Introduction

I suppose I should not have been surprised ten or so years ago when my son, then in middle school, reported at the dinner table on what had happened that day in his science class. The lesson had been on scientific classification and how it is used to group members of the animal and plant kingdoms into phyla, classes, orders, families, and so forth. At the end, he put up his hand to ask whether the fact that gorillas and humans were both members of the hominid family meant that they were related to one another. The question was innocent enough, and he was not trying to be controversial. After all, he had already learned a little about evolution in school, to say nothing of all those PBS nature shows, and it must have seemed to him that everyone believed in it, or at least everyone in our liberal (albeit southern) college town. Besides, it was in the textbook and was a standard component of the science curriculum in his award-winning public school. So the response of the teacher—a seasoned veteran with more than two decades of experience in the classroom—confused him, and it surprised me. Without missing a beat, she had looked my son straight in the eye and answered evenly: "*If you believe in evolution*, the answer is yes."

"*If you believe in evolution*, . . ." I should not have been surprised because at the time I was beginning to write this book, and I was already well aware that evolution was a sensitive topic, particularly in the public schools. As early as 1982, when George Gallup began to ask questions about creation and evolution in his national opinion surveys, polls had consistently shown that almost half of all American adults believed in the creation story as told in the Book of Genesis, in which God made the world in seven days less than ten thousand years ago. In 1988 the Williamsburg Charter Survey had reported that seven of ten Americans thought that public schools should teach both creation and evolution, and the responses were consistent across all regions, education levels, and age groups, including high school students. Studies from the same time showed that significant numbers of biology teachers—in some states approaching one-third—were teaching creationism alongside evolution in their classrooms. Among those teachers who emphasized evolution, many were reporting resistance from students, parents, and church pastors who demanded that students be allowed to leave the classroom during discussion of the topic. By the mid-1990s, when my son was in middle school, efforts were under way in several states to restrict the

teaching of evolution and to include creationism alongside it in the curriculum. Under the circumstances, it was understandable that his teacher had chosen her words carefully.[1]

Even so, I was surprised then, and I continue to be surprised now, not only by how deep and wide the distrust of evolution seems to run in this country, but also by the ability of its critics to make themselves heard on the issue. In fact, having studied antievolution activists for the last decade, I have to admit a certain admiration for them, even while confessing at the start that I agree with almost none of their views. Among modern American political movements, antievolutionism —or creationism, as it more commonly came to be called from the 1960s on—has been one of the most enduring, continuing through periods of activism and quiescence from the beginning of the twentieth century down to today. Admittedly an argument can be made that its endurance has followed from its failure, since part of the reason antievolution activists have been so persistent is that they have not succeeded in casting evolution out of the schools and installing creation in its place. Yet the movement has had more than its share of successes, at least at the state and local level, and the effect has been that in many of parts of this country remarkably little evolution has been taught in the public schools over the last century. In our own time, creationists have continued to champion their cause in schools across America, and those who study and track their efforts insist that the movement is as strong now as at any point in its past.

So I began by asking how antievolutionists had done it: how they had built a movement that has endured for almost a century, that has had a significant influence on public policy over that time, and that shows no signs of slowing today. In looking for answers I found no shortage of sources. Over the last fifty years, beginning with Norman Furniss's *The Fundamentalist Controversy*, scores of studies have detailed the creation, development, and continuing influence of the antievolution movement.[2] Among the best are the works of George Marsden, Ronald Numbers, and Edward J. Larson, who have described the debates over evolution that have continued from the early twentieth century to today, locating them in the religious, scientific, and legal landscape of our time.[3] But these are only the beginning, since few topics have attracted the attention of so many scholars, let alone those from such disparate disciplines. Historians have analyzed the intellectual roots of the antievolution movement; anthropologists and sociologists have studied its development, describing how organizations were created and members mobilized; political scientists have investigated how activists learned how to manipulate the levers of political power and influence public policy.[4] Science educators, who have a special interest in the issue, have followed the influence of creationism into the classroom, charting its effect on curricu-

lum and teaching practices.[5] Journalists have provided details on flash points and personalities.[6] Partisans from both creationist and evolutionist camps have poured out a steady stream of analysis, criticism, and polemics.[7] And this is not even to mention the movies, plays, and television documentaries that have introduced antievolutionism's most famous moment, the 1925 Scopes "monkey" trial, to millions of viewers.[8]

Yet despite all of the studies, there continue to be considerable disagreements in telling the story of the antievolution movement, let alone in trying to explain and interpret it. Antievolutionism is a controversial topic, and on this count alone some argument can be expected. But as Ron Numbers has recently lamented, the controversies that have characterized its study have arisen in large part because of the stubborn persistence of what he calls "myths and misperceptions." As Numbers sees it, scholars from Furniss on have contributed to a stereotypical understanding—really misunderstanding—of the movement. Taking the 1925 Scopes trial to be antievolution's defining moment, they have tended to shape their studies around it and, as a result, have spent too little time treating either its early development or later transformation. While William Jennings Bryan, the movement's most prominent personality, receives too much attention, other leading antievolutionists such as William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and J. Frank Norris receive too little. Tennessee, where antievolutionists won, becomes the focus, while events in other states, where they occasionally won but more often lost, are all but forgotten. In addition, Numbers argues that too many scholars continue to accept the conventional account of the Scopes trial as a battle between rural South and cosmopolitan North. Consequently, they have shown an almost instinctive tendency to depict the antievolution movement as existing for all practical purposes entirely in the South, rather than in the big cities of the North, where it began and where it carried out some of its most important campaigns. Above all, Numbers makes the point that by embracing the stereotype, these scholars have implicitly ignored other explanations for the movement, foregoing intellectual, political, and religious reasons in favor of social and economic ones. Predictably, when others have challenged the Scopes stereotype, or tried to move the study of antievolutionism beyond it, there has been conflict—what Numbers calls "continuing historiographical disagreement about even the most basic issues."[9]

Thus it became clear to me that in order to discover how antievolutionists had done it, I would have to find a way to get beyond the continuing debates. The first task was to describe the movement, telling its story in such a way as to avoid as many of the old preconceptions and stereotypes as possible. The second and bigger one was to explain and interpret it, bringing to bear whatever theories or

explanatory tools that would help me make sense of its success. My own background was in political theory, or, more precisely, in the history of American political thought. For the better part of two decades I had studied the connections between politics and religion in the United States, concentrating on conservative politics and conservative religion. I had written a book on the New Christian Right of the 1980s. But that book was primarily a study of ideas, based mostly on an analysis of the thinking of Christian conservative writers. This time I wanted to say more about how ideas were put into practice, how the thinking of the writers came to be applied in the agendas of the activists, in the character of the groups and organizations they created, and in the choices of the strategies they used to pursue their cause. That is to say, I wanted to study antievolutionism not only as a political ideology but also as a political movement. With this purpose in mind, I turned to social movement theory.

For at least a century scholars have been examining social movements, searching for explanations for how and why people come together to change their societies. In many of the earliest studies, movements were described in highly critical terms, as irrational products of the kind of mass behavior that inspired nineteenth-century mobs and twentieth-century totalitarian political parties. By the 1960s, responding to the labor and civil rights protests of the time, scholars had begun to treat movements more sympathetically, depicting them as the rightful efforts of rational people seeking their own economic interests and political rights. But it was in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by the explosion of groups advocating causes such as environmentalism, feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, and nuclear nonproliferation, that social movement theory really came into its own. Turning their attention to these so-called new social movements, European social theorists began to argue that they were distinctly different from older ones in that they existed not to achieve class-based economic ends but rather to pursue broader cultural and psychological goals such as building a sense of shared identity or improving the quality of life.[10] At about the same time, American academics, many of them studying similar movements in this country, began the shift from older Durkheimian theories to what they called a "political process" perspective, analyzing how these new-style groups and organizations operated within existing political systems to transform protest into policy.[11] Scholars from both schools concentrated their studies on late-twentieth-century movements, but some applied their assumptions to earlier ones as well, finding similarities between "new" social movements and "old" ones such as the moral reform movements that were common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States.[12] Although almost all of the studies were of liberal and left-leaning groups, a few treated conservative and right-wing ones as

well.[13] On rare occasions, conservative movements that were not only political but also religious even came in for review.[14]

As social movement theory flourished, however, it struggled to come together. Throughout the 1980s the field was in disarray, as "new social movement" and "political process" schools seemed to move into competing camps, with little communication between them. Those associated with new social movement theory maintained that movements could be understood best by considering how they gave meaning to the personal lives of their members. Concentrating on the concept of collective identity, these thinkers investigated how activists managed to create and sustain a shared sense of themselves (as people of color, as gays and lesbians, as women, etc.) by developing common cultural codes and distinctive discourses. For them, the internal dynamics of movements, including the emotional dynamics, were more important than any external ones.[15] By contrast, those associated with the political process model argued that movements should be seen in more political terms, as groups and organizations existing within elaborate social and political systems. These scholars focused on how movements mobilized resources, on how they took advantage of opportunities, and on how they operated within the constraints and possibilities of the political environment around them. Their perspective was more external than internal, focusing on how larger political forces—parties, states, even other movements—affected the success of political movements.[16] To some extent, the different perspectives reflected different academic traditions, with European scholars being attracted to a more cultural and philosophical perspective, while their American counterparts took a more institutional and instrumental one. Disciplinary differences—among historians, sociologists, political scientists, and so forth—exacerbated the divisions, as did methodological ones. Even within schools scholars analyzed different movements at different levels, with some concentrating on activists, others on organizations, and still others on state or even international systems. For that matter, studies of the same or similar movements sometimes came to contrasting conclusions depending on where in their histories they were studied, since movements can be very different in the early stages of mobilization than when they have arrived at maturity or are coming to a close.[17]

More recently, a rising chorus has begun to call for the creation of a more synthetic perspective. Denouncing false dichotomies between culture and structure, a new generation of social movement scholars, many of them associated only loosely (if at all) with the older schools, has come to draw simultaneously from both.[18] Theoretical differences remain, as do disciplinary and methodological ones, but boundaries seem increasingly to be blurred. Encouraged by collaboration between scholars in Europe and the United States, identity theorists have

begun to pay more attention to the role of institutions and political processes, exploring how the creation of identities in social movements is frequently shaped by the state, with its power to recognize some identities and repress others.[19] Political process thinkers have started to take more seriously what goes on inside movements, looking more closely at how institutions can influence the attitudes, concerns, and even emotions of movement members.[20] Disciplinary divisions are being overcome. As movements are analyzed at different levels and at different points in their development, scholars on all sides have come to see them as more complex and multilayered, as well as more dynamic, constantly adapting and transforming themselves in response to pressures both within and without.[21] Much still remains to be done, but as sociologist David S. Meyer has suggested in a recent essay, the state of social movement theory is that scholars have begun to create "synthetic paradigms," building bridges between what were once competing perspectives to create more comprehensive theories.[22]

It is in this spirit that I have written this book. In addition to telling the story of the antievolution movement, my aim has been to analyze it, considering it as a whole, from beginning to end, top to bottom, inside and out. To provide some structure to that substantial task, I have adopted some of the most significant concepts of social movement theory, drawing more or less equally from identity theorists and political process thinkers in an attempt to arrive at a more comprehensive account. Applying ideas of identity, mobilization, and framing, I have analyzed how antievolutionists of the early twentieth century created an identity for themselves, how they mobilized and organized their ranks, and how they framed evolution into an issue central to their cause. Using concepts of frame alignment, political opportunity structures, and strategic staging, I discuss how activists and their allies developed their movement during the first part of the 1920s, adapting to changing constituencies, taking advantage of political openings, and presenting their message to the media on the dramatic stage of the Scopes trial. Introducing a cyclical theory of protest, I track the course of events that followed the trial, describing how antievolution protest rose and fell as it came to a climax at the end of the decade. Finally, using insights into how movements survive over extended periods, I show how antievolutionists have managed to continuously renew their movement since the 1920s, maintaining it through several periods of retreat and revival over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In the conclusion I even attempt a few predictions about its future. The book considers the antievolution movement as it existed at the national, state, and local levels. It examines both its leaders and its rank-and-file followers. It treats its successes and its failures, its highs and its

lows. It is a study of one movement, and the findings cannot be applied universally. But for this one movement, it tries to tell the whole story.

In telling that story, I have relied as much as possible on the words of its members. Political movements are complex creations, but they are held together with words. As William Gamson has described, movements are the product of discourse, which he broadly conceives to include not only the written and spoken word but also symbolic acts and ritualized practices.[23] Robert Wuthnow calls them "communities of discourse," groups of like-minded talkers who develop their own ways of articulating common beliefs, goals, and visions of the future.[24] Moreover, as Ann Swidler and others have shown, movements use their distinctive discourses to act as well as talk, since discourse serves not only to construct collective identity but also to inspire and channel collective action.[25] In the antievolution movement, whose roots run deep into Scripture and sermon, words have seemed particularly important, and I have tried to take them seriously. With this in mind I have made use of a wide variety of printed sources, including not only books, pamphlets, and speeches, but also correspondence, court records, debate transcripts, news reports, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and (for more recent creationists) Web sites. In all of these, I have sought out a variety of voices, recognizing that movements consist of multiple views. On occasion, when the voices seemed too self-serving, I have added the perspective of critics and outside observers. Whenever possible, however, I have allowed antievolutionists to speak for themselves.

Finally, I would like to say one last word to readers. In each of the books I have written, I have attempted to address both specialists and generalists, those inside the academy and those outside it. In this one, I have found the challenge of reaching such a diverse audience to be especially daunting. On the one hand, this is a book of theory, an attempt to apply some of the best theoretical tools that scholars have devised in order to understand political movements. I am acutely aware that much of this theory is abstract and sometimes awkward in its terminology. Some may find it a distraction. On the other hand, it is also a book about the practice of politics, complete with colorful characters and detailed descriptions of events. No doubt there will also be those for whom such descriptions seem tedious. I ask that you all bear with me. What I am attempting to do here is to connect theory to practice in such a way that each can inform our understanding of the other. Making this connection has been the biggest challenge in writing this book. But it is also the best way to understand this movement. And we need to understand it, because however we feel about it, antievolutionism is not going away any time soon.