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### **Legal Perspectives on Religion in Public School Science Classes**

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In the 1920s, state legislatures in the United States became involved in enacting laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools. The famous *Tennessee v. John Scopes* trial of 1925 was the most famous test case to determine the constitutionality the first phase of the laws. Scopes was convicted of violating one such law and many of these anti-evolution laws continued to be in effect for the next forty years. During the 1950s, for a number of reasons, the teaching of evolution became more common as the anti-evolution laws were either repealed or ignored. In 1968, the Supreme Court in *Epperson v. Arkansas* ruled that the prohibition of the teaching of evolution was unconstitutional. Since the *Epperson* decision, there have been several other federal court decisions that have considered the constitutionality of allowing religious theories to be taught in the science curriculum. For all practical purposes, federal courts since 1968 have prohibited the teaching of creationism. The new current battleground is on the issue of intelligent design. The first court decision on intelligent design, from Dover, Pennsylvania, is expected by January 2006. The significance of this decision, and the fallout from it, will be discussed. In many ways, the current controversy over the teaching of intelligent design may be only the tip of a far larger public controversy involving the roles of science, law, politics, and religion. Suggestions will be made as to how the scientific community can contribute to the legal and cultural issues that underlie this debate.