

Teaching creationism in US schools

A new Tennessee law will permit teachers to discuss creationism alongside theories of evolution, writes Casey Selwyn.



On April 11 2012, Tennessee passed a [law](#) that protects teachers who choose to explore the merits of creationism alongside theories of evolution in public school science classes. Governor Bill Haslam claimed that the legislation would not [change](#) scientific standards in schools and refused to sign the bill. However, he refused to veto it either, so the bill became law. Tennessee thus became the second US state to enact such legislation, following the “academic freedom” law of [Louisiana](#) in 2008. It purports to support teachers wanting to “help students understand, analyse, critique and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories”.

Its scope is not limited to evolution, as global warming and human cloning are also open to critique. These three theories are widely accepted in terms of scientific merit. Critics named the bill the “Monkey Bill” after Tennessee’s 1925 “[Scopes Monkey Trial](#)”, in which John Scopes was

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convicted under state law for teaching evolution and later exonerated on appeal. The law has attracted criticism, and some fear that it will inspire other states to pass similar bills in addition to acting as a [backwards](#) move in the fight to improve science and maths education in the US; others claim it violates the principle of the separation of church and state. Its supporters believe that it encourages healthy scepticism among students and that “[critical](#) thinking and analysis fosters good science”.

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