New NET Program Looks at Religion and Science

The NET-produced video Monkey Trial has been added to the NETCHE Instructional Video Library. The NETCHE Web site has the most current catalog and includes descriptions of all the instructional video and multimedia programs. All programs can be ordered online (http://netche.unl.edu).

Monkey Trial

90 minutes, 2002

History, Religion

In 1925, a biology teacher named John Scopes was arrested for teaching evolution in defiance of Tennessee state law. His trial became an epic event of the twentieth century, a debate over free speech that spiraled into an all-out duel between science and religion. Featuring two of the century’s greatest orators, attorneys Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, the Scopes trial was America’s first major media event, with hundreds of reporters and live nationwide radio coverage dispersing the sensational news. Outside the courthouse, a circus atmosphere prevailed as a chimpanzee in a suit and hat vied with fire-and-brimstone preachers for the crowd’s attention.

Monkey Trial explores the dramatic moment when a new fault line opened in society as scientific discoveries began to challenge the literal truth of the Bible. Often humorous and at times frightening, the story of two value systems colliding resonates today. The program weaves together interviews with leading historians, America’s foremost scholars, and Dayton residents who sat in the courthouse, to vividly capture the passions that were unleashed for three weeks in July of 1925. In doing so, the program begins to strip away the myths that obscure the meaning of one of the most important trials of the century. Additional information about the program, including a teacher’s guide, is available on the Web (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/montytrial/index.html).

Monkey Trial was written, produced and directed by Christine Lesiak, executive producer for Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, for the PBS series American Experience.