Today in History - May 5

Cinco de Mayo

Mexican troops under general Ignacio Zaragoza successfully defeated the town of Puebla on **May 5**, 1862, temporarily halting France's efforts to establish a puppet regime in Mexico. With the U.S. absorbed by the Civil War, Emperor Napoleon III hoped to create a French sphere of influence in Latin America. The victory is commemorated as a national holiday in Mexico.

The Mexican victory at Puebla was short-lived. French reinforcements seized the town in March 1863. The following June, Maximilian, younger brother of Emperor Franz Josef of Austria and a member of the Hapsburg dynasty, was crowned emperor of Mexico. He remained in power until 1867, when Napoleon III abandoned his Mexican adventure and withdrew his troops.

In the United States, Cinco de Mayo has become an occasion to celebrate Hispanic culture. Fairs commemorating the day feature singing, dancing, food, and other amusements, and provide a means of sharing a rich and diverse culture.

Mexican Girl, Deming, New Mexico, circa 1939-1919. Runyon (Robert) Photograph Collection, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

Learn More

- See the Runyon (Robert) Photograph Collection, a collection of over 8,000 images of the Lower Rio Grande Valley from the early 1900s.
- Enjoy Hispano Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande: The Juan B. Rael Collection, an online presentation of a multi-format ethnographic field collection which documents religious and secular music of Spanish-speaking residents of rural Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado.
- Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940 to 1941 documents everyday life at Farm Security Administration (FSA) migrant work camps in central California in the early 1940s. The collection includes an interview with twenty-year-old migrant worker José Flores. He reflects on the cultural differences between Mexican and American families, discusses discrimination against Mexicans, and describes life in an FSA camp.
- The Hispanic Reading Room at the Library of Congress assists researchers investigating the geographical areas of the Caribbean, Latin America, and Iberia; the indigenous cultures of those areas; and peoples throughout the world historically influenced by Luso-Hispanic heritage, including Latinos in the U.S., and peoples of Portuguese or Spanish heritage in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. See the presentation Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822-1995 as well as other online collections on Hispanic culture.
- Don't miss Today in History features on José Manuel Gallegos and Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.
- Search Working in Patersen: Occupational Heritage in an Urban Setting using keywords *Mexican American, Hispanic American, emigration, and immigration* to find and listen to interviews regarding working in America.
- The Mexican section of the Immigration presentation on the Teachers website features the history of Mexicans in the United States.
- For more information about Cinco de Mayo take a look at the following blog posts:
  - Cinco de Mayo and the History of Mexican Codification
  - ¡Feliz Cinco de Mayo!
  - Cinco de Mayo is Not Mexican Independence Day!
  - 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Puebla (aka Cinco de Mayo) - Pic of the Week

Scopes Trial

On **May 5**, 1925, high school science teacher John Scopes was arrested for teaching evolution in one of Tennessee's public schools. On May 4, the day before Scopes's arrest, the *Chattanooga Times* ran an ad in which the American Civil Liberties Union offered to pay the legal fees of a Tennessee teacher willing to act as defendant in a case intended to test Tennessee's new law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in its public schools. Several Dayton, Tennessee residents overhiked a plot at a drugstore, hoping a trial of this type would bring much needed publicity to the tiny town. John Scopes agreed to admit to teaching the theory of evolution for the test case.

> *It certainly is most absurd, the fact can never be!*
> *My great grand daddy never was a monkey up a tree!*
>
> Grace Carleton, "Too Thin, or, Darwin's Little Joke"

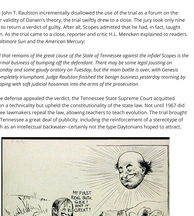
Too Thin; or, Darwin's Little Joke. Grace Carleton, words; O'Rangoutang, music; New York: Wm. A. Pond, 1874. Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1870 to 1885, Music Division

The Dinner Club. Rea Irvin, artist; Published in Life, March 18, 1915. Cartoon Drawings: Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon, Prints & Photographs Division

Defending Lawyer and Judge of Scopes Trial. Clarence Darrow seated with judge John F. Raulston, July 13, 1925. Prints & Photographs Division

The men enlisted several local attorneys and one teacher who believed in academic freedom and in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which states that all organisms developed from earlier forms through a process of natural selection. While volumes of scientific evidence support the theory of evolution, many felt that it contradicted the story of creation as described in the Bible, and they did not want evolution taught in schools.

The trial pitted famous labor and criminal defense attorney Clarence Darrow against former senator and secretary of state William Jennings Bryan, who worked for the prosecution. The trial was such a media circus that, on the seventh day in the courtroom, the judge felt compelled to move the proceedings outdoors under a tent due to the unbearable heat and for fear that the weight of all the spectators and reporters would cause the floor to cave in.



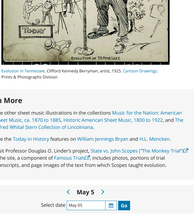
Scopes Trial Lawyers. William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow in outdoor courtroom during Scopes trial, UPI, 1925. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection. Prints & Photographs Division

As Judge John T. Raulston incrementally disallowed the use of the trial as a forum on the merits or validity of Darwin's theory, the trial swiftly drew to a close. The jury took only nine minutes to return a verdict of guilty. After all, Scopes admitted that he had, in fact, taught evolution. As the trial came to a close, reporter and critic H.L. Mencken explained to readers of the *Baltimore Sun* and the *American Mercury*

> *All that remains of the great cause of the State of Tennessee against the infidel Scopes is the formal business of bumping off the defendant. There may be some legal jousting on Monday and some gaudy oratory on Tuesday, but the main battle is over, with Genesis completely triumphant. Judge Raulston finished the benign business yesterday morning by leaping with soft judicial heaviness into the arms of the prosecution.*

When the defense appealed the verdict, the Tennessee State Supreme Court acquitted Scopes on a technicality but upheld the constitutionality of the state law. Not until 1967 did Tennessee lawmakers repeal the law, allowing teachers to teach evolution. The trial brought Dayton, Tennessee a great deal of publicity, including the reinforcement of a stereotype of the south as an intellectual backwater–certainly not the type Dayton's hoped to attract.

Evolution in Tennessee. Clifford Kennedy Berryman, artist, 1925. Cartoon Drawings: Prints & Photographs Division



Evolution in Tennessee. Clifford Kennedy Berryman, artist, 1925. Cartoon Drawings: Prints & Photographs Division

Learn More

- See other sheet music illustrations in the collections Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1870 to 1885, Historic American Sheet Music, 1800 to 1922, and The Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincoln.
- See the Today in History features on William Jennings Bryan and H.L. Mencken.
- Visit Professor Douglas O. Linder's project, State vs. John Scopes ("The Monkey Trial"). The site, a component of Famous Trials, includes photos, portions of trial transcripts, and page images of the text from which Scopes taught evolution.

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