

ATTITUDES OF SELECTED NEWSPAPERS TOWARD WILLIAM J. BRYAN  
DURING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE SCOPES TRIAL

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Scopes trial, the famous "monkey trial" of July 10-21, 1925, brought into focus the antagonism between the new confidence in science and technology and the nation's traditional religious doctrines.

Now, fifty years after the trial, historians are re-evaluating the issues involved and are assigning new importance to the treatment by the press of the role of William Jennings Bryan in the controversy.

This reassessment has been brought about by the realization that science and technology do not have answers for the problems of this world. Technology has far outstripped advances made in human values and ethics.

Many things that science had made possible are frustrated by a lack of answers to moral and ethical issues involved.

As Dr. Leroy Augenstein wrote, "Science marches on fast and furiously, but all too often our ability to handle our newfound powers does not keep pace. Increasingly, the advances being made in many areas of science and technology pose ethical and moral dilemmas which cannot be resolved by facts alone. Rather, the proper utilization of our new scientific findings requires that we face up to some terribly critical decisions, based upon our most fundamental values and beliefs.

"It cannot be emphasized enough that, as the pace quickens, the gap between our ability to discover and our ability to handle our

discoveries becomes ever greater in both magnitude and peril. In the matter of organ transplants, as in many other areas of science, our knowledge is doubling every 7 to 10 years. Yet in putting that knowledge to use we often rely exclusively on beliefs and practices which originated centuries ago, and seem to think that we can take centuries more to reevaluate and perhaps change our operating procedures.

"Actually, many of those old beliefs are still valid and should not be discarded casually. As Winston Churchill said, 'If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future.' Yet, by the same token, we dare not refuse to re-examine and reject old comfortable dogmas which are hopelessly oversimplified and not longer pertinent. To do so would be to bury our heads so deeply in the sand that we would surely suffocate. Thus, we have before us a lot of fundamental decisions which should have been made yesterday and cannot wait until the day after tomorrow. Certainly the 'two cultures' of C. P. Snow--and particularly science and religion--must beat their swords into plowshares and work together closely and harmoniously."<sup>1</sup>

### Purpose

This study is an attempt to analyze the attitudes expressed in editorials about Bryan and headlined stories on page one containing Bryan's name (referred to hereafter as Bryan-headlined stories) carried in four newspapers during July 1925 when the Scopes trial took place. Bryan's death also occurred in July, 1925.

Previous studies show that Bryan was misquoted and ridiculed by such major newspapers as The New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Cleveland Press, Chicago Tribune and The Baltimore Sun.<sup>2,3</sup>

A New York Times correspondent informed the public that Bryan was planning to "put God in the Constitution," in a sarcastic story which Bryan angrily denied.<sup>4</sup>

Historian Paul Good writes, "Most of the major newspapers of the period were either hostile to Bryan or opposed to the policies he advocated. The New York Times was relatively free of bias and provided the most complete coverage of political news. The New York World, although Democratic and progressive, was never an enthusiastic supporter of the Commoner. The Chicago Record Herald kept up a running criticism of him which he frequently felt obliged to meet. The New York Tribune was partisan to Roosevelt and Taft. Hearst newspapers, of which the New York American and the Chicago American were the most important, supported Bryan until 1904. The Springfield Republican frequently disagreed with Bryan, . . . the Des Moines Register and Leader was a progressive publication that often dealt with him sympathetically. The Omaha World-Herald was pro-Bryan.

"After 1904 when Bryan supported Sen. Cockrell of Missouri instead of Wm. R. Hearst, Hearst came to the conclusion that Bryan was an 'ingrate of insatiable ambition.' Never again was Bryan to receive the endorsement of Hearst newspapers."<sup>5</sup>

Historian Robert D. Linder disagrees with Good's analysis of New York Times coverage. He writes, "A study of the New York Times coverage of the event reveals how far the animosity toward Bryan extended. The Scopes trial dominated page one of the Times from July 9 to July 22, 1925. On the opening day the champion of fundamentalism was strategically misquoted by a Times reporter to the effect that if he lost in Dayton he would lead a campaign to put the Bible in the

Constitution and push for an amendment to prohibit the teaching of evolution. What Bryan really said was that if he lost the Scopes case he would carry the fight to the people. A correction, published at Bryan's insistence, appeared days later on page two. In the interim, Bryan became the object of a spate of editorials and cartoons in national newspapers denouncing him for his alleged efforts to impose his kind of religion on others by law.

"During the trial the Times ran several editorials severely criticizing Bryan and referring to him as 'prodigiously ignorant' and a man with 'a poorly furnished brain-room.' Even when Bryan died shortly after the trial, the Times editors could find little good to say about him except for a few backhanded compliments.

"Other major nationally recognized papers joined in the attack. On July 10, the Atlanta Constitution carried a lead story by Raymond Clapper, who claimed that the antagonists in Tennessee were ready for 'the greatest battle of the mind since Galileo was imprisoned by the inquisition for teaching the world was round.' In a similar vein, several bitter editorials in the Cleveland Press attacked the Commoner and his fundamentalist followers; one suggested that the reporters at Dayton might be better off if they simply packed up and 'took a train for the United States.'

"Perhaps the harshest and most relentless assaults on Bryan came from the Chicago Tribune, which also had its radio affiliate WGN broadcasting directly from the site of the trial." [This was the first live national broadcast of a trial.] "Half a dozen editorials during the three-week period characterized Bryan as a bigot and an enemy of American liberty. On July 22, the Tribune's lead editorial commented on

the results of the trial: In each state of the Union he wants a law which will bring the aid of the legislature, the law, the courts and the police to the upholding of his way of reading the King James version of the Bible. A series of Tribune cartoons mercilessly lampooned Bryan as an ignorant hayseed."<sup>6</sup>

"The portrayal of Bryan that is cemented in the stage drama and the motion picture is the gross distortion that Darrow contrived at Dayton. It is that of a bigoted, ill-informed, hopelessly outdated old man. Darrow and the dramatists who have taken their cues from him have cheated posterity of knowledge of the whole man, the better man, the resolute champion of social justice who for decades prior to the Monkey Trial made religion and the Bible the foundation of an earthly kingdom of social justice and brotherhood among men and nations which today and as far into the future as the mind can see deserves the best efforts of men of goodwill."<sup>7</sup>

Mencken called Bryan the "Fundamentalist Pope" and invented the name "Monkey Trial." In his daily diatribes about the trial, he called Bryan a "buffoon," "montebank," and "buzzard," and the Dayton folks "hill-billies and yokels."

"The Bible-belt zealots were exhibiting themselves as hilarious boobs," and "Bryan's last secular act on this globe of sin was to catch flies" are excerpts from his columns.

In the July 13 Chicago Tribune columnist Westbrook Pegler pointed out "Of course, the primary question in the Dayton story is whether young John Scopes tried to make a monkey out of William Jennings Bryan or decided that this would be a duplication of effort."<sup>8</sup>

These are a few examples of the treatment Bryan received from some of the major eastern papers. This study will assess editorial attitudes of selected newspapers of the midwest and northwest.

#### Justification for the Study

Historians are struck by the hostility expressed toward Bryan by the press during the trial. He was misquoted, ridiculed and vilified in copy and cartoon. Except for Hearst, the press lords had not backed Bryan during his three campaigns for the presidency. However, he had never been so viciously attacked before. H. L. Mencken of The Baltimore Sun was especially unbridled in his jeering at Bryan. Even Scopes objected to these attacks.<sup>9</sup>

Bryan was something of a folk hero, he was called the "Great Commoner" because of his concern for the common man.<sup>10</sup>

In their re-evaluation of Bryan, many historians such as Robert Linder agree with Levine's statement that "Bryan has been too often judged and too little understood."<sup>11</sup>

This study will assess attitudes toward Bryan in selected midwestern newspapers and one from the northwest. It may encourage broader studies of Bryan with special interest in underlying issues, political, economic and religious, which influenced the media's attitudes toward him.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to The Manhattan Mercury, Kansas City Star, St. Louis Post Dispatch and The Seattle Post Intelligencer during July, 1925.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Leroy Augenstein, Come, Let Us Play God (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1969), pp. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Robert D. Linder, "Fifty Years After Scopes: Lessons to Learn, A Heritage to Reclaim," Christianity Today, XIX, No. 21 (July 18, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Donald F. Brod, "The Scopes Trial: A Look at Press Coverage After Forty Years," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), pp. 220-226.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, July 14, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Paul W. Good, The Trumpet Soundeth (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1960), pp. 221, 156.

<sup>6</sup>Robert D. Linder, "Fifty Years After Scopes: Lessons to Learn, A Heritage to Reclaim," Christianity Today, XIX, No. 21 (July 18, 1975), pp. 8, 9.

<sup>7</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 656.

<sup>8</sup>Brod, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup>B. Shaw, "Scopes Reviews the Monkey Trial," Esquire, November, 1970, pp. 86-87.

<sup>10</sup>Paola E. Coletta, Review of William Jennings Bryan by Margaret Colt, in the Saturday Review, August 6, 1969, 31-32.

<sup>11</sup>Bryan, Defender of the Faith, by L. W. Levine, reviewed in the Christian Century, December, 1965, p. 1481.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### William Jennings Bryan

William Jennings Bryan was born in Salem, Illinois on March 19, 1869. He was graduated from Illinois College in 1881 and from the Union College of Law, Chicago, in 1883. He practiced law in Jacksonville, Illinois for four years and then moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where he soon made a name for himself by his brilliant oratory during the presidential campaign of 1888, making speeches for Democratic candidates. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1891 and gained a reputation as a conscientious worker and brilliant debator. Because of his famous persuasive speeches he became a leader of the "free-silver" movement. After four years in Washington he returned to Nebraska and became editor of the Omaha World Herald.

Bryan was defeated in all elections in which he later became a candidate, but in spite of this, he was a recognized leader in his party for the next thirty years. During the Democratic National Convention at Chicago in 1896 he made his most famous speech, later referred to as his "cross of gold" oration because of the passage, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." This brought him the nomination for the presidency as well as the support of the Populist party. Although he waged a strenuous campaign he was defeated by William McKinley, the Republican candidate.

Bryan was nominated again in 1900 but was again defeated by McKinley. After this election he established and edited a weekly political journal, The Commoner, in Lincoln. This gained a wide circulation and was the origin of his title "the commoner."

For eight years Bryan lived an active political life, traveling around the world, gaining a brilliant reputation as an orator. He had great influence in his party and in Congress.

Bryan was defeated for the presidential nomination in 1908 but dictated the platform in both that election and the one in 1912 when, largely owing to Bryan's influence, the nomination went to Woodrow Wilson instead of to Champ Clark. In recognition of this service Wilson appointed Bryan Secretary of State in 1913.

After World War I broke out in Europe, Bryan was deeply interested in attempts to restore peace. He opposed the President's strong note of protest to Germany and resigned in June, 1915, as a result of this incident.

He was a tireless worker for the cause of Prohibition, the popular election of senators, and income tax, the creation of the Department of Labor, and women's suffrage. The adoption of much legislation in these causes was largely due to his persistent efforts.

His last public appearance was at the Scopes trial. Shortly after the conclusion of the trial Bryan was taken ill and died at Dayton, Tennessee on July 26, 1925.

### The Scopes Trial

The Scopes trial began July 10, 1925, at Dayton, Tennessee, and lasted eleven days. It was one of the most widely publicized legal cases in 20th-century U.S. history. John Thomas Scopes, who taught

science in a high school in Dayton, was charged with violating the Tennessee state law prohibiting the teaching of any theories that deny the divine creation as put forth in the Bible. Scopes was not the regular biology teacher but had substituted for a period of time in biology classes. He was not sure he had even covered the theory of evolution while he taught the classes but was willing to be the defendant in a test case.<sup>1</sup>

The basis for the sensational nature of the trial was an increasing alarm of a Christian movement, known as Fundamentalism, over the opposition by scientific theory of a literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

The legislature of the state of Tennessee was the first to pass an anti-evolution law which was signed by the governor on March 13, 1925. This law made it unlawful to teach that man had descended from a lower order of animals.<sup>2</sup>

When Roger N. Baldwin, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in New York City, heard that Tennessee had passed this law he sent news releases to leading Tennessee newspapers offering the services of the A.C.L.U. to defend any teacher who was willing to test the constitutionality of the law.

George Rapplyea, proprietor of a drug store in Dayton, saw the news release and discussed his idea of getting national publicity for Dayton with several local men who were wholeheartedly in favor. Scopes seemed the ideal teacher to be the defendant. He was young, unmarried, a little radical in his thinking and believed fervently in science and the theory of evolution. He also had stated his views in favor of academic freedom in the classroom. The stage was set.

The public prosecutor in Dayton secured an indictment. The news of the case soon spread across the country. As soon as Bryan heard about it he offered his assistance to the local prosecutor. Defense counsel was led by Clarence S. Darrow, the most famous criminal lawyer of his generation. These opposing lawyers were the best known and most appropriate that could have been cast in their parts. Bryan was a well-known Bible teacher, strongly opposed to any but a literal interpretation of Scripture.

The fame of the lawyers and the controversial subject of the case assured extended newspaper coverage. An average 175,000 words were telegraphed out of Dayton each day during the trial, and tens of millions of readers in both the United States and Europe followed the action closely.

Since the judge had ruled that the validity of the doctrine of evolution or the constitutionality of the law forbidding the teaching of it were not issues to be decided, but only whether Scopes had taught evolution (which he freely admitted), the trial might have been wrapped up in a short time. However, Bryan allowed Darrow to put him on the stand for a long and grueling cross-examination of his Fundamentalist beliefs on Biblical authority. During this performance he ridiculed Bryan, twisting his answers, and the usually adept Bryan became an object of public humiliation. It was a devastating experience for Bryan and may have hastened his death, which occurred five days later.

Darrow's fast footwork prevented Bryan from delivering a long oration he had prepared in defense of his beliefs in the authenticity of the Bible. It was Darrow's most animated and sarcastic courtroom performance, and probably Bryan's most disastrous public appearance.

Bryan was in his late sixties and suffering from diabetes, which slows the reflexes. He appeared as a bumbling and foolish old man and Darrow made the most of it. Scopes was convicted and fined \$100 but was later cleared on a technicality.

Linder writes in his article that the Fundamentalists have never regained their former status among the general public and have been on the defensive.<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned earlier, historians are struck by the hostility expressed toward Bryan by the press during the trial. He was misquoted, ridiculed and vilified. While, except for Hearst, Bryan had not been backed by the press lords during his presidential campaigns, he had never been so viciously attacked before.<sup>3</sup> H. L. Mencken of The Baltimore Sun called Bryan a "clod," a "peasant," a "Zany without sense or dignity," and an "utter fraud." He covered the trial for the Sun and venom against Bryan poured daily from his pen.<sup>4</sup>

Bryan was something of an American folk hero, especially in rural America. He was called the "Great Commoner" because of his concern for the common people. He was a man of principles and resigned from his position as Secretary of State in Wilson's cabinet because he was against war. This is the only time a cabinet member had resigned up to the time of the resignation of Elliot Richardson in recent history. Bryan touched the laggard conscience of America and disturbed its complacent absorption in material success. Bryan fought an unyielding battle against J. P. Morgan and his "interests." He was of service to his country in laying bare the abuses of concentrated wealth and its control of government. Bryan's persuasive eloquence stirred up a country weary of hard times and awakened the rural population to the dangers resulting from political power being concentrated in the Eastern states.

Bryan was a master politician, a silver-tongued orator and a man of character and dedication. His influence in Congress was tremendous. The Federal Reserve system echoed a plan of his, The Clayton Act (anti-trust) answered his demands; he saw the income tax and tariff reform become law because of his guidance.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of all this, Bryan sometimes appears to have been a born loser. He was for states rights in a time of ever-increasing centralization; for peace during a world-engulfing war. The 18th Amendment (Prohibition) was his dubious monument. Even before this amendment was adopted the Bryans refused to serve alcoholic beverages at parties during their public life in Washington. He received much ridicule for this.

His greatest battle he lost. As a Christian he believed all war was anti-Christian and as a moralist he saw no moral issue at stake in the conflict of 1914-1918. He was truly neutral--the first Christian pacifist in high office. When the United States entered the war he was greatly discouraged and disillusioned with national politics.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the hostility of publishers and editors toward Bryan, reporters had developed a warm regard toward the Commoner during his campaigns for the presidency.<sup>7</sup>

In their re-evaluation of Bryan, many historians agree with Levine's statement that "Bryan has been too often judged and too little understood."<sup>8</sup>

Even Scopes bridled at the picture Mencken painted of Bryan as a "buffoon" during the trial. Scopes believed Bryan was absolutely sincere in his rabid fundamentalism. He thought Bryan should not be judged by his actions at Dayton alone, "he deserves better."<sup>9</sup>

Paul Glad in The Trumpet Soundeth presents Bryan as a man who "was fashioned with forceful affection by the rural society in which he lived and moved and had his being"; a man from the frontier, indeed, becoming a power in American politics at a time when the frontier itself was dead but when its approach to life still had much power.

Glad considered him to be the perfect reflection of the middle-border region; intensely moralistic, believing in progress and the improvement of society.

Glad acknowledges that Bryan was not, unfortunately, a powerful thinker; he followed his emotions more than his reason. He was, in short, a romantic, in a land that was becoming more and more cynical.<sup>10</sup>

Bryan entered his last stage appearance on the American scene when his political fortunes and his health were at a low ebb. He had retired to Florida where he was involved in promoting land sales and teaching Sunday school class. He was diabetic and overweight but seemed unable to control his appetite. During the trial he munched radishes by the sackful because he was on a diet.<sup>11</sup>

For Bryan, the Great Commoner, Dayton was the end of a long trail studded with lost causes. He died of "apoplexy" less than a week after the trial and his supporters instantly elevated him to martyrdom.<sup>12</sup>

Stories proclaimed his courage under headlines such as "Stout Heart Broke Under Latest Strain," "Thousands Lined the Train Route from Dayton to Washington Where He was Buried in Arlington Cemetery."<sup>13</sup>

The sharp-tongued critic of the American scene, H. L. Mencken of The Baltimore Sun, reacted to the news of Bryan's death a few days later: "We killed the son-of-a-bitch!"<sup>14</sup>



The negative impression toward Bryan was reinforced by a Broadway play (1950) which was made into a movie (1960), Inherit the Wind.

Scopes, however, found no pleasure in Mencken's viciousness and in his book, Center of the Storm, called the attacks unchristian and declared, "No fair man would judge Bryan's place in history by his actions at Dayton alone."<sup>15</sup>

Scopes said "the man who died at Dayton was a poor copy of the vigorous, sterling William Jennings Bryan who electrified the Democratic convention of 1896 in Chicago with his 'Cross of Gold' speech, with it winning the Presidential nomination. And perhaps the greatest tragedy of his life was that he was born a half-century too soon, before the age of television when he could have projected his personality to millions. He was, in my opinion, the most outstanding public speaker this country had produced. Franklin D. Roosevelt could not approach him as a public speaker."<sup>16</sup>

Recent students of Bryan's life (such as historians Paul W. Glad and Paeola Coletta) see Bryan's positive achievements far outweighing the negative image stemming from the Scopes trial.<sup>17</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, 1962 IV, pp. 298-99.
- <sup>2</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, 1962 XX, pp. 132-133.
- <sup>3</sup>Robert D. Linder, "Fifty Years After Scopes: Lessons to Learn, a Heritage to Reclaim," Christianity Today, July 18, 1975, pp. 7-10.
- <sup>4</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 345.
- <sup>5</sup>J. A. Garraty, "Progressives," American Heritage, December 1961, pp. 4-11.
- <sup>6</sup>Paeola E. Colleta review of William Jennings Bryan by Margaret L. Colt, in the Saturday Review, August 6, 1969, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>7</sup>Paeola E. Colleta, William Jennings Bryan, (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1969).
- <sup>8</sup>L. W. Levine, Bryan, Defender of the Faith, review in the Christian Century, December, 1965, p. 1481.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup>B. Shaw, "Scopes Reviews the Monkey Trial," Esquire, November, 1970, pp. 86-87.
- <sup>11</sup>Paul W. Glad, The Trumpet Soundeth (University of Nebraska Press, 1960) review in American Heritage, December, 1960, p. 112.
- <sup>12</sup>Time review of Center of the Storm by J. Scopes and J. Presley, Time 89:102 February 17, 1967.
- <sup>13</sup>Seattle Post Intelligencer, July 31, 1925, p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup>Linder, "Fifty Years After Scopes," p. 9.
- <sup>15</sup>John T. Scopes and James Presley, Center of the Storm (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), p. 216.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 209-210.
- <sup>17</sup>Linder, p. 9.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Method

The method of research for this study is content analysis, a technique for describing in systematic form the content of communications.<sup>1</sup>

Berelson (1952) defines content analysis as a research technique that is objective, systematic and quantitative in the description of manifest content of communication.<sup>2</sup>

This method adds precision to insight and results in methodically classifying all relevant materials in the sample. By taking a systematic, defined sample of newspaper editorials and headlines and counting those which express favorable, unfavorable or neutral attitudes toward a subject, one can carry out a simple form of quantification that is feasible and reliable.<sup>3</sup>

The method used is based on Lasswell's coding procedures as he developed them in the late 1930's.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Sample

The papers used in this study were chosen because of the writer's interest in discovering attitudes toward Bryan during the last month of his life in the Midwest and the northwest part of the United States. Studies had already been made of major Eastern newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

Bryan-headlined stories and editorials of The Manhattan Mercury, a rural Kansas daily newspaper published not far from Bryan's home in Lincoln, Nebraska; The Kansas City Star, a flourishing influential paper of the midwest; The St. Louis Post Dispatch, published in a political hotbed of the era as well as the center of the Fundamentalist Missouri Synod Lutheran Church; and the Seattle Post Intelligencer, a large newspaper with wide circulation in the Northwest were selected.

July, 1925, issues were used in the study because the focus was on the Scopes trial which occurred in that month. Bryan's death on Sunday, July 26, also caused a flurry of copy about his life and political fortunes.

Only headline stories on page one which contain Bryan's name, and editorials on the editorial page of the selected newspapers were used. This was an arbitrary limitation to make the study manageable.

#### Data Sheets Used

Bryan-headlined stories and editorials were rated on data sheets using the above-mentioned coding procedure developed by Lasswell.

Bryan-headlined stories were rated favorable (+), unfavorable (-) or neutral (0) on sheets as each issue of the selected newspaper was examined and a cumulative total was kept.

Editorials were rated plus or minus in terms of value as suggested by Lasswell. By value he means object of desire such as power, virtue, respect, safety, income, and courage.<sup>6</sup>

Lasswell recommends two categories of values: strength and morality. These are the values measured in this analysis of editorials.

Strength-Weakness: Gains in economic, political or ideological influence show strength. Their loss indicates weakness.

Morality-Immorality: Compliance with society's positive values and institutions. Conformity indicates morality; non-conforming shows immorality.

The values are weighted. The morality-immorality category is given a numerical value of plus two or minus two; the strength-weakness category is plus one or minus one. This is done because society places more value on morality than on aggressiveness, especially when the object of analysis is a person.<sup>7</sup> See Appendix A for a description of Lasswell's procedure.

An editorial could also be considered neutral and rated zero. The coding was a continuum: See Appendix B for samples of coding sheets.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Claire Sellitz, Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>Sellitz et al., p. 335.

<sup>4</sup>Harold D. Lasswell, "The Politically Significant Content of the Press: Coding Procedures," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. XIX (1942), pp. 22, 23.

<sup>5</sup>Donald F. Brod, "The Scopes Trial: A Look at Press Coverage after Forty Years," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), pp. 219-226.

<sup>6</sup>Lasswell, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FINDINGS

#### General Numerical Findings

A total of 50 front page headline stories were evaluated in this study: Nine in The Kansas City Star; 15 in The Seattle Post Intelligencer; nine in The Manhattan Mercury; 17 in The St. Louis Post Dispatch. These were all stories that contained Bryan's name in the headline. See Appendix C for the list of headlines analyzed.

A total of 22 editorials were evaluated: Six in The Kansas City Star; none in The Seattle Post Intelligencer since they had no editorial page; two in The Manhattan Mercury; 14 in The St. Louis Post Dispatch. See Appendix D for a list of editorials analyzed.

All the selected newspapers carried stories on other pages and had other front page stories about Bryan, but only headline stories on the front page with his name contained in the headline were used.

The Seattle Post Intelligencer spread editorial type stories throughout its pages and reprinted editorials from other papers, even some from foreign countries, but it had no editorial page per se. This paper gave Bryan the widest and most favorable coverage, but the layout of pages at that time did not separate editorial comment from news stories. It was decided therefore to keep the limits used on the other selected newspapers--that only editorials on the page labeled "editorial" should be included.

Table 1 shows the frequency and ratings of Bryan-headlined stories before, during and after the trial.

Table 2 shows frequency and ratings of editorials before, during and after the trial.

### Interpretation of Findings

#### Headline Stories

The Manhattan Mercury used nine headline stories during July, 1925, on page one which included Bryan's name in the headline. These were all rated neutral except one which called him "Peerless Leader." The stories were all from the AP wire service. The Manhattan Mercury was not as interested in Bryan as would be expected. This might be because he was a Democrat and also that national news got second billing to local news in this small city paper at that time.

The Kansas City Star covered the trial quite extensively and had its own staff correspondent reporting from Dayton. It used AP dispatches as well.

Nine front page headline stories used Bryan's name; six were favorable, three were neutral. The stories were generally favorable to Bryan, critical of Darrow's agnostic views. Stories stress Bryan's sincerity and the hero worship he received from the crowds at Dayton. Resentment of Mencken and his editorial slurs of the local people were emphasized.

Coverage by The Kansas City Star seemed generally objective, slightly favorable to Bryan.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch sent a staff correspondent to cover the trial and he seemed fascinated by Darrow's performance. He was very unsympathetic to Bryan. There were seventeen front page headlines using



Table 1

Frequency (f) and Rating (R) of Page 1 Bryan-Headlined Stories  
in Selected Newspapers During July, 1925 by Newspaper

	Bryan-Headlined Stories							
	July 1-9		10-21		22-31		Total	
	f	R	f	R	f	R	f	R
St. Louis Post Dispatch	0	0	9	-3	8	+5	17	+2
Kansas City Star	3	+2	3	+2	3	+2	9	+6
Seattle Post Intelligencer	3	+3	7	+3	5	+5	15	+11
Manhattan Mercury	1	0	2	0	6	+1	6	+1

Table 2

Frequency (f) and Rating (R) of Editorials in Selected  
Newspapers During July, 1925 by Newspaper

	Editorials							
	July 1-9		10-21		22-31		Total	
	f	R	f	R	f	R	f	R
St. Louis Post Dispatch	2	-6	7	-21	5	-7	14	-34
Kansas City Star	1	+3	1	-3	4	+6	6	+6
Seattle Post Intelligencer	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Manhattan Mercury	0		1	+3	1	-1	2	+2

July 1-9 Before Trial

July 10-21 During Trial

July 22-31 After Trial, Death Period

Bryan's name. These stories were rated neutral (four) or unfavorable (four), except one favorable one that told of the crowds watching Bryan, up to the time of his death. Then the headlines became favorable accompanying stories describing tributes paid Bryan by the huge throngs that mourned him.

The Post Dispatch in 1925 was published by The Pulitzer Publishing Company.

The Seattle Post Intelligencer used 15 headlines containing Bryan's name on page one during July. Of these, 12 were either top banner or sub-banner (seven or eight columns wide). Twelve of these stories were rated favorable, two neutral and one unfavorable.

On Monday, July 27, the day after Bryan's death, pages one, two and three were almost totally filled with stories about Bryan and these pages all carried banner headlines using his name.

The day page one carried an unfavorable INS (International News Service) story, July 17, there was a long staff-written story on page two that was very positive toward Bryan.

This paper and its audience evidently idolized Bryan. Stories treated him as a great hero and mourned his death. Negative opinion stories by the news services were carried about him but it was evident editorial opinion disagreed with them. Sometimes an unfavorable story would carry a favorable headline which reflected some minor favorable aspect of the story.

The paper used Universal Service, Associated Press and International News Service stories.

## Editorials

The Manhattan Mercury used only two editorials about Bryan during July, 1925. One praised his ability as an orator; one derided him as being not well informed.

The Kansas City Star ran six editorials about Bryan during this time period; four were favorable and two took issue with his views on religion versus science. On July 24 the Star ran a poem called "Dayton's Hymn" sent to the Kansas City Rotary Club from the club in Nashville, N.C.:

The tumult and the shouting dies  
The Darrows and Malones depart  
Bill Bryan's gab we'll sacrifice  
With pleasure and a joyous heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget.  
--Wm. Teague<sup>1</sup>

The St. Louis Post Dispatch treated Bryan unsympathetically and negatively in editorials and made much of the issue of "loss of freedom" and his so-called ignorance. Fourteen editorials about him appeared during July, 1925. All were negative except one on July 27 when the lead editorial eulogized his high moral ideals and courage as a public leader.

On July 28 and 29, however, editorials appeared accusing him of splitting his party, arousing bitter fights, even in his church; and "striking heavy blows at free American institutions and the principles upon which they were founded." Even his death did not appease the editorial ire of this paper.

The Seattle Post Intelligencer carried international and national opinion as well as staff opinion in its pages but did not use an editorial page layout.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Teague, "Let Us Forget," Kansas City Star, July 24, 1925, p. 1.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze attitudes of editorials and headline stories of selected newspapers toward Bryan during July 1925 when the Scopes trial occurred.

The writer hoped the information obtained would add to that found in previous studies in which major Eastern newspapers were analyzed.

#### Summary

The modified content analyses of the editorials and the coding of headline stories suggest that Bryan's popularity was greater in the West than in the East. Hostility expressed by the newspapers toward him was milder, even by the most critical of those selected--The St. Louis Post Dispatch.

The one paper selected from the far west--The Seattle Post Intelligencer, treated him as a hero in its headline stories. A further study of other west coast papers might prove interesting, to see if Bryan's popularity in that area was unanimous.

The Kansas City Star and The Manhattan Mercury were not as enthusiastic about Bryan's career as the writer had expected them to be. It was assumed since not a great number of public figures from this area had reached the pinnacle of power in Washington Bryan had attained that he would be a hero in the area near his home in Lincoln, Nebraska. Not

so! It was the Seattle press that accorded him that adulation.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch used the greatest number of front page stories containing Bryan's name (17) but the cumulative score of favorable-unfavorable was only +2. The Kansas City Star used nine with a +6 cumulative total score. The Manhattan Mercury carried nine such headline stories during July 1925, but only one was favorable. The Seattle Post Intelligencer used Bryan's name in 15 headlines with a cumulative score of +11.

Cumulative coding scores for editorials during July 1925 were as follows:

The Manhattan Mercury ran two editorials on the editorial page which used Bryan's name a total of five times and with a cumulative coding score of +2.

The Kansas City Star ran six editorials on the editorial page using Bryan's name a total of 31 times and with a cumulative coding score of +6.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch used Bryan's name 69 times in 14 editorials on the editorial page with a cumulative score of -34.

As noted previously The Seattle Post Intelligencer did not use an editorial page in their format so there were no editorials coded from that newspaper.

### Conclusions

Bryan's popularity at the time of the Scopes trial had declined drastically from the zenith of power he attained during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The wire stories coming out of Dayton during the trial as well as those of the staff correspondent for The St. Louis Post Dispatch painted a picture of a bumbling old man with eccentric

ways who was a narrow-minded stupid bigot. It is difficult to synchro-  
nize this picture with that of the popular, talented speaker--a power in  
his political party and in Congress, a president-maker--who had earned a  
classical education, knew both Latin and Greek, studied law and passed  
the bar examination.

The animosity expressed toward Bryan is difficult to explain.  
Certainly he should never have been involved in the trial; his general  
appearance and behavior and his death soon after its end point up the  
fact that his health was failing. His diabetes could account for  
slowness of reactions and speech and lack of mental alacrity described  
by reporters as "his bumbling manner."

The sympathetic treatment given Bryan in The Seattle Post  
Intelligencer Bryan-headlined stories may have been influenced by his  
stance on the silver issue--an echo of his "cross of gold" oration.  
Perhaps they were remembering his crusade against J. P. Morgan and his  
big-money cronies of the East. This younger area of the country with  
its fresher outlook may have viewed his defense of truth and the Bible,  
and his sincerity with less cynicism than the sophisticates of the  
Eastern Establishment of which Mencken was a leader.

Politics certainly influenced the press also. The fact that  
Bryan was a Democrat must have affected his treatment by The Manhattan  
Mercury and The St. Louis Post Dispatch. The Kansas City Star took an  
objective interest and covered the trial and the following days in a  
competent journalistic manner. It contrasted sharply with the shrill  
emotionalism of both The Seattle Post Intelligencer (pro) and The  
St. Louis Post Dispatch (con).

More newspapers should be studied and analyzed to see if any patterns emerge to account for their attitudes toward Bryan at this time. An in-depth historical approach might be used to discover reasons and issues underlying these attitudes.

Evolution is still a controversial subject. This fact keeps the issues involved in the Scopes trial interesting to review and study.



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## APPENDIX A

In the further interest of clarity, supplementary instructions may be issued regarding standards, as follows:

### I. **STRENGTH**: Plus one.

Gain of, act, indication, promise, hope, expectation, demand of: economic, military, diplomatic, social strength and/or gain.

*Military strength*: attacks, raids on, bombing of, harassing of — the enemy; avoidance of losses, availability of fighting power, personnel, and material; military operations "successfully" carried out — such as reconnaissance, improved positions, scouting sorties, etc.

*Economic strength*: aid received or promised, trade pacts, negotiations; production gains, finances available; availability of materials, resources, transportation, communication facilities.

*Diplomatic strength*: envoy recall, demands for reparations, verbal at-

tacks and offensives, belligerent stands, pro-war anti-peace stands, threats.

*Ideological strength*: social services available, child care, health standards, medical facilities, education despite adverse conditions, housing and shelter facilities.

### II. **WEAKNESS**: Minus one.

Loss of, act, indication, expectancy of weakness or defeat — in the military, economic, diplomatic, or social spheres.

*Military loss*: attacks suffered, casualties, loss of position, material; failures of attacks, raids, sorties, reconnaissance, insufficiencies of fighting power, retreats; military gains as described above when the symbol on which such gains have been made is indicated.

*Economic weakness*: lack of items constituting economic strength described above; need for aid, shortages.

*Diplomatic weakness*: yielding to pressure, conciliatory attitudes, pro-peace anti-war in face of threats.

*Ideological weakness*: lack of items listed under ideological strength.

### III. **MORALITY**: Plus two.

Emotional evaluations of the symbol, endowing it with the following qualities: truth, mercy, glory, heroism, virtue, propriety, religiosity, honor, generosity, kindness, affection, sympathy, duty, justice, honesty, patriotism, loyalty, legality (courage, bravery).

### IV. **IMMORALITY**: Minus two.

Emotional evaluation of the symbol, endowing it with the following: falsity, viciousness, ferocity, uncharitableness, cowardice, impropriety, paganism, dishonor, selfishness, cruelty, hatred, vanity, treachery, treason, subversiveness, unjust, dishonesty, unpatriotic, disloyalty, illegality, aggressions, insanities, abnormalities.

\*In connection with some of our work many standards have been utilized. See "The World Attention Survey." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1941, 3, 458-462.

Above text from:

Harold D. Lasswell, "The Politically Significant Content of the Press: Coding Procedures." *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. XIX (1942), pp. 22, 23.

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLES OF DATA SHEETS

Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Cumulative: Preceding \_\_\_\_\_ + this Headline \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Rating Favorable +      Unfavorable -      or Neutral 0

Rating follows Lasswell's attitudes of strength and morality. Words such as truth, virtue, honesty, etc. receive + rating. Words such as impropriety, disloyalty, abnormality etc. receive - rating.

Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Cumulative: Preceding \_\_\_\_\_ + this Headline \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Rating Favorable +      Unfavorable -      of Neutral 0

Rating follows Lasswell's attitudes of strength and morality. Words such as truth, virtue, honesty, etc. receive + rating. Words such as impropriety, disloyalty, abnormality etc. receive - rating.

## Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Bryan mentioned by Name: times

## Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Position

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Bryan mentioned by Name: times

## Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Title	

Bryan mentioned by Name: \_\_\_\_\_ times

## Data Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Bryan mentioned by Name: \_\_\_\_\_ times

## APPENDIX C

### LIST OF BRYAN-HEADLINED STORIES ANALYZED JULY, 1925

#### Section I: The Kansas City Star

1. "Welcome Bryan to Dayton"  
July 7 Page 1 Col. 2
2. "Bryan on New Crusade"  
July 8 Page 1 Col. 5
3. "Bryan's Son into the Case"  
July 8 Page 1 Col. 6
4. "Crowds Cheer When Bryan, Special Prosecutor, Enters"  
July 10 Page 1 Col. 5
5. "Bryan is Hero of the Hour in Minds of Simple Tennessee Folk"  
July 13 Page 1 Col. 5
6. "Bryan Speaks Now"  
July 16 Page 1 Col. 5
7. "Bryan to Stand for Bible"  
July 22 Page 1 Col. 6
8. "Mourn at Bryan Bier--Greatest Hero of the Time"  
July 27 Page 1 Col. 5
9. "The End to Bryan"  
July 29 Page 1 Col. 5

#### Section II: The Seattle Post Intelligencer

1. "Evolution Destroys Freedom"----W. J. Bryan  
July 5 Page 1 8 col. banner
2. "Jubilant Bryan Leads Dayton Crusade"  
July 8 Page 1 7 col. sub-banner
3. "Monkey Trial/ Town Greet/ W.J.B. as Hero"  
July 8 Page 1 Col. 8
4. "Bryan and Darrow Girding for Arena"  
July 12 Page 1 7 col. sub-banner
5. "Bryan Listens, Scowls, but Talks Not"  
July 15 Page 1 Col. 8

The Seattle Post Intelligencer (cont'd)

6. "Bryan Links Religion with Politics"  
July 16 Page 1 7 col. banner
7. "Bryan Opens Attacks on Scientists"  
July 17 Page 1 7 col. banner
8. "Bryan Renews Attack on Darrow"  
July 19 Page 1 7 col. banner
9. "Bryan Leads Monkey Trial Final Assault"  
July 20 Page 1 8 col. banner
10. "Bryan Takes Stand to Defend Bible"  
July 21 Page 1 7 col. banner
11. "W. J. Bryan Found Dead in Bed"  
July 27 Page 1 7 col. banner--3" type
12. "Bryan's Burial Friday in Arlington"  
July 28 Page 1 8 col. sub-banner
13. "Bryan's Last Speech Now Published"  
July 29 Page 1 6 col. banner
14. "Crowds Honor Bryan Along Train's Route"  
July 30 Page 1 Col. 4
15. "Thousands See Bryan Lying in State"  
July 31 Page 1 7 col. sub-banner

Section III: The Manhattan Mercury

1. "Religion First Bryan Declares"  
July 9 Page 1 Col. 3
2. "WJB Made his First Appearance Today"  
July 16 Page 1 Col. 1
3. "Expunge Bryan's Testimony"  
July 21 Page 1 Col. 1
4. "Stroke Fatal to Peerless Leader"  
July 27 Page 1 Col. 1
5. "Bryan's Speech to Jury Made Public"  
July 28 Page 1 Col. 1
6. "Brief Service for Bryan Today"  
July 28 Page 1 Col. 4



The Manhattan Mercury (cont'd)

7. "Bryan's Body on Way to Capital"  
July 29 Page 1 Col. 3
8. "Radio Cast Bryan Funeral Service"  
July 30 Page 1 Col. 7
9. "Bryan Rites a Simple Service"  
July 31 Page 1 Col. 3

Section IV: The St. Louis Post Dispatch

1. "Court Room Crowd Watches Bryan"  
July 11 Page 1 Col. 7
2. "Bryan Draws Darrow's Sarcasm"  
July 12 Page 1 Col. 1
3. "Bryan Described as Ignorant of Constitution"  
July 13 Page 1 Col. 8
4. "Bryan Urges Court to Bar Expert Testimony"  
July 16 Col. 6, 7, and 8
5. "Bryan Demanded a Duel, then Ran Away, Declares Defense"  
July 18 Page 1 Col. 1
6. "Darrow and Bryan exchange shots"  
July 19 Page 1 Col. 8
7. "Anti-Bible Plot is Bared, Avers Bryan"  
July 19 Page 1 Col. 8 3rd deck
8. "Bryan's Testimony Expunged From Record by Judge"  
July 21 Page 1 Col. 8
9. "Darrow the Agnostic and Bryan the Evangelist in Dramatic Debate"  
July 21 Page 1 Col. 5 and 6
10. "Bryan Will be Buried in Arlington"  
July 27 Page 1 5 col.
11. "Tributes Paid Bryan by Men of All Parties"  
July 27 Page 1 Col. 4 2nd deck
12. "Bryan to Rest on Highest Spot in Arlington"  
July 28 Page 1 Col. 7
13. "Throngs Pay Simple Tribute to Bryan"  
July 28 Page 1 Col. 8

The St. Louis Post Dispatch (cont'd)

14. "Bryan Funeral Party on its Way to Washington"  
July 29 Page 1 Col. 8
15. "Capital Throngs Pay Homage to Bryan"  
July 30 Page 1 Col. 8
16. "Simplicity Marks Services Held for Bryan"  
July 31 Page 1 4 col.
17. "Bryan, in his Last Sleep, Arriving in Washington"  
July 31 Page 1 3 col. sub-head

## APPENDIX D

### LIST OF EDITORIALS ABOUT BRYAN ANALYZED JULY, 1925

#### Section I: The Kansas City Star

1. "Science, Religion, Fundamentalism and Modernism"  
July 8 Page 4
2. "The Issue is not Evolution vs. God"  
July 21 Page E?
3. "Religion and the Church Will Stand"  
July 22 Page 4
4. "William Jennings Bryan"  
July 28 Page E
5. "The Democratic Party Without Bryan"  
July 28 Page E
6. "Political Review of the Week"  
July 29 Page E

#### Section II: The Seattle Post Intelligencer

No editorials on true editorial page

#### Section III: The Manhattan Mercury

1. "Windfalls"  
July 16 Page 2
2. "Bryan's Ignorance Not Necessary"  
July 22 Page 2

#### Section IV: The St. Louis Post Dispatch

1. "Has it Come to This?"  
July 3 Page 14
2. "The Issue at Dayton"  
July 9 Page 18
3. "A New Questionnaire"  
July 11 Page 10

The St. Louis Post Dispatch (cont'd)

4. "The Bigotry of Bryan"  
July 13 Page 12
5. "When No Man's Life is Safe"  
July 15 Page 16
6. "A National Menace"  
July 16 Page 16
7. "Following His Leader"  
July 17 Page 14
8. "What Will Bryan Say?"  
July 20 Page 12
9. "A Bryanite"  
July 21 Page 12
10. "The Issue at Dayton"  
July 22 Page 16
11. "Bryan in his Own Field"  
July 24 Page 14
12. "William Jennings Bryan"  
July 27 Page 14
13. "Mr. Bryan's Public Influence"  
July 28 Page 16
14. "Bryan's Last Word"  
July 29 Page 18

ATTITUDES OF SELECTED NEWSPAPERS TOWARD WILLIAM J. BRYAN  
DURING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE SCOPES TRIAL

by

AILINE DETERS

B.S., Kansas State University, 1939

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

## THE ABSTRACT

The Scopes trial, the famous "monkey trial" of July 10-21, 1925, brought into focus the antagonism between the new confidence in science and technology and the nation's traditional religious doctrines.

Now, fifty years after the trial, historians are re-evaluating the issues involved and are assigning new importance to the distortion by the press of the role of William Jennings Bryan in the controversy.

Previous studies show that Bryan was misquoted and ridiculed by such major newspapers as The New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, The Chicago Tribune and the Baltimore Sun.

This study investigates the treatment of Bryan during the Scopes trial by the press in the midwest and northwest.

The Manhattan Mercury is a rural Kansas daily newspaper published not far from Bryan's home in Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Kansas City Star and The St. Louis Post Dispatch were influential newspapers of that time published in the central part of the country.

The Seattle Post Intelligencer was a flourishing newspaper of the northwest.

A modified content analysis focused on Bryan-headlined stories and editorials. Stories were analysed as favorable (+), unfavorable (-) or neutral (0). Following Lasswell's coding procedure, editorials were quantitatively rated in categories of strength and morality.

The results showed that The St. Louis Post Dispatch was hostile to Bryan; The Kansas City Star reported the trial objectively without obvious bias, The Manhattan Mercury was not very interested in national news at that time and gave him but little coverage and The Seattle Post Intelligencer treated him as a hero of the time.

Further in-depth study might investigate reasons underlying these attitudes.