

10 Significant Court Decisions Regarding Evolution/Creationism

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1. In 1968, in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, the United States Supreme Court invalidated an Arkansas statute that prohibited the teaching of evolution. The Court held the statute unconstitutional on the grounds that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution does not permit a state to require that teaching and learning must be tailored to the principles or prohibitions of any particular religious sect or doctrine (*Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968) 393 U.S. 97, 37 U.S. Law Week 4017, 89 S. Ct. 266, 21 L. Ed 228).
3. In 1982, in *McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education*, a federal court held that a "balanced treatment" statute violated the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. The Arkansas statute required public schools to give balanced treatment to "creation-science" and "evolution-science." In a decision that gave a detailed definition of the term "science," the Court declared that "creation science" is not in fact a science. The Court also found that the statute did not have a secular purpose, noting that the statute used language peculiar to creationist literature in emphasizing origins of life as an aspect of the theory of evolution. While the subject of life's origins is within the province of biology, the scientific community does not consider the subject as part of evolutionary theory, which assumes the existence of life and is directed to an explanation of how life evolved after it originated. The theory of evolution does not presuppose either the absence or the presence of a creator (*McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education* (1982) 529 F. Supp. 1255, 50 U.S. Law Week 2412).
4. In 1987, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the U.S. Supreme Court held unconstitutional Louisiana's "Creationism Act." This statute prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools, except when it was accompanied by instruction in "creation science." The Court found that, by advancing the religious belief that a supernatural being created humankind, which is embraced by the term creation science, the act impermissibly endorses religion. In addition, the Court found that the provision of a comprehensive science education is undermined when it is forbidden to teach evolution except when creation science is also taught (*Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987) 482 U.S. 578).

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