The decade of the 1920s, a time of rapid change, was called “the Jazz Age.” The name seems to suggest a relaxed, easy-going attitude about life. Yet not all Americans then were relaxed or pleased about the changes taking place around them. For example, some people worried about what they saw as a widespread loss of religious faith, even a hostile feeling toward religion. Strictly religious and believing in a literal interpretation of the Bible, these fundamentalists opposed modernists, who put more emphasis on modern science than religion.

These differing beliefs came into sharp conflict in the 1920’s, namely with the Scopes trial in Tennessee. In that trial, John Scopes was accused of breaking a Tennessee law against the teaching of evolution. His lawyer defended Scopes’ right to teach the controversial ideas of evolution. But the opposing side argued that evolutionary theory was actually being used to mock or insult religion. The trial showed that deep feelings of suspicion divided Americans on religion in the 1920s. Scopes was found guilty and fined $100. This photo shows Scopes’ lawyer defending his case during the trial.

*IN YOUR “ROARING TWENTIES” PACKET, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the 1920’s worry some Americans?
2. What were fundamentalists?
3. What were modernists?
4. What was the Scopes Trial? What was the final verdict?
5. (2 PARTS) Overall, do you think that ‘fundamentalism’ was a positive or negative aspect of the 1920’s? Do you think that ‘modernism’ was a positive or negative aspect of the 1920’s? Explain.