TOPIC 7:
“BIRTH OF THE MODERN”--1920s

LECTURE 2:
Jazz Age vs. That Old-Timed Religion





Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944): Hollywood Glamour Comes to the Church

Discussion Points

What is the meaning of the word “modern” and how does it apply to the 1920s?

What demographic trends shaped American life in the 1920s?

What was the state of the 1920s economy? And how did lay the foundation for modernity of the 1920s?

What were some of the key new technologies of the 1920s and how did they transform American life?

What kinds of social and cultural changes were occurring in the 1920s?

What kind of reaction did these changes trigger in much of small town and rural America?

What was the role of fundamentalist Christianity in this reaction?

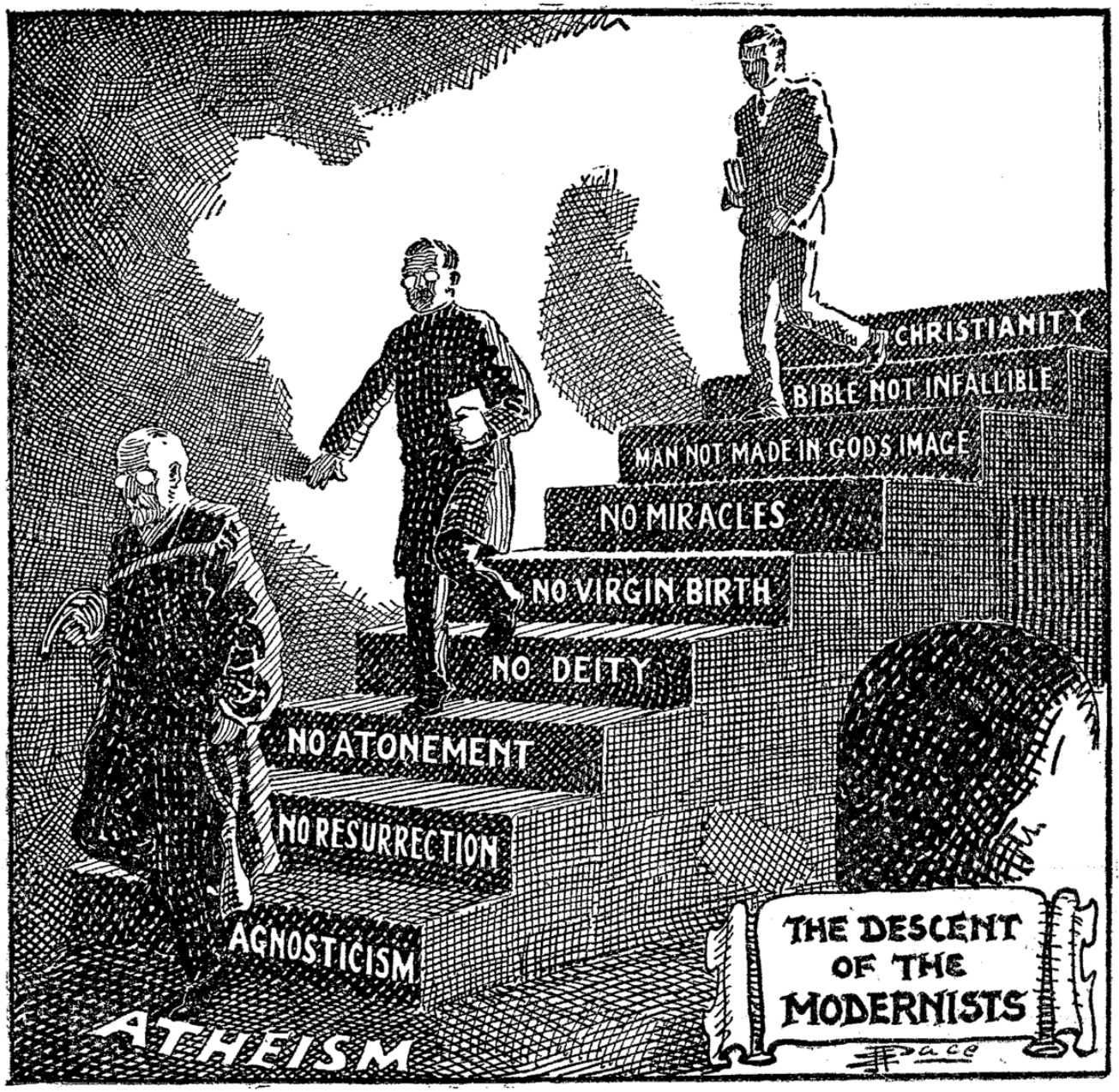
How did the teaching of evolution in public schools become such a hot button issue in the 1920s?

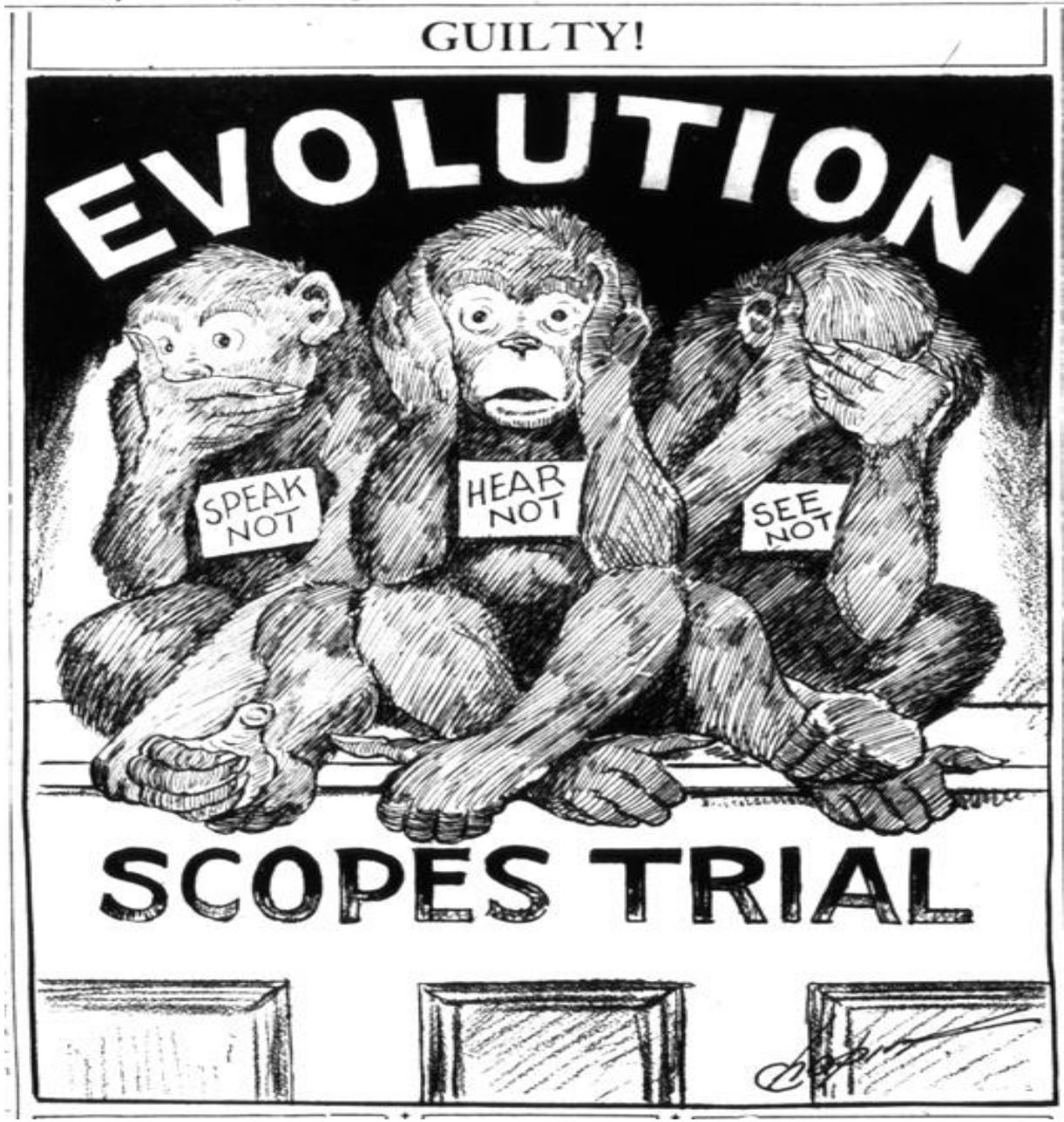
What triggered the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and how did it differ from its earlier manifestation in the Reconstruction era?

Can we see echoes of the 1920s in our country’s current “culture wars?”



Culture War Today





Culture War in the 1920s

Science versus Religion

We must take the abiding spiritual values which inhere in the deep experiences of religion in all ages and give them new expression in terms of the framework which our new knowledge gives us. Science forces religion to deal with new ideas in the theoretical realm and new forces in the practical realm.

--Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick



Our…indictment is that the evolutionary hypothesis, carried to its logical conclusion, disputes every vital truth of the Bible. Its tendency, natural, if not inevitable, is to lead those who really accept it, first to agnosticism and then to atheism. Evolutionists attack the truth of the Bible, not openly at first, but by using weasel-words like "poetical," "symbolical" and "allegorical" to suck the meaning out of the inspired record of man's creation.

--Williams Jennings Bryan

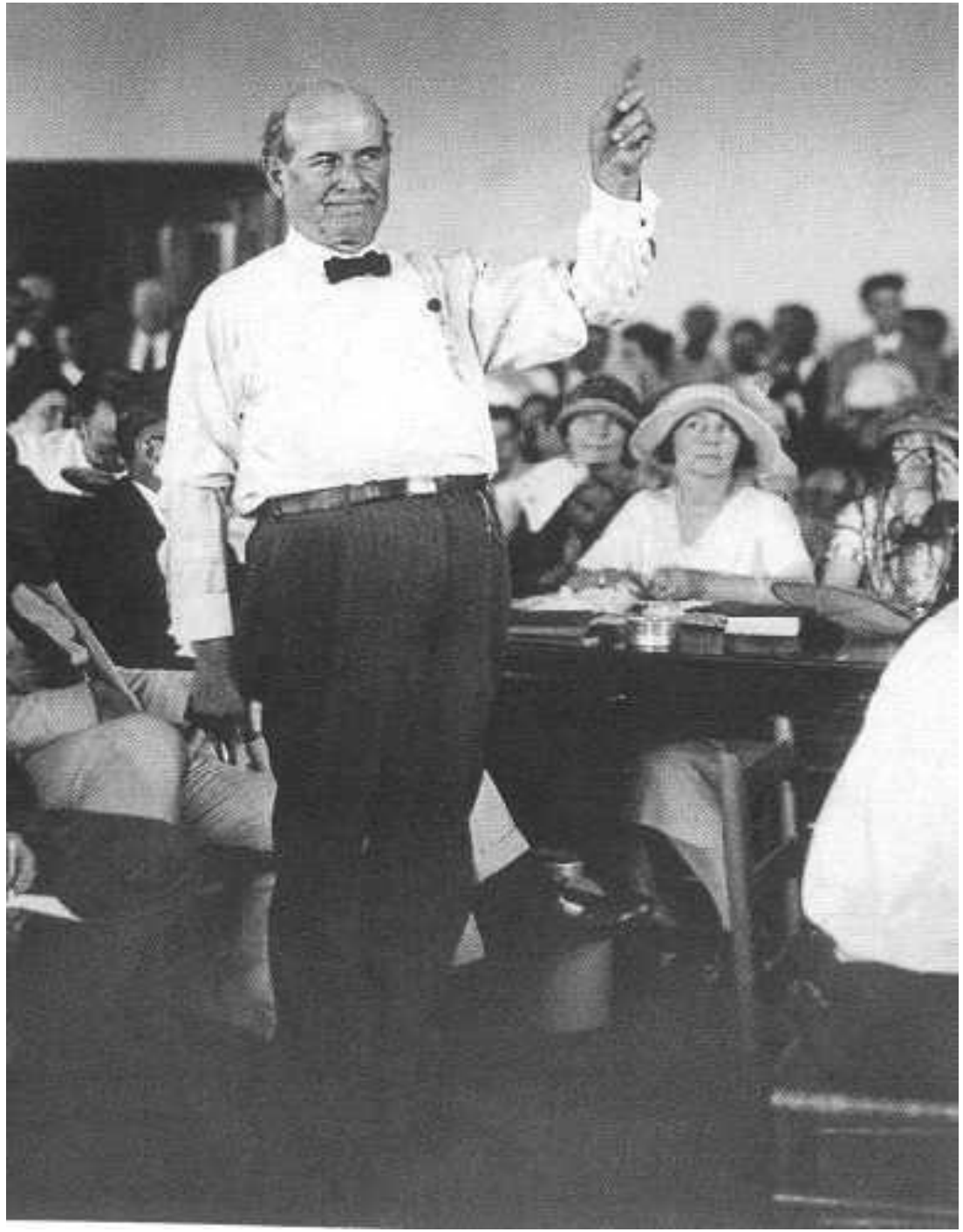




DAYTON, TENNESSEE, 1925



Clarence Darrow (1857-1938): America’s Most Famous Criminal Defense Lawyer; Defends Scopes



William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925): Three-time presidential candidate, Bible teacher; Prosecutes Scopes

William Jennings Bryan's Intended Closing Argument at Scopes Trial, 1925

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First: Could God perform a miracle? Yes, the God who created the universe can do anything he wants to with it. He can temporarily suspend any law that he has made or he may employ higher laws that we do not understand.
Second: Would God perform a miracle? To answer that question in the negative one would have to know more about God's plans and purposes than a finite mind can know, and yet some are so wedded to evolution that they deny that God would perform a miracle because a miracle is inconsistent with evolution.

If we believe that God can perform a miracle and might desire to do so, we are prepared to consider with open mind the third question, namely - did God perform the miracles recorded in the Bible? The same evidence that establishes the authority of the Bible establishes the truth of the record of miracles performed…
If any one has been led to complain of the severity of the punishment that hangs over the defendant, let him compare this crime, with its mild punishment, with the crimes for which a greater punishment is prescribed. What is the taking of a few dollars from one. In day or night in comparison with the crime of leading one away from God and away from Christ?

William Jennings Bryan's Intended Closing Argument at Scopes Trial, 1925

The soul is immortal and religion deals with the soul; the logical effect of the evolutionary hypothesis is to undermine religion and thus affect the soul. I recently received a list of questions that were to be discussed in a prominent Eastern school for women. The second question in the list read "'is religion an obsolescent function that should be allowed to atrophy quietly without arousing the passionate prejudice of outworn superstition?" The real attack of evolution, it will be seen, is not upon orthodox Christianity, or even upon Christianity, but upon religion.

James H. Leuba, a professor of psychology at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania…selected one thousand names as representative of the fifty-five hundred [science professors] and addressed them personally. Most of them, he said, were teachers in schools of higher learning. The names were kept confidential. Upon the answers received, he asserts that over half of them doubt or deny the existence of a personal God and a personal immortality, and he asserts that unbelief increases in proportion to prominence, the percentage of unbelief being greatest among the most prominent. Among biologists, believers in a personal God numbered less than 31 per cent, while believers in a personal immortality numbered only 37 per cent.
He also questioned the students in nine colleges of high rank and from 1,000 answers received, 97 per cent of which were from students between 18 and 20, he found that unbelief increased from 18 percent. In the freshman class up to 40 to 45 per cent among the men who graduated. On page 280 of this book we read: "The students' statistics show that young people enter college possessed of the beliefs still accepted, more or less perfunctorily, in the average home of the land, and gradually abandon the cardinal Christian beliefs." This change from belief to unbelief he attributes to the influence of the persons "of high culture under whom they studied."

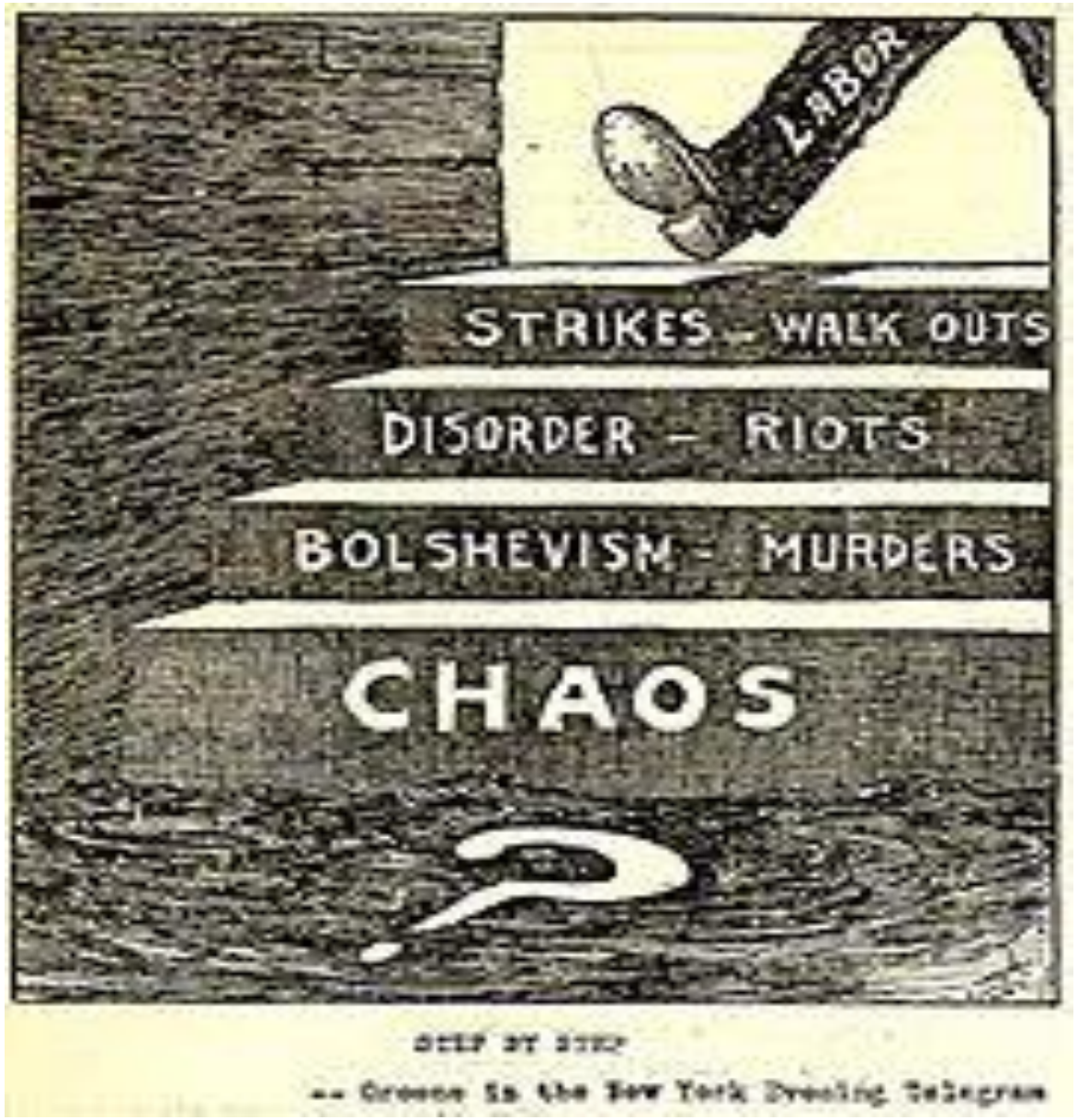
William Jennings Bryan's Intended Closing Argument at Scopes Trial, 1925

Can any Christian remain indifferent? Science needs religion, to direct its energies and to inspire with lofty purpose those who employ the forces that are unloosed by science. Evolution is at war with religion because religion is supernatural; it is therefore the relentless foe of Christianity, which is a revealed religion.
Let us, then, hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Science is a magnificent material force, but it is not a teacher of morals.
It can perfect machinery, but it adds no moral restraints to protect society from the misuse of the machine. It can also build gigantic intellectual ships, but it constructs no moral rudders or the control of storm-tossed human vessels. It not only fails to supply the spiritual element needed, but some of its unproven hypotheses rob the slip of its compass and thus endanger its cargo.
In war, science has proven itself an evil genius; it has made war more terrible than it ever was before.

The world needs a savior more than it ever did before and there is only one "Name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." It is this Name that evolution degrades, for, carried to its logical conclusion, it robs Christ of the glory of a virgin birth, of the majesty of His deity and mission, and of the triumph of His resurrection. It also disputes the doctrine of the atonement.

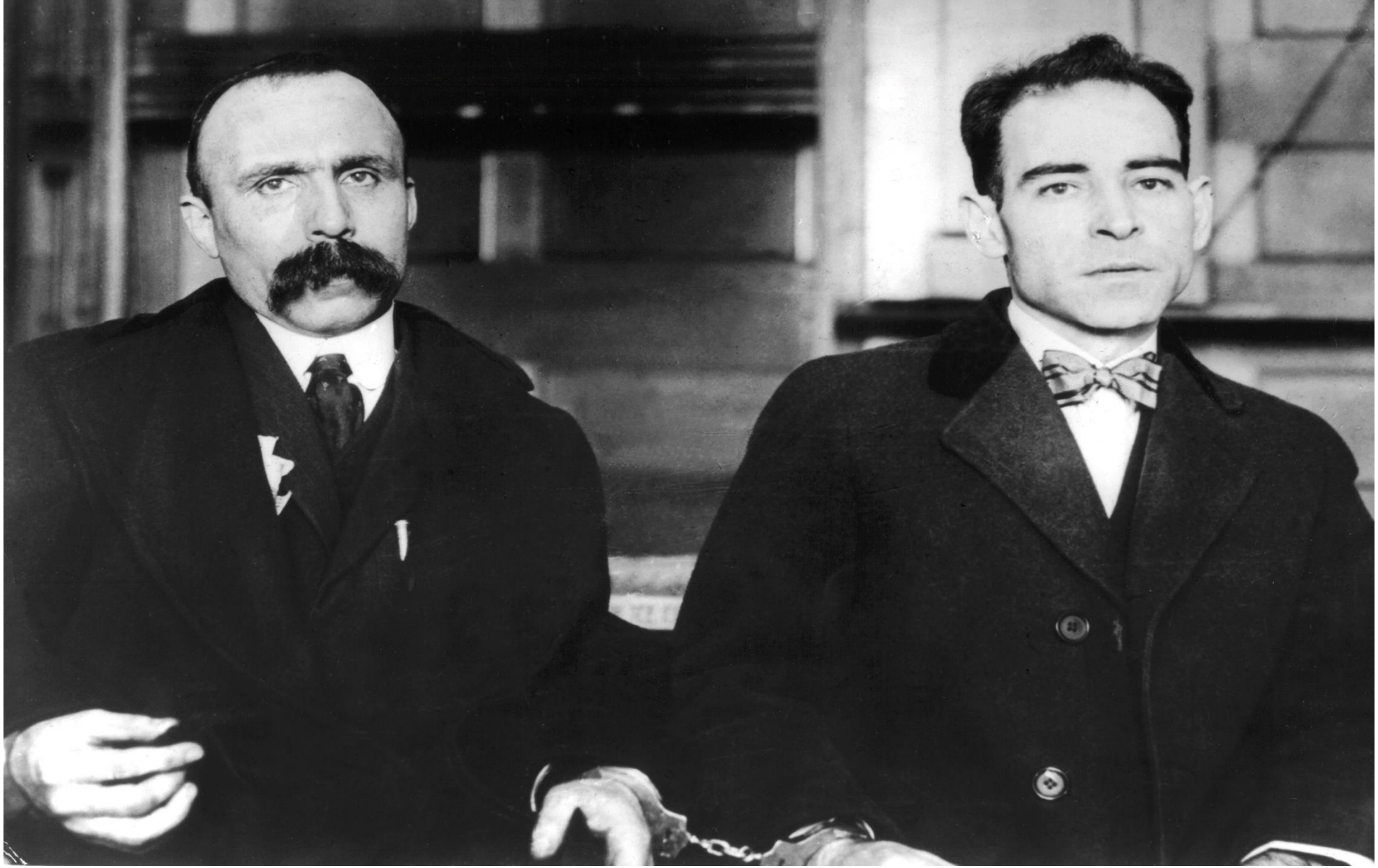
H.L. Mencken (1880-1956): Journalist; Author; Professional Cynic







Fear of Radicalism and Fear of Foreigners Fed the “100% Americanism” Movement



Sacco and Vanzetti Trial and Appeals: 1920-1927
Left: Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888-1927); Right: Nicola Sacco (1891-1927)



The Lynching of Leo Frank
for the Murder of
Mary Phagan,
Marietta, Georgia,
August 17, 1915





Lynchings


The Bryan Daily Eagle

AND PRESS

FIFTEEN THOUSAND SAW NEGRO BURN

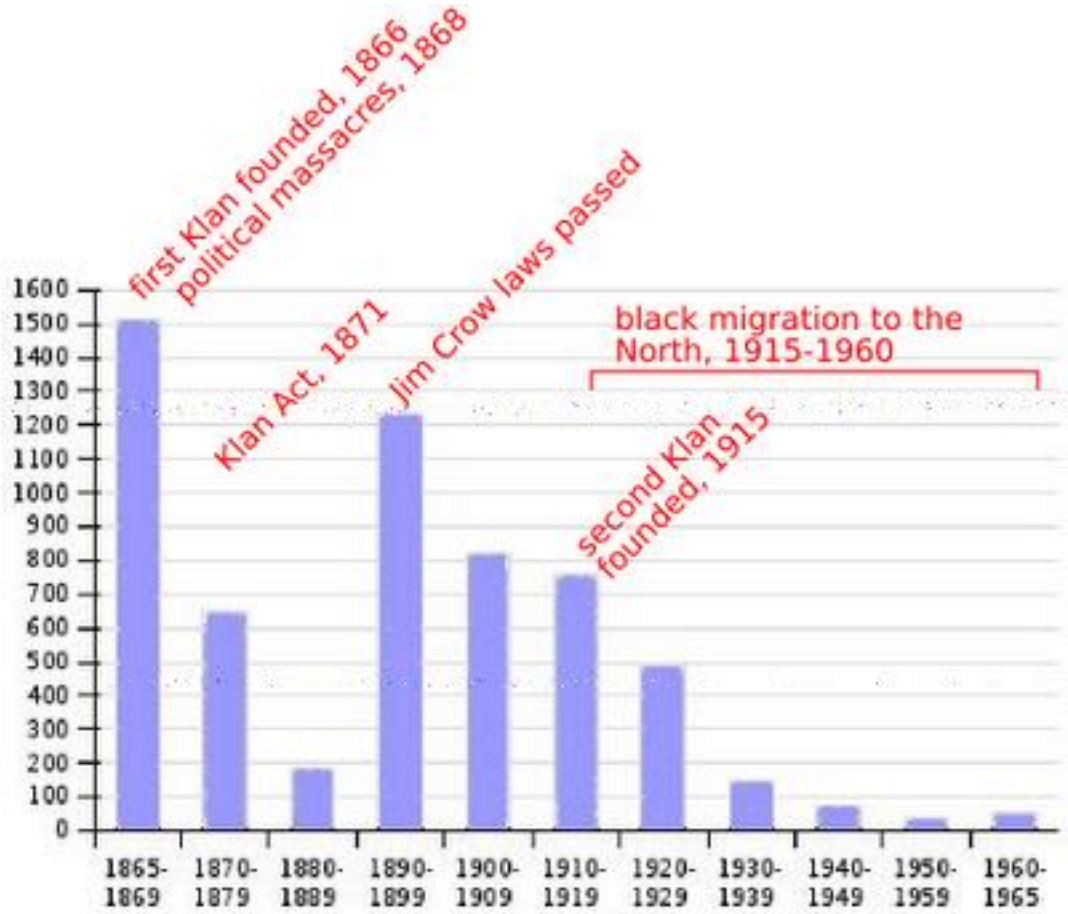
FRESH STRAWBERRIES

HARDY NEWTON

WACO PUBLIC SQUARE SCENE OF EXECUTION

SERVICE

Reid Bros.









KU Klux Klan of the 1920s



D.C. Stephenson and the Fall of the Ku Klux Klan