

Flehinger Clip 1 Transcript

BRETT FLEHINGER: So one level, this is sound and fury signifying nothing. This trial, it's a low stakes trial in a small town-- I was going to say something different-- in a small town. But what's at stake here? This is what's weird.

Give me Bryan's perspective. And I think we need to understand Bryan because it's easy to make him a buffoon. And part of the goal of this class is to understand Bryan or the Bryans of the world. So lay it out. Yeah?

STUDENT: Cool. So--

BRETT FLEHINGER: Jonah, here, yup. We'll get you the microphone. OK, cool. There we go.

JONAH: Awesome. So my understanding of Bryan's view of liberty is a more majoritarian perspective on liberty. So what that means is that the idea of equality in American society as laid out in the Constitution is that if the people will it, if the majority wills it, then that's what it should be in society.

BRETT FLEHINGER: I'm with you 80%, but there is one shift I would make there. I'm not certain it's in the Constitution. Is that where you were going to go?

STUDENT: I wasn't going to go Constitution.

BRETT FLEHINGER: I'll come to you in a second, Aubrey. But I think the thing is let me just push back on this. I'll just give you a chance to revise it. You said it's in the Constitution. Thinking back about the first part of this class, would you give me-- let me give you a chance to revise.

JONAH: In the article, they were talking about the importance of the Declaration of Independence and Abraham Lincoln's revival of the Declaration as a leading uniting document.

BRETT FLEHINGER: I agree. But I also think that this course fills in some gaps. There's a critique I can make up this article, and that's not my goal here. Let me shift a little. It wasn't where I was planning on going. But I think you've taken us a good place, Jonah.

So what's the difference between thinking of this as in the founding documents-- I'm trying to see how I ask the question here. So essentially, where does Bryan's logic come from? What logic is he reflecting? And where does it come from? Does that question makes sense to you, Phillip?

PHILLIP: Kind of.

BRETT FLEHINGER: OK, Jonah, can you hand Phillip the-- yep, perfect. "Kind of is good enough for me.

PHILLIP: I think what Bryan's saying, well, Scopes can have his own opinions of free expression and believe what he wants to believe. But because he's a teacher who's-- taxpayers are funding, he has to do what the majority wants him to do. He has to do what the majority wants him to do.

And the majority, at one level, we think of as the People. Exactly. I think one of the things that Larson is missing is that this is a democratic vision of this. This is democratic freedom. It is the freedom for people to collectively make their decisions.

Is it when we think that through-- and I'll come to you in a second, Aubrey, I promise-- is it coincidence that it turns on Christian interpretation of the Bible? Does the question makes sense to you? OK, Michael, you're going to have to wait for the-- yep.

MICHAEL: So I would just, by the way you're posing the question, say, no.

BRETT FLEHINGER: All right, so that's how to ask a leading question.

MICHAEL: Because using the idea that populism is becoming-- I don't want to say-- not subverted. That's not what I want to say. But it's becoming mixed with Christianity. And this idea that then all of a sudden you've got this democratic majority staking out, this democratic, the People staking out what it believes Bryan should be teaching.

If Christians have been led to believe that they can make that stake or that claim, then I don't see it as a coincidence necessarily.

BRETT FLEHINGER: OK, I would agree with that. The next question, as a historian, you would ask is why now. To some extent, why here, not Dayton, Tennessee as opposed to Carbondale, Pennsylvania or some other place. But why now? Yeah, Gabe, you've got to wait for the microphone. You're on it, Gabe.

GABE: In part, it's a claim as to who the authentic people are. Why now? It's in the '20s when there's this rising anti-immigrant sentiment and rising anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish sentiment.

BRETT FLEHINGER: Why are you having a rising anti-Jewish, especially rising anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant sentiment?

GABE: So it's about taking a claim that white Anglo-Saxon Protestants are the authentic people.

BRETT FLEHINGER: Yeah, exactly. And you and to me, as a historian for the most part, and there are exceptions. And I'll get to one of those. When you start to see those claims being made, it tells you those people perceive themselves as being under threat.