

BOOK REVIEWS

and Newport's religious pluralism. This is an important contribution to Revolutionary and urban historiography.

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Lauri Lebo. *The Devil in Dover: An Insider's Story of Dogma v. Darwin in Small-Town America*. (New York: New Press, 2008. Pp. 256. Paper, \$16.95.)

Pennsylvania has had its share of controversies and court rulings about the role of religion in public life, from William Penn's historic commitment to freedom of religion in his "godly commonwealth" to the importance of Prohibition and its legacy, the 1940 *Gobitis* decision on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pledge of Allegiance, the 1963 *Abington v. Schempp* school prayer decision, and the blue laws which persisted here longer than in most states. The 2004–2005 school board controversy over teaching "intelligent design" (ID) in Dover, which resulted in the landmark *Kitzmiller et al v. Dover Area School District* ruling that ID has no place in a public school science curriculum, has now joined these important legal and social aspects of our history. The appearance of *The Devil in Dover*, by Lauri Lebo, the *York Daily Record's* education reporter who grew up in the area and knows it intimately, will be very useful in reminding students, professors, and citizens of the big issues at stake in this most recent battle.

Lebo's is not the first book on the case, and the others, too, have strengths. Matthew Chapman's *40 Days and 40 Nights: Darwin, Intelligent Design, God, Oxycontin, and Other Oddities on Trial in Pennsylvania* (2007) has the attraction of being written by a descendant of Charles Darwin, and Chapman's sardonic tone echoes H. L. Mencken's reporting on the 1925 Scopes "monkey" trial. Gordy Slack's *The Battle Over the Meaning of Everything: Evolution, Intelligent Design, and a School Board in Dover, PA* (2007) covers the courtroom testimony and scientific aspects more deeply, but has less on the community. Edward Humes's *Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul* (2007)—the case inspires long subtitles—is the most scholarly, with the greatest attention to national politics and history. (A fine documentary, "Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial," which can be viewed at www.pbs.org/wghb/nova/id/program.html, includes interviews with participants and observers, including Lebo.)

Lebo reviews developments as school board members in small-town Dover, in York County, who had long felt frustrated by restrictions on including Christianity in the public schools, sought to “balance” the teaching of evolution with the presentation of creationist ideas, which later became ID. The district’s science teachers opposed the plan, but the superintendent and his deputy facilitated the new policy. National groups—the Discovery Institute and the Thomas More Law Center on behalf of the board, and the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Center for Science Education on the side of parents who challenged it—soon became intertwined in the local struggle, just as the Scopes trial in Tennessee eighty years earlier became an epic clash between veteran politician William Jennings Bryan and the ACLU’s Clarence Darrow.

But, once again demonstrating Marx’s comment that when history repeats itself, it does so first as tragedy and then as farce, the school board and its allies were far less principled than their model, Bryan. Board members denied wanting to teach creationism, although the local television station had such statements on tape. They professed not to know where the money came from for copies of a textbook that presented ID as science, although in reality one member solicited the contributions at his church, and presented the check to another. Plaintiffs’ attorneys showed that the book in question, *Of Pandas and People*, began as a “creation science” text and evolved to “intelligent design” in response to a previous Supreme Court ruling. And the board’s lead lawyer conducted a particularly lackluster defense. Judge John Jones’s meticulous 130-page decision (www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf), very much worth reading in full, not only ruled that the school board had the motive of promoting religion in its efforts to bring ID to Dover science classes, thus violating the constitutional test laid down in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), but also that ID itself was not science, but a form of religious doctrine.

In her cogent, fast-moving narrative, Lebo emphasizes several important themes. She demonstrates that the Dover teachers and residents opposed to the school board’s policy were not all secular liberals, but often as not were Christians who reconciled science and religion. Indeed, on the slate of Dover residents who successfully challenged the incumbent school board members at the ballot box while the trial was underway, half were Republicans and half were Democrats. Lebo also dispels the notion that “the liberal media” were out to get the conservative Christians on the school board, especially with

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her sensitive thumb-nail sketch of Joe Maldonado, a devout Baptist who had been the first to report that board members spoke of teaching creationism.

Lebo explores the religious culture of south-central Pennsylvania, along with observations about the social history of the area, in order to ascertain why Dover was the place where such a challenge arose. In the end, however, given the nature of American religion and early twenty-first century social divisions, Lebo concludes that “this could have happened just about anywhere” (166). The author’s descriptions of local fundamentalist Christian ministers and their followers are far less sympathetic than her sketches of their antagonists. She is particularly acerbic about professed Christians who “bear false witness”—that is, who misrepresented the facts. Overall, these individual portraits of Dover residents, local journalists, lawyers on both sides, and others constitute the book’s main strength.

Lebo raises two less compelling themes. She questions whether journalism has adopted a “misguided notion of objectivity,” which in this case led them to “regurgitate lies,” presenting ID as more coherent than it was in the interest of “balance.” The problem is real, but even historians who know that bias is embedded in any document will flinch at Lebo’s approval of the idea that “a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true” (159), especially given that this debate revolved around standards of evidence. Lebo also weaves into her story her ambivalent relationship with her fundamentalist father. This personal angle makes the account less dispassionate, but it effectively illuminates the fissures which the Dover case exposed in families and communities.

The Devil in Dover is better suited for adoption in sociology, journalism, or law classes than in history. From a scholarly viewpoint, the footnoting is inconsistent, and this reviewer would have welcomed more explication of the judge’s extraordinary ruling. But Lebo’s book reminds history teachers and professors of the importance of drawing connections between the Scopes trial—a staple in every US history survey class—and recent events. It helps us raise for discussion the pros and cons of local control of education, the tensions between the “free exercise” and “establishment” clauses in the First Amendment, the place of the courts in ruling on legislative policies, academic freedom, and the role of fundamentalist Christianity in society.

The Dover case also reveals a difference between science and history classes. *Kitzmiller* determined that ID cannot be taught in science classes, as it is not science. Even “teaching the controversy” between evolution and

its essentially religious challengers is off-limits there, Judge Jones ruled. But for social studies and history, teaching the controversies in public opinion and public policy is the heart of our discipline, and *The Devil in Dover* provides an excellent overview of these controversies.

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