



5-1998

## Cleaning house : the U. T. faculty firings of 1923

Stephen D. Chandler

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephen D. Chandler entitled "Cleaning house : the U. T. faculty firings of 1923." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Susan Becker, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Charles Johnson, Larry Ratner

Accepted for the Council:

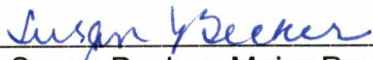
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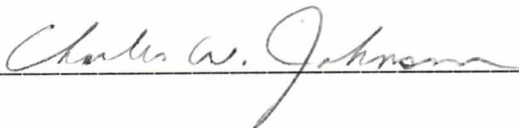
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Accepted for the Council:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of the Graduate School

CLEANING HOUSE:  
THE U. T. FACULTY FIRINGS OF 1923

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen D. Chandler

May, 1998

For Mom and Dad

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many special people who have helped me during my years at the University of Tennessee and who deserve recognition. Through their instruction, advice, support, and assistance, these individuals have proven invaluable to me both in completing this thesis and in adjusting to graduate school after a six-year high school teaching career.

While the limitations of this thesis are my responsibility alone, the merits of this work are due, in no small part, to the efforts of my Thesis Committee: Dr. Susan Becker, Dr. Charles Johnson, and Dr. Larry Ratner. I am grateful to them for their suggestions and encouragement throughout the entire process of preparing this manuscript. I am especially indebted to my Thesis Director, Dr. Becker, for reviewing numerous thesis revisions, providing valuable instruction, and always taking time to listen. Her friendship and support will be remembered always.

I thank the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, History Department for providing me with a graduate assistantship and the Graduate Research Awards Committee for awarding me a Bernadotte Schmitt Research Award. I extend my appreciation to the archival staffs at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the Lawson McGhee Library in Knoxville, and the Tennessee State Library in Nashville for their assistance in gathering needed sources. In addition, I offer special thanks to a fellow graduate student, Alex. Macaulay, for his valuable friendship and support throughout my graduate school experience.

I owe the largest debt of gratitude to my wife, Ellie. Her patience, encouragement, and love have helped me to endure.

## ABSTRACT

After firing two professors in April 1923, the University of Tennessee administration found itself in the midst of a growing controversy. Discontent among certain professors over the firings, along with student agitation for increased freedoms, led U. T. officials to investigate. When the investigation ended, a total of seven professors had been dismissed. The controversy surrounding the firings attracted state and national attention after the first professor charged that his dismissal stemmed from his views on evolution and his intended use of an evolutionary text. James R. Montgomery, author of the standard history of the University of Tennessee, concluded that the dismissals were the precursor of the famous 1925 Scopes trial.

This thesis explores the reasons behind the firings, the role of evolution in the controversy, the public's understanding of the dismissals, and the accuracy of Montgomery's claim. An examination of manuscript collections, university records, professional publications, and an assortment of newspapers reveals that the actual reasons and the public's understanding of the reasons differed greatly. The public believed that evolution stirred at the heart of the matter. However, while the issue did generate widespread publicity about the controversy, evolution played no direct role in any of the firings. The professors' dismissals resulted from a combination of disagreements about job performance, perceived antagonisms toward U. T. officials, and dissatisfaction with the organization of the university. More specifically, U. T. administrators defined what was in the University's best interests and operated within a strong hierarchical structure that allowed them to dismiss the professors arbitrarily and with virtual impunity. Strong personalities and personality conflicts also played

a large part in the firings. Where there is a connection between the 1923 firings and the 1925 Scopes trial, it is with the controversy's notoriety based on what the public thought happened, rather than what actually happened. Sometimes public perception can be stronger and more important--than reality.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

By George they just condemned [sic] themselves. The things they had been doing, the disturbances they had made. You get a lot of people stirred up in an organization that way and they can just give you the devil.<sup>1</sup>

James D. Hoskins, May 1957,  
recalling the faculty firings of 1923.

In the spring and summer of 1923, a controversy enveloped the University of Tennessee, bringing the institution under intense public scrutiny. Charges of academic freedom violations and stories of faculty discontent with the university's organization appeared in local Knoxville newspapers following the administration's decision to dismiss two professors in the late spring. Fanning the flames even higher, a surreptitious student newspaper of anonymous authorship appeared on campus and around the city at this time, criticizing the administration and demanding its own changes. Two years earlier Dean James D. Hoskins had warned President Harcourt A. Morgan that certain faculty members were criticizing the administration, agitating among the ranks and undermining faculty morale. But now they had gone too far. Hoskins called in suspected troublemakers and questioned them as to their participation in, and knowledge of, the unrest. Following his interrogation and a meeting with college deans, Hoskins presented Morgan with a list of names. By mid-summer, the following professors had been terminated: Jesse W. Sprowls, Professor of Secondary Education; Mrs. Ada M. Withers, Assistant Professor of Art; John R. Neal, Professor of Law; Asa A. Schaeffer, Professor of Zoology;

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Hoskins, Interview by Dr. Frank T. Rogers, 6 May 1957, p. 1, "James R. Montgomery Papers" MS-1880, Box 5, Folder 19, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, hereafter cited as M. P.

Robert S. Radford, Professor of Latin and Roman Archaeology; Robert S. Ellis, Professor of Psychology and Philosophy; and Maurice Mulvania, Dean of the Premedical Course and Associate Professor of Bacteriology. With a student enrollment of 1655, the University of Tennessee employed seventy-one instructors of assistant professor rank or above in 1923. The U. T. administration fired approximately ten percent of the faculty, eliminating five of thirty-four professors, one of thirteen associate professors, and one of twenty-four assistant professors.<sup>2</sup>

The issues and factors at work in this controversy mirrored concerns and tensions found in early twentieth-century society. Seen in isolation, the U. T. faculty firings appear trivial. Yet questions of evolution, academic freedom, and the role of the faculty in a changing university melded with anxieties that plagued an intolerant and changing decade. Viewed in the context of its time, the significance of this controversy becomes readily apparent. In the United States' relatively short history, few decades have witnessed such dynamic and lasting changes as did the 1920s. The world fought and recovered from its first world war, in some ways bringing closure to the nineteenth century. The destructiveness and ghastly nature of that war shook the idealism of many and irrevocably changed the world view of humankind. The "Great War" signaled the beginning of the end of the Victorian age and ushered in a time of rapid social, cultural, and technological change in the United States. Capturing the essence of this transitory period, Geoffrey Perrett writes in America in the Twenties: A History: "The nineteenth century had suffered a death blow in the war, but the corpse still twitched; the twentieth century was alive, but still in its

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<sup>2</sup> University of Tennessee, Register and Announcement, vol. 4, no. 2, University of Tennessee Record (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, June 1923), 7-11, 249.

cradle.”<sup>3</sup> Old met new in the early postwar years, producing both exhilaration and uneasiness, and marking the dichotomous nature of the 1920s. To some, change meant progress and growth, but to others it meant chaos and decline. The United States came of age as a modern nation in the twenties, and for those who experienced it, personal perspective and point of view made all the difference on how it would be remembered.

Following the typical lethargic postwar reconvergence, the American economy enjoyed a meteoric rise. The automobile fueled much of the business boom as consumers, aided by installment buying options, participated in a mass production consumer society. With sixty percent of U.S. households wired for electricity by the mid-1920s, producers introduced a wave of electrical appliances that promised consumers increased luxury and more leisure time. Small, family stores gave way to large chain stores, and advertisers made billions of dollars promoting the scores of standardized products available for purchase. Technology revolutionized communication in the twenties. From 1920 to 1925, radio sales increased from \$1 million to \$400 million annually, and five hundred new radio stations began transmitting in 1922 alone. With the silent film and later the “talkie,” movies became the latest addiction. Reader's Digest debuted in 1921, Time in 1923, and by the mid twenties, ten magazines had circulations exceeding 2.5 million each. For the young, casual dating began to replace serious courting and self-expression took such forms as jazz music, dancing, and “flapperism.” Amazing the country with their dramatic advances, scientists and medical researchers promised everything from the stars to a longer life.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Perrett, America in the Twenties: A History (New York: Simon And Schuster, 1982), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Boyer and others, The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People, vol. 2 (Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 771-802.

However, not all that earned the decade its “roaring” accolade proved jubilant. The war combined with social and cultural transformation to produce tensions in American society. All choices involve costs, and for many during this time, the dynamics of rapid cultural and social changes carried an emotional price that they were unwilling to pay. The same science and technology that led to increased productivity and large-scale industrialization created an impersonal work environment and monotonous labor. The automobile made the country a smaller place and transformed our paradigms of time and distance, but while some welcomed the benefits of mobility and independence, others saw only the opportunities for trouble and the loosening of morals that the auto created. Silver screen images that entertained also threatened to erode societal values.

The rapid make-over of American society and culture by the forces of innovation threatened our traditional notions and values of what we thought culture and society should be. In The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s, Lynn Dumenil argues that the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization presented serious challenges to Americans’ sense of order. An understanding of one’s place had permeated the Victorian world view. Their’s was a stable, ordered, and hierarchical world that placed its faith in progress and in the existence of a knowable, rational universe.<sup>5</sup> The modernist ideas that had slowly crept into American society beginning in the late nineteenth century mushroomed in the 1920s. Some Americans were ambivalent toward, or rejected, Freudianism, behaviorism, or developments in the sciences such as Einstein’s theory of relativity because of the challenge that these ideas and beliefs represented to their understanding of the universe and

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<sup>5</sup> Lynn Dumenil, The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 145-49.

humankind. Some, like the youth, embraced the social and cultural changes that liberated them from the bonds of Victorianism and a tired past. Others found more to embrace than reject; therefore, they transformed their attitudes to fit the changing times. But many found change unsettling, the consequences of transformation unappealing, even repulsive. Those who longed for stability in a sea of change grabbed hold of tradition and past verities, determined to battle against the new ideas, ideologies, and innovations that they perceived as harmful or threatening. Author Willard Gatewood refers to Americans' pervasive need, or willingness, to combat perceived dangers to tradition and order as an "exclusionist mood," and this term proves helpful in describing many of the trends and events of the time.<sup>6</sup> In 1915, W. J. Simmons revived the Klu Klux Klan which tapped into the particular fears and prejudices of white people under the guise of "100% Americanism." Applications for membership arrived five thousand per day in the fall of 1921 and Klan membership in the early twenties reached five million. Bombs sent by mail to judges, senators, and to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer in 1919 galvanized public fears that radicalism threatened the nation. As the progressive impulse waned and "Americanization" failed to integrate immigrants fast enough into the dominant and accepted cultural norms, nativists pressured the government to set restrictions on immigration that greatly reduced the number of Southeastern European and Asian immigrants.<sup>7</sup> In Anxious Decades, Michael Parrish concludes that "confidence about the nation's capacity to absorb a steady stream of people from diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds had now given way to a new pessimism about assimilation and the resilience of the

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<sup>6</sup> Willard Gatewood, Jr., ed., Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Perrett, America in the Twenties, 77; Boyer, The Enduring Vision, 765, 793-95.

social order.”<sup>8</sup> Pseudoscience bolstered this fear and uneasiness by claiming that America was being “mongrelized” by inferior people.<sup>9</sup>

Social forces stimulated universities to adapt to changing times as well. In The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, David O. Levine notes that after World War I institutions of higher learning underwent change and growth unprecedented in their history as America’s youth increasingly viewed universities as an avenue for upward mobility.<sup>10</sup> Laurence Veysey, author of The Emergence of the American University, describes the basic pattern of an American university after 1890 as “that of a success-oriented enterprise” that could not resist the lure of “numbers, influence, and respectability.” With growing numbers of students came the rise of college administration, most often arranged hierarchically with trustees at the top and a powerful president just below, followed by the university Dean and the department heads. According to Veysey, the “Administration leadership of the American university sought to bring an institution into being which might claim public respect . . .” and establish a reputation for “soundness.” As university administrations grew larger and more powerful, a sharp division developed between the faculty and the administration in many institutions. Administrators concerned themselves with increasing enrollments while diligently working to cultivate positive public images for their universities. Oftentimes, retaining the ideas of academic freedom and progress without alienating the values of tax-paying constituents proved to be a difficult and delicate balancing act. Smooth operation meant stability; therefore, administrators showed little patience for those deemed

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Parrish, Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 113.

<sup>9</sup> Perrett, America in the Twenties, 79.

<sup>10</sup> David O. Levine, The American College and the Culture of Aspiration (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 14.

troublemakers among the faculty. Attempts by the faculty to “democratize” the institution’s structure were labeled “revolts.” “Academic freedom,” still a new concept to higher education at the turn of the century, was often viewed by the administration as a challenge to internal harmony and the orderly flow of power. In order to protect the academic freedom and tenure of teachers in higher education, John Dewey and others organized the American Association of University Professors in 1915.<sup>11</sup> Despite their growing prestige and expansion, American universities in the 1920s did not necessarily embrace democracy. Inside the new teaching “profession,” younger teachers who were trained in the new techniques and methods of modern scholarship and who understood the value of academic freedom were often dissatisfied with conditions in their schools. Yet independence and individual initiative that went against the prevailing mood of the administration or the community could result in serious reprimands or dismissal. Hundreds of teachers in the twenties “appear to have lost their jobs for reading the wrong books, having the wrong friends, holding the wrong opinions, or joining the wrong groups,” according to one historian. In 1920, for example, the New York legislature passed the Lusk Laws which, in addition to outlawing the Socialist party and creating a state bureau of investigation, required teachers to take a loyalty oath.<sup>12</sup> With the Sedition Act of 1918, the government reinforced the notion that printed words deemed subversive or dangerous should be squelched.

Following the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, states that supported

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<sup>11</sup> Laurence R. Veysey, The Emergence of the American University (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 439,381,304, Part II passim; “General Report of the Committee On Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure,” Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors I (December 1915), 20-42, passim, hereafter cited as AAUP, Bulletin I; John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities, 1636-1976 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 318-322.

<sup>12</sup> Perrett, America in the Twenties, 52.



colleges whose curriculums included instruction in agriculture and the mechanical arts qualified for federal funds. As did many other southern colleges and universities following the Civil War, the University of Tennessee, in 1869, began receiving funds as a land-grant university. As farmers developed greater respect for experts, these colleges and universities began to grow. Aided by stabilization and rising agricultural prices, land-grant colleges entered a period of advancement between 1900 and World War I. More and more farmers who could afford it sent their sons to college.<sup>13</sup> As society modernized, universities had to adapt. But in the South where agriculture dominated, change occurred more slowly. Lacking the cosmopolitan experience that accompanied most developed industrial regions of the country, less-educated southern communities rarely tolerated teachers who instructed or acted in contrast to local convention. The South's lack of exposure to varied viewpoints, lifestyles, and cultural variations seemed to increase the strangeness or "radicalness" of these alien ideas and practices when they appeared. U. T.'s administrative structure resembled those common at the time, but the university's administration held conservative attitudes that fit the turn of the century more than the early 1920s. The University of Tennessee's southern location amidst a conservative public slowed the institution's development. In order to grow and to attract the support and respect of the local and state community, U. T. administrators had to maintain a positive public image, showing taxpayers that the university operated within community standards and beliefs and worked for the best interests of the entire state.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> James R. Montgomery, The Volunteer State Forges Its University: The University of Tennessee, 1887-1919, vol. 69, no. 6, University of Tennessee Record (Knoxville, TN.: University of Tennessee Press, November 1966), 2-3; Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952; reprint, 1963), 43.

<sup>14</sup> Veysey, The Emergence of the American University, 263-438, passim.

The most recent mention of the 1923 disturbance appears in Edward J. Larson's Summer For The Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion. Larson briefly describes the dismissal of Sprowls, the ensuing controversy, and concludes that "the continuing public furor in and around Knoxville over the episode helped set the tone for the Scopes trial in nearby Dayton." The most comprehensive look at the 1923 faculty controversy appears in James R. Montgomery's Threshold of a New Day: The University of Tennessee, 1919-1946. Montgomery paints a descriptive picture of the events and supplies probable meanings gathered from the evidence, yet his straight-forward manner in presenting the facts leaves room for additional analysis and interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

One of the fired professors insisted that U. T. administrators terminated him because of his views on evolution and his intended use of a book that contained evolutionary references. This widely-publicized charge has led some historians to link causally the 1923 U. T. faculty firings with the 1925 Scopes trial.<sup>16</sup> Although there appears to be some connection between these events, only very brief mentions of the 1923 university unrest appear in other secondary sources. In his memoirs about the Scopes trial, Center of the Storm, John T. Scopes makes only a fleeting reference to the incident while giving his recollections of John R. Neal, a member of Scopes' defense team and one of the U. T. professors fired. Ray Ginger's Six Days or Forever?, one of the best accounts of the anti-evolution showdown in Dayton, Tennessee, only mentions

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<sup>15</sup> Edward J. Larson, Summer For The Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 78-80, quote from page 79; James R. Montgomery, Threshold of a New Day: The University of Tennessee, 1919-1946, vol. 74, no. 6, University of Tennessee Record (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, November 1971).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

the U. T. firings once.<sup>17</sup>

Why did seven professors lose their jobs at the University of Tennessee in the early 1920s? What did the public think happened? What was the relationship, if any, between the U. T. dismissals of 1923 and the Scopes trial of 1925? In answering these questions, this thesis will provide a detailed look at the events in the faculty controversy, including the press coverage of, and the public's reaction to, the firings. If this controversy served as a precursor for the Scopes trial, knowing the real reasons for these faculty firings becomes a vital element in the anti-evolution story in which Tennessee took center stage. If this controversy began with a clash over a professor's right to academic freedom, then this case should prove useful in better understanding the growing pains of a university straddling the fence between tradition and modernism. The issues involved in the U. T. faculty firings took on an added sense of urgency in the early twentieth century, and an analysis of these dismissals should clarify the historical record and allow this painful episode to find its proper place in history. Moreover, a greater understanding of this controversy offers a chance to better understand a dynamic decade, and, to a large extent, the defining years of contemporary culture and society.

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<sup>17</sup> John T. Scopes and James Presley, Center of the Storm (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 64; Ray Ginger, Six Days or Forever?: Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 44-45.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLAYERS: A GILDED CAST

As is often the case, much lies hidden beneath the surface of this controversy. Those who eventually lost their jobs represented over sixty-five years combined teaching experience at the University of Tennessee. Their accomplishments in their respective fields, in the eyes of colleagues, students, and the community, were numerous.<sup>18</sup> A brief sketch of the principal participants and related background information helps to clarify the story and shed light on the dynamics of the disturbance. Long before Sprowls' and Withers' firings had ignited unrest on campus, problems had accumulated between the professors and the administration, creating negative impressions and strained relations that, in 1923, acted as necessary causes in the house-cleaning of unwanted professors from the University of Tennessee.

In the middle of the academic year 1920-1921, Dr. Jesse W. Sprowls left the University of Vermont where he served as Professor of Secondary Education to take the same position at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Harcourt A. Morgan, U. T. president, had for some time sought to cultivate good relations with Tennessee's rural schools so as to insure a steady stream of high school graduates into the university. Thus, Sprowls' new position required field work with the secondary schools of the state, and he found himself in the unenviable position of replacing a professor who had proven to be a successful

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<sup>18</sup> "Report on the University of Tennessee," Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors X, (April 1924), 213-60, hereafter cited as AAUP, Bulletin X.

and popular liaison.<sup>19</sup> Although a good teacher and one who was well-liked by his students, Sprowls, according to neutral observers, was the “antithesis” of his predecessor: “a retiring scholar, an ineffective speaker and a poor mixer and promoter.”<sup>20</sup> As secondary school liaison, Sprowls “failed to measure up.”<sup>21</sup> In March, 1923, Professor J. A. Thackston, head of the Department of Education, notified Dean Hoskins that Sprowls was not working out as Professor of Secondary Education. According to Thackston, Sprowls’ performance over the past two and a half years had proven “conclusively that he [was] not adapted to this work.”<sup>22</sup> Sprowls’ “haphazard methods,” including unmade progress reports and the lack of plans on how to advance secondary education in Tennessee, had left the program without specific information on how best to sell the university to Tennessee’s high schools. Professor Sprowls insisted that he had done all that he could in this position, considering that he taught fifteen hours per week and had been provided only \$250 for travel expenses. When Thackston pointed out his deficiencies and intimated to Sprowls that he might be dismissed, Sprowls insisted that Thackston’s reasons were insufficient. On April 2, in the presence of Dean Hoskins, Thackston informed Sprowls that he would not be reappointed for another year. At that time, professorial tenure was indefinite because the University of Tennessee hired professors for one year terms with yearly reappointments. Professors could assume that they would be

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 215; J. A. Thackston to Dean James Hoskins, 10 July 1923, President’s Papers 1867-1954, AR-1, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, hereafter cited as P. P.; “Public Schools and Relations to U. T. Be Discussed,” *Journal and Tribune* (Knoxville), 10 July 1923, 5; C. E. Brehm, Specialist in Markets, to E. E. Miller, Editor, *Southern Agriculturist*, 9 June 1923, P. P.; AAUP, *Bulletin X*, 218-19.

<sup>20</sup> AAUP, *Bulletin X*, 219.

<sup>21</sup> Brehm to Miller, 9 June 1923, P. P.

<sup>22</sup> University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, Minutes, 17 July 1923, 402, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, hereafter cited as Minutes; Thackston to Hoskins, 10 July 1923, P. P.

reappointed unless notified otherwise at year's end. In essence, non-reappointment became tantamount to dismissal. Sprowls counter-charged that his dismissal stemmed from his intended use of The Mind in the Making, a book containing evolutionary references of which Thackston and Morgan did not approve. This charge will be treated in detail in Chapter Two.<sup>23</sup>

U. T. faculty member and later U. T. president Cloide E. Brehm described Sprowls as "a very arbitrary individual and hard for anyone to get along with."<sup>24</sup> Even Sprowls' friend, Philip Hamer, an Associate Professor in the U. T. history department, recalled Sprowls as being "brutally frank" and "a difficult person with whom to deal." Hamer told U. T. historian James Montgomery in a later interview that Sprowls had called his department head "a damned coward" to his face shortly after being told of his dismissal.<sup>25</sup> U. T. Botany professor L. R. Hesler remarked at the time that he was not surprised to hear that Sprowls had been fired "in view of previous conversations in which he [Sprowls] had told me things he had said to the administration."<sup>26</sup> Spencer McCallie, president of The McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, had worked with Sprowls in the Southern Association for two years. McCallie remarked to Morgan that "the biggest mistake you ever made was employing him [Sprowls] for the university and the best thing you ever did was asking for his resignation." Finding Sprowls to be a contrary individual in attitude, manners, and religious

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; Philip M. Hamer, Diary, April 9-August 20, 1923, MS-526, 12 April 1923, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, hereafter cited as Diary; James D. Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 2, M. P., Box 5, Folder 19; "Sprowls Gives His Own Story," Knoxville News, 14 July 1923, 8; AAUP, Bulletin X, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Brehm to Miller, 9 June 1923, P. P.

<sup>25</sup> Hamer, Diary, May 8 1923; Philip Hamer, Interview by James R. Montgomery, interviewer's summary, 12 October 1967, 3, M. P.; James R. Montgomery, "John R. Neal and The University of Tennessee: A Five-Part Tragedy," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 38 (Summer 1979): 221.

<sup>26</sup> L. R. Hesler, Interview by J. D. Hoskins, typed transcript, 25 June 1923, 4-5, P. P., Box 6, Folder 17.

convictions, McCallie had refused to even consider Sprowls for a job at the McCallie School in 1921.<sup>27</sup> Writing for the Nashville Tennessean, T. H. Alexander described Sprowls as “a typical university professor type in voice and appearance” but who was “not very tactful in his talk.”<sup>28</sup>

Mrs. Ada Withers had joined the U. T. faculty as an Assistant Professor of Art and department head in 1921. Withers worked to develop the art department, and during her short time as art instructor, enrollment in her classes increased from a few students to well over one hundred.<sup>29</sup> Believing fine arts to be a “luxury,” Dean Hoskins hired Mrs. Withers “with the distinct understanding” that she would spend most of her time teaching applied art, or skills such as costume design and dress making.<sup>30</sup> The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 provided federal subsidies to vocational education with the primary goal of improving the quality of incoming freshmen to agricultural colleges. Because applied art constituted a necessary component of the Smith-Hughes curriculum, a course of growing importance for women preparing to teach, Hoskins told Withers to devote the majority of her instructional time to this component. The administration placed art instruction under the control of the Home Economics department, and, “after considerable difficulty,” Mrs. Withers agreed to comply and cooperate.<sup>31</sup>

Immediately after the consolidation, friction developed between Withers and the head of the Home Economics department, Nellie Crooks. Crooks charged that Withers refused to cooperate and that she neglected to do her part

<sup>27</sup> Spencer J. McCallie to H. A. Morgan, 13 August 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 18.

<sup>28</sup> T. H. Alexander, “Sprowls Seeks To Save Jobs of Ousted Teachers,” Nashville Tennessean, 17 July 1923, 1,2.

<sup>29</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 220.

<sup>30</sup> James Hoskins to H. A. Morgan, 13 July 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 19.

<sup>31</sup> Hofstadter and Hardy, The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States, 43; Hoskins to Morgan, 13 July 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 19; AAUP, Bulletin X, 220-21.

in teaching applied art. The administration believed that a change had to be made in order to get someone in this position who would cooperate and who could properly instruct students in applied art. Despite a student petition asking the university officials to keep Mrs. Withers and allow an independent art department, the consolidation continued and Withers was dismissed.<sup>32</sup>

Although she had not been openly critical of Hoskins or Morgan, the administration still found Mrs. Withers a difficult person with whom to work. One entry in Philip Hamer's diary stated that Withers had a "vitriolic and uncontrolled tongue."<sup>33</sup> During their later investigation of the firings, American Association of University Professors investigators also found that most of her colleagues thought Withers "a rather difficult person to get along with" and, in gender-biased terms, described her as both "nervous and emotional."<sup>34</sup>

The academic community esteemed Robert S. Radford, a professor of Latin and Roman Archaeology at the University of Tennessee where he had taught for fourteen years. His U. T. colleagues and other professors from across the nation regarded Professor Radford "as one of the leading Latin scholars of the United States."<sup>35</sup> Far from resembling an insurgent out to undermine the administration, Radford admired and defended both the Dean and the president, and he worked to avert "a break between the faculty and the administration" by trying to keep news of Sprowls' dismissal out of a local newspaper.<sup>36</sup> However, the administration had already formed an opinion of Radford, based largely on previous incidents involving the Latin scholar.

<sup>32</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 221; see Appendix D.

<sup>33</sup> Hamer, Diary, 8 May 1923.

<sup>34</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 221.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 234; "Even the Meek are Discharged," Knoxville News, 6 July 1923, 4; "Sturdy Defense Is Offered By Instructors and Their Friends But Administration Sustained," Knoxville Sentinel, 17 July 1923, 1.



During the administration of U. T. president Brown Ayres in the 1910s, Radford had varied his classes to include such offerings as Latin literature, the history of art, modern painting, and Greek sculpture and architecture. However, the Morgan administration had insisted repeatedly that Radford confine his work to Latin translation, and Radford's unwillingness to meet this request drew the ire of university administrators and competing department heads.<sup>37</sup> His involvement in off-campus, controversial matters caused friction as well. In 1919, Radford defended publicly a Knoxville high school principal who had been terminated by the city Board of Education, prompting a caveat from Dean Hoskins that he desist his involvement in the matter. During the 1920 Democratic campaign, Radford's name had appeared in the newspaper after he made a motion to strike "the treaty of Versailles" from an endorsement of the Woodrow Wilson administration. At his boarding house, Radford had also argued openly that jailed socialist Eugene V. Debs should be pardoned. Morgan called both of these political statements "imprudent" because Radford's comments indirectly involved the university in battles and causes with which it had no desire to be associated.<sup>38</sup> Dean Hoskins neither liked nor respected Radford, and in March, 1921, the Dean requested that Radford be replaced because of poor work performance, "erratic views and meddlesome inclinations" that brought "discredit on the institution."<sup>39</sup> The administration did not want to see the university endangered by one who developed strong liberal

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<sup>37</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 235.

<sup>38</sup> "Private Views of Professors Also Censored," Knoxville News, 18 July 1923, 1; AAUP, Bulletin IX, 234-235; see also "Effort To Re-elect Prof. Neal Made By Governor and Bolton Smith Failed," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 18 July 1923, 1,16.

<sup>39</sup> Dean J. D. Hoskins to H. A. Morgan, 31 March 1921, P. P., Box 7, Folder 7.

or even radical convictions, championed causes, and talked indiscreetly.<sup>40</sup> In an interview with Dr. Frank T. Rogers, Dean Hoskins remarked that “[i]t’s the faculty that make a university” and he believed that an institution’s reputation and character emanated from the faculty.<sup>41</sup> Given the anti-communist, anti-subversive climate of the 1920s and the still-fresh memories of the “red scare,” Radford’s comments about Debs and the Versailles treaty had the potential to tarnish the university’s reputation. As the faculty controversy began, Radford called a meeting in his classroom on April 5, 1923, for the purpose of inquiring into the Sprowls and Withers firings. The administration considered this to be a protest meeting, and this incident later became a factor in Radford’s dismissal.

Asa A. Schaeffer came to the University of Tennessee as Professor of Zoology shortly after receiving his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University. He had made numerous contributions to scientific literature over his thirteen year career at U. T. and “was considered to be the foremost American authority” on the amoeba and, perhaps, the most distinguished scholar on the U. T. faculty.<sup>42</sup> Also, Schaeffer served as president of the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors. In the first of two letters that he wrote to the national AAUP, Schaeffer described the “thoroughly autocratic” policy of the U. T. administration, criticized administrators for dismissing both Sprowls and Withers, and wrote that “unless we can bring about some marked changes in the administration soon, about a dozen or so of us are going to look for positions elsewhere merely to save our self respect.”<sup>43</sup> In a second letter dated

<sup>40</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 234-35; L. R. Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, interviewer’s summary, 4-5 June 1968, 8, M. P., Box 5, Folder 16; Letter entitled “Dismissal of College Professors, 1920’s: Discussion with Mr. Hess,” 18 March 1963, 1, M. P., Box 5, Folder 19.

<sup>41</sup> J. D. Hoskins, Interview by Dr. Frank T. Rogers, typed transcript, 8 August 1957, 3, M. P., Box 5, Folder 19.

<sup>42</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 223-224.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

June 1, 1923, Schaeffer asked for an investigation by the AAUP Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure into the Sprowls' dismissal and conditions within the university. Two other faculty members who attended Radford's meeting signed the letter as well. Believing that the AAUP would "defend indiscriminately" any professor slated for termination regardless of the reasons, U. T. administrators resented this call for an investigation as "outside meddling." Schaeffer showed the first letter to a reporter with the Knoxville News who, in turn, wrote a story focusing on the faculty discontent. The call for an AAUP investigation and the "grave indiscretion" of releasing information to the press greatly influenced the administration's later decision to dismiss Schaeffer.<sup>44</sup>

During his tenure at the University of Tennessee, Professor Schaeffer had drawn the administration's attention to himself on several occasions. On June 19, 1913, Schaeffer had given a lecture entitled "Heredity in its Relation to Vice" for approximately thirty women of the Knoxville Anti-Vice League. While answering questions in a small group following his talk, Schaeffer supposedly remarked that he agreed with a double standard for men and women in moral conduct, including social activity and sexual relations. The matter resurfaced three years later when Knoxville Reverend Henry W. Stough gave a speech to several thousand men at Stough Tabernacle in which he charged a professor at U. T. with advocating the double standard and teaching immorality to his classes. Stough based these charges on the written statements of three women who had attended Schaeffer's June 1913 lecture. Schaeffer denied the charges, saying that he only admitted that a double standard existed. The executive committee of the Board of Trustees investigated the matter, and the entire board voted to support Schaeffer. They based their conclusion on the

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<sup>44</sup> R. S. Ellis, Interview by J. D. Hoskins, typed transcript, 18 June 1923, 2, P. P., Box 6, Folder 17; AAUP, Bulletin X, 215, 228-29.

testimony of three U. T. professors who had also attended Schaeffer's lecture and on a commendatory article about the lecture in the June 20, 1913, Knoxville Journal and Tribune supposedly written by Anti-Vice League member Mrs. L. Crozier French. The committee believed that this article, written when the lecture was fresh on the minds of the women, proved more believable than statements made three years later. Still, the Ministers' Association of the Methodist Church and Mrs. French demanded that the decision be overturned, the matter be more fully investigated, and the women who made statements be given a chance to reclaim their good names that they believed had been impugned by the board's decision and comments. Mrs. French pursued the matter until the spring of 1917.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to this conflict, Schaeffer "habitually overdrew his departmental allowances[,] . . . would not submit estimates of appropriations for his department, which were necessary for the preparation of the University budget[, and] . . . neglected to report student absences."<sup>46</sup> Even before the college deans put the dismissals to a vote on June 29, 1923, Hoskins had made up his mind that Schaeffer had to go. Believing him to be the "ring leader" in the agitation, Hoskins wrote Schaeffer a letter on June 23, 1923, telling him that he would not be reappointed because he was "not in accord with the

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<sup>45</sup> "Heredity Is Great Factor," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 20 June 1923, 9; L. Crozier French, typed transcript of Mrs. L. Crozier French's statement attached to "Bill of Complaint," 23 August 1916, Lizzie Crozier French Papers, Box 1, Folder "May 6, 1901-March 20, 1913," Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library System, Knoxville, Tennessee, hereafter cited as L. C. F. P.; Professor A. A. Schaeffer statement, typed transcript, June or July, 1916, L. C. F. P., Box 1, Folder "May 6, 1901-March 20, 1913"; "Trustees of University," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 26 July 1916, 7; "Letter Sent To Dr. Brown Ayres," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 25 July 1916, 7; L. Crozier French to "Mr. Smith Evans, and Cooper," 22 August 1916, L. C. F. P., Box 2, Folder "July 27, 1916-December 15, 1916."; T. W. Kittrell, Tennessee House of Representatives, to Mrs. L. Crozier French, 30 March, 1917, L. C. F. P., Box 2, Folder "February 21, 1917-September 21, 1920."

<sup>46</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 224-225.

administration” and would not cooperate.<sup>47</sup> Dean Hoskins sent the letter after Schaeffer had left the country on a Carnegie Foundation-funded scientific expedition to study the amoeba in the Tortuga Islands in the British West Indies. Although Schaeffer met with both President Morgan and Dean Hoskins immediately prior to his leaving for the summer, news of his dismissal arrived weeks after he had left the country.<sup>48</sup>

Professor Maurice Mulvania had been with the University of Tennessee for seventeen years, first in connection with the agricultural experiment station, then as an Associate Professor of Bacteriology since 1919, and finally as Dean of the Premedical Course since March 1921. Mulvania's conduct had never been questioned prior to the disturbance of 1923 and there seemed to be a general feeling of respect among students and faculty for him. On the heels of the appearance of the anonymous student newspaper and the faculty meetings, Mulvania talked with President Morgan about “disaffections” between the administration, faculty, and students which he believed could be eliminated with a stated code, or constitution, that defined the proper role of each group within the university.<sup>49</sup> Morgan told Mulvania to write down his suggestions. Thinking that a broad survey of opinion would be more useful, Mulvania “took it upon [him]self” to go to ask the faculty for their suggestions of needed changes.<sup>50</sup> Later, the local press reported that the faculty had submitted a constitution of proposed changes in university organization and the newspaper printed an inaccurate list of those who had submitted suggestions. Mulvania's

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 226-27, 231.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 224, 229-30; “Schaeffer Is Off,” Knoxville News, 31 May 1923, 1; “Teachers May Make Defense,” Chattanooga Daily Times, 11 July 1923, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 242; Maurice Mulvania, Interview by James D. Hoskins, typed transcript, 21 June 1923, 2, P. P., Box 6, Folder 17.

<sup>50</sup> Mulvania Interview, 2-3, P. P.; AAUP, Bulletin X, 243.

involvement with the "constitution" and the publicity it created played a major role in his dismissal.<sup>51</sup>

A native of Tennessee, Professor Robert S. Ellis had served as Professor of Psychology and Education in the West Tennessee State Normal in 1914-1915 and had worked at Ohio University as Acting Professor in the Extension Department from 1915 to 1916. In 1919, Ellis came to the University of Tennessee to become Professor of Psychology and Philosophy.<sup>52</sup> According to AAUP investigators, the academic community considered him to be a "young man of unusual scholarship, possessed of a keen mind, . . . and an excellent teacher." His students honored Ellis by naming him in the 1922-23 Student Annual as one of the nine most outstanding faculty members.<sup>53</sup> Ellis seems to have been in good standing with the administration during his first couple of years at U. T; the administration increased his salary from \$2400 to \$3250 after his first year.<sup>54</sup> Most of the friction between the administration and Ellis occurred in his third year when the administration proposed the consolidation of the Departments of Psychology and Education under the control of Professor Thackston. Although the merger did not happen, Ellis said that Thackston "tried to assume a 'sort of directorship' over the work in psychology."<sup>55</sup> Other incidents affected Ellis' attitude towards the administration as well. He claimed that Thackston suggested to him that an older student without a college degree should be allowed to teach one or two sections of Psychology after only one year of training. Ellis charged that the same student received a degree from

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<sup>51</sup> "Professors Tell University Needs," Knoxville News, 1 June 1923, 12; "Professors at U. of T. Submit a Constitution," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 2 June 1923, 9.

<sup>52</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 237.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-38.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 239; Ellis Interview, 6-7, P. P., Box 6, Folder 17.

U. T. later although he had not completed the necessary requirements. The appointment of an unqualified teacher with only six months training in the field to teach psychology bothered Ellis most. The administration claimed that this was the best teacher who could be secured for the \$1500 salary, but Ellis believed that these decisions eroded the high standards that he had set for his department. Ellis had also signed Schaeffer's petition calling for an AAUP investigation and he had been openly critical of Sprowls' dismissal, stating that Sprowls should have been told sooner that he did not fit in rather than be made a full professor and then fired two and a half years later.<sup>56</sup> The administration claimed that Ellis had been indiscreet in his opposition to the organization of the university, that he had criticized the administration both at the university and in public, and "that he was a troublemaker and was very difficult to get along with."<sup>57</sup>

Also a Tennessee native, Professor John R. Neal had taught at the University of Tennessee for fourteen years prior to his dismissal. In 1909, Neal became a part-time law professor at the University of Tennessee, teaching at U. T. each spring and at the University of Denver Law School each fall. Neal became a full professor of law at the University of Tennessee in 1917. Besides teaching law, Neal was deeply involved in Tennessee politics, had served in both houses of the Tennessee legislature, had been a frequent candidate for governor of the Volunteer State, and had often sought election as U. S. Senator. Neal's extensive reputation and popularity among his students prompted a statewide campaign to save his job. Neal was considered peculiar, eccentric, and nontraditional, and he gave little attention to either his personal

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<sup>56</sup> Ellis Interview, 4-5, P. P.

<sup>57</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 239-241.

appearance or hygiene. He often failed to cash, or even collect, his payroll checks, and some who knew him recalled that he would sometimes use the checks as bookmarks. His unkempt appearance worsening over the years, Neal slept in his clothes, seldom bathed, and would wear a shirt without changing it until it was worn out.<sup>58</sup> While speaking in Tennessee during the period, Will Rogers, the nationally-known humorist, is said to have commented: "I met John R. Neal, the candidate for governor[.] Some say they are not going to vote for him because he is wishy-washy--well I don't know about wishy, but he certainly is not washy."<sup>59</sup> Rather than being charged with disloyalty or antagonism toward the university, the administration charged Neal with failure to follow university rules and laxness in duties. As examples of Neal's laxness, all forty-nine students in two of his classes received an identical grade of "95", at least one of his attendance books showed no marks to indicate that attendance was kept, and he was once accused of turning in final grades to the registrar without grading the final exams. Neal's friends and former students charged that his dismissal stemmed from the jealousy of the Dean of the College of Law, Malcolm McDermott. Neal's supporters told AAUP investigators that students liked Neal and confided in him, and that they preferred Neal's instructional methods for law over McDermott's "Harvard" system.<sup>60</sup>

Born in Ontario, Canada, Harcourt A. Morgan became the Dean of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 248; Montgomery, "John R. Neal and the University of Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 38 (Summer 1979): 218; Bobby E. Hicks, "The Great Objector: The Public Life of Dr. John R. Neal," MA Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1968, Appendix E, 185-89, hereafter cited as Hicks Thesis; "Effort To Keep U. T. Professor is State-Wide," Knoxville Sentinel, 5 July 1923, 15; Harvey Broome, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, interviewer's notes, 3 January 1968, 2, M. P., Box 5, Folder 5; Hicks Thesis, 21, 146-48; AAUP, Bulletin X, 248-50.

<sup>59</sup> Broome Interview, 3 January 1968, 15.

<sup>60</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 254; Refer to Appendix B; John R. Neal's grade book, 1922-23, and attendance book found in P. P., Box 6, Folder 20; copy of grade report for Neal's "Public Corporations" and "Equity and Trusts" classes, first term 1919-1920, P. P., Box 6, Folder 20; AAUP, Bulletin X, 249-52.



Agriculture at the University of Tennessee in 1904. Fifteen years later he was named president, beginning his fifteen year career in the university's highest post.<sup>61</sup> Colleagues recognized Morgan's talents for promoting both the university and agriculture. Looking back years later, former U. T. professor and president Cloide Brehm believed Morgan's "outstanding accomplishment was selling this University to this state," and that he could "spell bind" farm groups with his speeches.<sup>62</sup> Tennessee native and U. T. graduate who earned Bachelor of Law and Master of Arts degrees from the university, James D. Hoskins served as a Professor of History beginning in 1900, as Dean of the College in 1911, and became university dean in 1919. Hoskins served as interim president from January to July, 1919, following the Death of President Brown Ayres.<sup>63</sup>

In his memoir about the firings penned years after the incident, Hoskins wrote that shortly after Harcourt A. Morgan became the U. T. President, a few of the faculty members began criticizing him because they believed his election to have been a mistake. Hoskins remembered that Asa Schaeffer and Maurice Mulvania had both been critics of the president.<sup>64</sup> Dean Hoskins described Schaeffer as being "especially violent in his opposition" and a man who had caused the administration trouble for a long time. According to the Dean, Mulvania had once come to him talking negatively about President

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<sup>61</sup> John Harcourt Alexander Morgan, 1945, original wire recording, typed transcription, M. P. Box 4, Folder 6.

<sup>62</sup> Cloide E. Brehm, Interview by James R. Montgomery, typed transcript, 17 May 1968, 47, M. P., Box 5, Folder 4; see also Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, 4, M. P.; "Discussion with Mr. Hess," 1, M. P.

<sup>63</sup> Montgomery, The Volunteer State Forges Its University, 101-102; James R. Montgomery, Stanley J. Folmsbee, and Lee Seifert Greene, To Foster Knowledge: A History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1970 (Knoxville, TN.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 160, 192; Montgomery, Threshold, 5, 6, 11, 418.

<sup>64</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 1, M. P.

Morgan, much to Hoskins' chagrin.<sup>65</sup> L. R. Hesler, Professor of Botany at U. T. during this time, recalled in a later interview with James Montgomery that these two men, along with Sprowls, "were mean to Hoskins." They "baited" him, made fun of him, and deliberately tried to embarrass him at faculty meetings.<sup>66</sup> These professors had criticized Morgan for a long time, causing Hoskins to go to the president and urge him to confront these men immediately to find out whether they were going to "cooperate with the administration officials of the university."<sup>67</sup> Morgan thought that the professors should be allowed to criticize and Hoskins might have agreed if their criticism had been constructive. However, Hoskins saw their actions and comments as "destructive and violent antagonism" that had to be stopped.<sup>68</sup> Despite Hoskins' warning that hesitation would only give the agitation time to grow, Morgan chose to do nothing. Hoskins' initial warning came two years before the large-scale disturbance of 1923.

There seems to have been a rocky adjustment period after the death of President Brown Ayres in January, 1919. President Ayres accepted Professor Schaeffer's occasional departmental overdrafts; during his term as interim president, Hoskins told Schaeffer to stay within his budget or be charged himself. President Ayres allowed Professor Radford to teach courses outside the field of Latin language, but the Morgan administration thought that art and literature were best taught by other departments and that Radford should stick to Latin translation. Such are the conditions in which discontent thrives and grows, where negative comparisons are made, and where lasting impressions

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<sup>65</sup> J. D. Hoskins to J. W. Garner, University of Illinois, 11 October 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 19; Hoskins Interview, 6 May 1957, 1, M. P.

<sup>66</sup> Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, 8, M. P.

<sup>67</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 1, M. P.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

are formed.<sup>69</sup>

A fine line separates self-expression and insubordination. Dean James D. Hoskins played a pivotal role in the university's actions, and a closer look at the University Dean reveals much of the hidden story. C. E. Brehm knew Hoskins well as a friend and co-worker. In a later interview with J. R. Montgomery, Brehm said of Hoskins: "When he made up his mind, hell and highwater [sic] couldn't move him. And his judgment was not so good."<sup>70</sup> L. R. Hesler called Hoskins "a product of Baker-Himel Preparatory--a place where discipline was strict" and described a dogmatic Hoskins who "could be fair but . . . could be a most terrible man when aroused."<sup>71</sup> Hoskins had a great deal of influence over Morgan and handled a lot of the difficult jobs. The Dean believed that he had to take on responsibility that Morgan should have assumed himself, telling Frank Rogers during a 1957 interview that the president "frequently" left town when "serious things would come up . . . and [left] me to handle" them.<sup>72</sup> Others indirectly corroborated Hoskins' claim by calling Morgan a "promoter" who preferred to avoid a fight and one who "always ran scared in his job."<sup>73</sup>

Hoskins never cared much for the outspokenness of faculty members. C. E. Brehm recalled that years later, while president of the university, Hoskins resented the activities of history professor Ruth Stephens. Always speaking her mind, Professor Stephens held strong convictions and occasionally Hoskins caught "the backlog (backlash) of some of the statements she made."

<sup>69</sup> AAUP, *Bulletin X*, 235.

<sup>70</sup> Brehm Interview, 17 May 1968, 20, M. P.; Nathan Dougherty, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, typed transcript, 9-10 April 1968, 51, M. P., Box 5, Folder 9.

<sup>71</sup> Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, 8, M. P.

<sup>72</sup> Hoskins Interview, 9 August 1957, 5, M. P.

<sup>73</sup> "Discussion with Mr. Hess," 1, M. P.; Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, 18, M. P.; Dougherty Interview, 15, M. P.

Resenting the "heat" that her outspokenness brought, Hoskins froze her salary at \$2400 and would not increase it, according to Brehm.<sup>74</sup>

Introspective statements by Hoskins himself reveal much about his personality and perhaps help to explain some of Hoskins' actions during the 1923 unrest. Hoskins told Rogers in 1957 that "the world is influenced more by feeling . . . than by anything else[.] [W]hen you hurt a mans [sic] feelings, you really hurt him." These words reflect a man who internalized things, particularly criticism. Hoskins believed that you should always give your best. If you gave less than this, you had no room to complain if someone criticized you. However, Hoskins also emphatically told Rogers that if someone "bawls you out" unjustly when you are doing your best, you should "give him the devil" and never "take it" because it undermines your self respect.<sup>75</sup> Recalling a conversation with the president in which Morgan had insulted him unintentionally, Hoskins said that he had slammed his fist on the desk and asserted that Morgan should never "try to talk to [him] that way." After Hoskins' temperamental display, Morgan never did.<sup>76</sup>

The controversy of 1923 carried with it the baggage of previous struggles, differing opinions, and incidents between certain faculty members and the administration. Similar to other university administrations of the day, the University of Tennessee administration strove to cultivate and maintain a positive public image. Charged with the job of running the institution smoothly and effectively, U. T. administrators followed an organizational pattern quite common throughout the nation, particularly in the less industrialized regions. In

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<sup>74</sup> C. E. Brehm, Interview by James R. Montgomery, 29 April 1970, typed transcript, 36, M. P., Box 5, Folder 4; Brehm Interview, 17 May 1968, 20, M. P.

<sup>75</sup> Hoskins Interview, 9 August 1957, 4, M. P.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

this hierarchical structure of trustees, president, university dean, deans of the separate colleges, and department heads, the faculty had a very limited governance role in the operations of the university. Clashes between personalities and egos over differing points of view were not unique to this setting, and these personal conflicts merged with an emotionally charged national, state and local context to produce the 1923 faculty firings.

CHAPTER III  
THE 1923 U. T. DISMISSALS: AN ANALYSIS

A combination of causal factors merged to produce the controversial and widely-publicized U. T. faculty firings. Near the first of April, 1923, the U. T. administration notified two professors that they would not be reappointed for another year. In both cases, university officials named unsatisfactory job performance as the reason for the change. For professor of secondary education Jesse Sprowls, his inability to complete successfully the fieldwork portion of his job led education department head John A. Thackston to ask for his dismissal. In Mrs. Ada M. Withers' case, her reluctance to teach applied art and work in conjunction with the Home Economics department caused the administration to dismiss her.<sup>77</sup> Despite the fact that students signed petitions on behalf of Withers and Sprowls and in favor of an independent art department, these two dismissals would probably have remained unnoticed by the general public. However, one incident between Sprowls and Thackston created the opportunity for the campus controversy that developed.<sup>78</sup>

In September, 1922, Thackston had told Sprowls that he could not use James Harvey Robinson's The Mind in the Making in a psychology class because of its evolutionary content. Holding an evolutionary view of social progress, Robinson argued that man, at one time, "lived similarly to the primates" and that "[w]e are all descended from the lower animals."<sup>79</sup>

Outraged, Sprowls took the matter to President Morgan, but Morgan also

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<sup>77</sup> See Appendices C and D.

<sup>78</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 2, M. P.; Minutes, 17 July 1923, 402; Thackston to Hoskins, 10 July 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 19; AAUP, Bulletin X, 219, 221.

<sup>79</sup> James H. Robinson, The Mind in the Making (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), 67-68.

thought it “unwise” to use the book. Morgan appears to have believed in evolution but thought it better to “soft pedal” its teaching to avoid a “monkey legislature” that might try to forbid evolution’s teaching in public school.<sup>80</sup> Near the close of the 1922 summer school session, Morgan thought the threat of reactionary measures real enough to call Sprowls to his office and tell him of an anonymous letter that he had received. The unknown writer labeled Sprowls “a dangerous element” whose views go “beyond Darwin” and stated that it was “time to be rid of such professors.”<sup>81</sup> Incensed at Morgan’s position on using the text, Sprowls voiced his disapproval and offered to resign, but Morgan assured him that he was a valued professor and suggested that he teach another course. Sprowls and Morgan agreed finally, and the matter appeared resolved. After receiving word that he was to be let go in 1923, Sprowls refused to accept that his poor fieldwork performance had cost him his job. It was then that Sprowls told faculty members that he was being dismissed because of his views on evolution and his intended use of The Mind in the Making. The university insisted that neither the book nor the issue of evolution had ever played a part in their decision, but Sprowls believed them to be the cause, thereby making his dismissal a matter of academic freedom.<sup>82</sup>

Ten members of the faculty attended the April 5, 1923, meeting called by Professor Robert Radford to try to determine the actual reasons for Sprowls’ dismissal. With academic freedom, as well as the status of a full professor at

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<sup>80</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 217, 221; Hamer, Diary, 5 April 1923; Philip Hamer to J. R. Montgomery, 16 October 1970, M. P., Box 1, Folder 12; Robert Gam[m]on, John G. Logan, Robert A. Kern, or Leo D. Fanz to J. W. Garner, University of Illinois, transcribed typed letter, 7 December 1923, printed in Hicks Thesis, 177; “Sprowls Gives His Own Story,” Knoxville News, 1, 8.

<sup>81</sup> “Anonymous letter addressed to “The Authorities of the University,” envelope postmarked 28 August 1922, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>82</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 217-18; Hoskins, “Controversy of 1923,” 2, M. P.

stake, the professors met to discuss what they knew about the case. They made the general statement that any system that allows a professor to be fired without explanation is bad, but the meeting was primarily of an investigative nature.<sup>83</sup>

The next day, the Knoxville News ran a story about Sprowls' dismissal based on information provided by Sprowls and Professor Asa Schaeffer.<sup>84</sup> According to Philip Hamer, Sprowls had made a deal with the paper to grant a brief interview if the school agreed to retain him, but if they did not, then he would "give them information enough to last two years."<sup>85</sup> Schaeffer showed a reporter from the Knoxville News a copy of his letter to the AAUP which described the Sprowls dismissal and unfavorable conditions in the university. In addition to giving the reason for Sprowls' termination as the evolutionary textbook, the article mentioned an incident in which President Morgan had once rebuked Mrs. Marguerite Hamer for voting in the Knoxville charter election and had told her that she would be terminated if she went to Nashville to represent the Ossoli Circle and other Knoxville women's clubs in support of an equal rights for women bill. Mrs. Hamer had shared this information with Schaeffer in confidence; therefore, the inclusion of Mrs. Hamer's name in the article without permission prompted the Hamers to attend a meeting in Schaeffer's home in which Edward Meeman, the editor of the Knoxville News, was present. Meeman met with Schaeffer that night because he intended to do a national story on the Sprowls' firing if he could get the information.<sup>86</sup> When Philip

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<sup>83</sup> Hamer, Diary, 5 April 1923; Robert S. Radford, Interview by James D. Hoskins, typed transcript, 19 June 1923, 1-2, P. P.; AAUP, Bulletin X, 232.

<sup>84</sup> " 'Autocracy' In University Is Charge Made," Knoxville News, 6 April 1923; see also "Storm Brews Over Dismissal of U.T. Professor Who Attempted To Use Text Book On Evolution Theory; Faculty Acts," Knoxville Sentinel, 7 April 1923, 5; "Dr. J. W. Sprowls Notified He Is Not To Remain," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 7 April 1923, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Hamer, Diary, 6 April 1923.

<sup>86</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 228-29; " 'Autocracy' In University Is Charge Made," Knoxville News, 6 April 1923; Hamer, Diary, 8 April 1923.



Hamer responded that current conditions at the university with respect to academic freedom were fine, Meeman countered that academic freedom made "the best issue on which to fight."<sup>87</sup> When Hamer asserted that evolution had nothing to do with the administration's decision to fire Sprowls, Meeman retorted that he "didn't give a damn about that, but it was a good issue and he could get at Morgan through this route."<sup>88</sup> The Knoxville News criticized the administration relentlessly, leading the local press in its coverage of the developing controversy and in condemnation of U. T. officials. In editorials probably written by Edward Meeman, the Knoxville News repeatedly referred to Morgan, Hoskins, the deans, and department heads involved in the dismissals as "autocrats" reminiscent of czars and sultans who ruthlessly governed with an "iron hand" and rid the university of any who questioned their "infallible ways." Despite his dislike of what he understood to be a closed-minded and autocratic administration, Meeman's eagerness to castigate the Morgan administration through the columns of his newly-established newspaper appears to have been motivated by expediency as well.<sup>89</sup>

On April 15, 1923, the first of three editions of an underground student newspaper entitled The Independent Truth appeared around the U. T. campus. This student newspaper was the result of a long accumulation of discontent accelerated by Sprowls' dismissal and the abolition of the art department. Whereas the official, censored, student newspaper, the Orange and White, could only subtly protest the events of early April with a blank editorial page, the anonymous writers of the The Independent Truth directly criticized the

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<sup>87</sup> Hamer, Diary, 8 April 1923.

<sup>88</sup> Hamer Interview, 12 October 1967, 3, M. P.

<sup>89</sup> "U. T. Professors Being Called on the Carpet," Knoxville News, 29 June 1923, 1; see also "The Psychology on the Hill," Knoxville News, 10 July 1923, 4; Philip Hamer to J. R. Montgomery, 25 September 1970, M. P., Box 1, Folder 12.

administration for its reactionary, recalcitrant, and autocratic methods.<sup>90</sup>

Desiring to join in the movement of greater liberalization of universities across the nation, the student writers declared that "the time is ripe for Tennessee to take some action, and put her self [sic] on a plane comparable with other institutions."<sup>91</sup> The contributors wanted greater student input into shaping university policies, a student government, an honor system, student control of student publications and activities, as well as increased faculty influence in the governance of the university. All three editions of The Independent Truth criticized the U. T. administration as "autocratic" and particularly reprovved Dean Hoskins.<sup>92</sup> Students wanted the University Dean to be more open-minded and receptive to students' suggestions and criticisms. Highlighting the contrast between what they wanted and the reality of the Dean's style, the anonymous writers quoted Hoskins' "favorite expression": "If you don't like it here, get out and go elsewhere."<sup>93</sup>

Revealing to the press his identity as editor-in-chief of The Independent Truth in mid-July, Walter S. Roberts, Jr. claimed that none of the fired teachers helped in any way with the underground student publication. Roberts insisted

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<sup>90</sup> It is possible to establish the release date by referring to " 'The Truth,' Anonymous Student Publication, Attacks U. T. Administration As Sequel to Dismissal of Sprowls,' Knoxville Sentinel, 16 April 1923, 13; Editorial page, Orange and White, 19 April 1923, 2, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; The Independent Truth, editions 1-3, passim, P. P., Box 6, Folder 18.

<sup>91</sup> "Wake Up Tennessee!," The Independent Truth, issue 3, 8 or 9 May 1923, 1, P. P., Box 6, Folder 18. It is possible to establish the release date by referring to Hamer, Diary, 8 May 1923 and to "U. of T. Trustees To Hear of Sprowls [sic] Dismissal and Anonymous Newspaper," Knoxville Sentinel, 9 May 1923, 20.

<sup>92</sup> The Independent Truth, editions 1-3, passim, P. P., Box 6, Folder 18, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; "U. of T. Trustees To Hear Facts of Sprowl[s] Dismissal and Anonymous Newspaper," Knoxville Sentinel, 9 May 1923, 20; "U. of T. Trustees To Hear Facts of Sprowls [sic] Dismissal and Anonymous Newspaper," Knoxville Sentinel, 9 May 1923, 20.

<sup>93</sup> "A Rumor," The Independent Truth, issue 3, 4, P. P.; description of the administration as autocratic found in issues 1, 2 and 3, passim.

that students had written all articles and that donations from over one hundred students financed the newspaper. However, the administration suspected collusion between some of the faculty and the disgruntled students. In his diary, Hamer recalled that Sprowls had told him that Schaeffer, Ellis, and Withers supported The Independent Truth, and that he, Schaeffer, Withers, and Neal had all written for it. Sprowls also confided that he and other faculty members gave money to help finance the underground student newspaper. If true, Sprowls' confession to a friend justified the administration's suspicions.<sup>94</sup>

Tension continued to mount throughout April and May of 1923. The students' protest, voiced through their underground publication, fueled the stories that continued in the local press. After Maurice Mulvania wrote to President Morgan, expressing his opinion that the antagonism came from misunderstandings between the administration, faculty, and students and suggesting a university constitution, he surveyed his colleagues for suggestions. Mulvania wrongly thought that the president would view his actions as helpful.<sup>95</sup>

On June 1, the administration and other faculty members were shocked to read in the Knoxville News that U. T. professors had proposed for adoption a new constitution providing for greater faculty and student participation in the governance of the university. Along with other liberalizing measures, the constitution mandated that no professor should be dismissed from the university without a trial before a faculty committee, and that students should have an

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<sup>94</sup> "Walter Roberts, Jr., ITs Editor; Professors Had No Connection," Knoxville Sentinel, 16 July 1923, 1, 2; Hamer, Diary, May 8 1923 and July 4 1923; for evidence that Morgan still believed there to be a connection between the disgruntled faculty and student protesters see H. A. Morgan to W. P. Connell, Louisiana National Bank, Baton Rouge, LA., 1 October 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>95</sup> Mulvania Interview, 2-3, P. P.; AAUP, Bulletin X, 243; "Professors Tell University Needs," Knoxville News, 1 June 1923, 1.

honor system and the right to control of student publications. The newspaper article included an inaccurate list of faculty members who had submitted suggestions and gave the impression of widespread faculty discontent. A reporter for the newspaper admitted to an AAUP investigator that Asa Schaeffer had been his source for the story, but Mulvania admitted to supplying the reporter with a list of names. Although Mulvania insisted that his intentions were to help bring resolution to the unrest and that there was no subterfuge in his actions, many on the faculty felt that Mulvania had deceived them into thinking that he gathered suggestions at Morgan's request; in fact, the article reported that the president had requested the survey. The administration gave Mulvania's involvement with the constitution, his indiscretion in supplying the names of faculty members, and his desire for reforms as the reasons for his later dismissal. News that he had been fired came as a shock to him, for Mulvania claimed that he had been told just two days before being fired that he would be promoted to full professor the following year. In keeping with its antagonistic stance against the university administration, the Knoxville News implied that President Morgan had lured Mulvania into a trap by asking him to get suggestions for improving the university and then firing him once he had done so.<sup>96</sup>

The university's charter had been amended in 1909 calling for authority in hirings, firings, and other administrative matters to be contained in a

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<sup>96</sup> "Professors Tell University Needs," Knoxville News, 1 June 1923, 1; "Professors At U. of T. Submit a Constitution," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 2 June 1923, 9; AAUP, Bulletin X, 229, 245; Mulvania Interview, 5-6, P. P.; for examples of faculty members upset at the inclusion of their names in story see Judson H. Robertson, Associate Professor of Chemistry, to J. D. Hoskins, 6 June 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 19; Charles Otis Hill, Professor of Chemistry, to J. D. Hoskins, 4 June 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 1; N. E. Fitzgerald, Professor of Agriculture Education, to M. Mulvania, 7 June 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 1; AAUP, Bulletin X, 245; "Vanguard of University Trustees Arrive Today To Dispose of Vital Problems of State Institution," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 15 July 1923, 5; "Ask: Was Dr. Mulvania Led Into Trap?," Knoxville News, 6 July 1923, 1.

hierarchical system including the Board of Trustees to the University President, the Dean of the University, and the department heads. Hoskins knew that changes could not occur in this structure without amending the charter, and he believed that having the president as an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees gave the faculty adequate representation. As for students' desires for a larger part in the governance of the university via representation in the Board of Trustees and faculty meetings, Hoskins thought this to be "perfectly ridiculous."<sup>97</sup>

The administration had hoped that the unrest and agitation would subside, but conditions only appeared to deteriorate as the weeks wore on.<sup>98</sup> Unwilling to tolerate the criticism and the negative publicity any longer, Dean Hoskins determined that he would investigate and bring the situation under control. In a 1957 interview with Frank Rogers, Hoskins said:

In 1923 We [sic] cleaned out and turned off seven professors, they got to bucking, fighting Morgan, dissatisfied, Morgnan [sic] finally agreed that I should investigate.<sup>99</sup>

His prior warnings unheeded, Hoskins went to Morgan and demanded action. Indicative of his resolve, Hoskins offered to find out who was responsible for the troubles and see that they were dismissed, and after they were gone resign himself.<sup>100</sup> When Morgan said that this would be wholly unnecessary, Hoskins snapped, "Alright [sic] if you keep sitting and let this go on I'm going to give you

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<sup>97</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 3-4, M. P.

<sup>98</sup> Hoskins to Garner, 11 October, 1923, M. P.

<sup>99</sup> Hoskins, Interview by Rogers, 6 May 1957, 1, M. P.

<sup>100</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 1, M. P.; *Ibid.*, 1; Hoskins, Interview by Rogers, 9 August 1957, 1, 2, M. P.

my resignation anyway[.] I'm not going to sit here and take it."<sup>101</sup>

About mid-June, with Morgan's reluctant permission to proceed and his assurance that he would back him, Hoskins began his formal investigation. He called suspected faculty members to his office and questioned them about their involvement in, and knowledge of, the underground student newspaper and student protest, their membership in the AAUP, and their attitudes toward the present organization and administration of the university. A witness observed the proceedings and a secretary recorded the professors' responses in shorthand, later typing the notes into a transcript.<sup>102</sup> Hoskins found that some of the faculty "seemed to be dissatisfied with the organization of the university" and that a proposal existed for faculty and student representation in the administration. The Dean also seems to have taken offense when professors, such as Robert Radford, refused to answer the question: "Who asked you to sign a petition for an investigation?"<sup>103</sup> Recalling the investigation, Hoskins declared, "By George they just condemned [sic] themselves."<sup>104</sup> With their answers to his questions safely on the secretary's paper, the Dean boasted, "I got seven of them."<sup>105</sup> Some of the faculty aided Hoskins in his investigation, but others feared that his zealous quest to rid the university of malcontents would ruin the institution.<sup>106</sup>

Although at first unaware of an AAUP chapter at the university, Hoskins

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<sup>101</sup> Hoskins Interview, 6 May 1957, 1, M. P.

<sup>102</sup> Minutes, 406.

<sup>103</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 236; "Professors May Be Cited To Appear: Dean Hoskins' Questionnaire As To Connection With Unrest May Be Put To More Teachers," Knoxville Sentinel, 6 July 1923, 1, 21; "More Teachers Will Be Called In U. of T. Quiz," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 7 July 1923, 1, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Hoskins Interview, 6 May 1957, 1, M. P.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

was “dead set against” it once he learned about it. Despite being a national professional association, the AAUP had never been formally recognized by President Morgan or the Board of Trustees, but no objections had ever been made to its existence on campus. Hoskins seemed to link the activities of those he deemed troublemakers to the AAUP; therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that all of those dismissed were AAUP members.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Hoskins was referring to the U. T. chapter of the AAUP when he said in an interview: “You get a lot of people stirred up in an organization that way and they can just give you the devil.”<sup>108</sup>

On the morning of June 29, 1923, Deans James T. Porter, Charles A. Willson, Charles E. Ferris, and Malcolm McDermott met for a third time with Dean Hoskins to consider recommendations not to reappoint certain faculty members. After considering the evidence, they unanimously decided to fire Dr. Robert S. Ellis, Dr. Asa A. Schaeffer, Dr. Robert S. Radford, and Professor Maurice Mulvania.<sup>109</sup> In a summary of the controversy, Hoskins wrote that due to the demands for change that emerged during the course of his investigation, “. . . we [the administration] came to the conclusion that the time had arrived for us to have a house-cleaning and we proceeded accordingly.”<sup>110</sup> In a 1968 interview with J. R. Montgomery, Nathan Dougherty, professor of civil engineering, remembered it this way:

Morgan was in a meeting with his Deans and somebody said

<sup>107</sup> Hesler, Interview by J. R. Montgomery, 4-5 June 1968, 8-9, M. P.; “‘Freedom and Tenure’ Committee of College Professors’ Clan To Pass On Request For U. T. Probe,” Knoxville Sentinel, 8 July 1923, 4; “More Teachers Will Be Called In U. of T. Quiz,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 7 July 1923, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Hoskins Interview, 6 May 1957, 1, M. P.

<sup>109</sup> “Record of the Deans’ Meeting, June 29, 1923,” Minutes, 406.

<sup>110</sup> Hoskins, “Controversy of 1923,” 4, M. P.

can you fire anybody around here? He said yes, yes you can fire anybody around here. You got somebody you want to fire? And by gosh they just pooled their resources and each one had one almost.<sup>111</sup>

Can Dougherty's recollection be dismissed as an embellished memory? In light of Hoskins' remarks, Dougherty's account does not appear so exaggerated.

Professor McDermott, head of the U. T. law school, told Dean Hoskins that Dr. Neal should also be dropped while Hoskins was "cleaning out" professors, so Hoskins told him to write down his reasons. McDermott believed that it would be in the best interest of the law school to let Neal go. The most serious of McDermott's charges against Neal were failure to follow the rules, laxness in duties, and leaving the university unannounced for long periods of time in order to attend political meetings.<sup>112</sup>

As the summer temperatures rose, so, too, did the intensity of the faculty controversy. Newspaper articles carried the names of those who had been dismissed and speculated as to who might be next. By early July, the final list of those who were not to be recommended for reappointment had been compiled. With Hoskins' investigation complete and the other deans and the president in agreement, only the Board of Trustees' decision remained. Speculation ran high as anticipation mounted. Friends of Neal had conducted a state-wide campaign to save his job, and they had been assured by the governor that he and the other professors would get a hearing at the July 17 Board of Trustees meeting. Governor Peay received numerous letters written in support of Professor Neal, asking that the governor look into Neal's dismissal, and

<sup>111</sup> Dougherty Interview, 9-10 April 1968, 14, M. P.

<sup>112</sup> Hoskins Interview, 6 May 1957, 2, M. P.; Malcolm McDermott, College of Law, to J. D. Hoskins, 5 June 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 20; Single sheet summary of Dean's meeting, 29 June 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 17; refer to Appendix B.



expressing hope that he be retained for the good of the university. Thirty-two students signed a petition that went out to the governor, President Morgan, and the Board of Trustees expressing that Neal's dismissal would be a "staggering blow to the standing and integrity" of the university, and they, according to their spokesman, pledged to quit school if Neal was not reinstated. Talk abounded of a possible professors' boycott to be called by the AAUP and of a general students' strike.<sup>113</sup>

In a letter to Governor Peay and in the newspapers, friends of Neal defended the law professor, called for a full investigation into the dismissals of all of the professors, and charged that the Board of Trustees was illegally constituted because it failed to meet the one third alumni requirement.<sup>114</sup> According to Hamer's diary, Sprowls confided to him that Schaeffer and Ellis planned "a campaign for the destruction of the University" by means of the media and speeches.<sup>115</sup> Professor Neal claimed that "a number of politicians plan[ned] to get Morgan" even if it took "cutting off the university completely from the financial support of the state."<sup>116</sup> By early July, Hamer, an early supporter of those fired, had become appalled by the activities of Schaeffer, Ellis, Neal and

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<sup>113</sup> "No More Professors Slated For Removal From U. of T. Faculty; Action of Trustees Is Awaited," Knoxville Sentinel, 8 July 1923, 1,4; "Effort To Keep U. T. Professor Is State-Wide," Knoxville Sentinel, 5 July 1923, 15; "Full Hearing For Judge Neal Is Assured By Governor Peay," Knoxville Sentinel, 6 July 1923, 1; for examples of letters in support of Neal see "Governor Austin Peay Papers, 1923-1927" GP-40, Box 93, Folder 3, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, hereafter cited as Peay Papers; Signed letter from U. T. Law School students to Governor Austin Peay, undated, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 3; "Law Students to Quit if Dr. Neal Goes," Knoxville News, 11 July 1923,1; "Reinstatement of Judge Neal Asked," Nashville Banner, 12 July 1923, 9; "Professor' Boycott Threatened At U. of T.," Commercial Appeal (Memphis), 8 July 1923, 1; "Local U.T. Students Say Revolt Talk Rife," Chattanooga Daily Times, 7 July 1923, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Gammon, U. T. Alumnus, and others to Governor Austin Peay, 10 July 1923, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 3; "Politics May Play Part in Dr. Neal Case," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 11 July 1923, 1, 10.

<sup>115</sup> Hamer, Diary, 4 July 1923.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 July 1923.

others. Although admitting in his diary that the university had its flaws, Hamer believed it was "criminal to destroy it" and he said of those he thought were bent on destruction: "They are wild."<sup>117</sup>

The fate of the professors targeted for non-reappointment was never really in question. Sprowls felt confident that he and the other professors would be retained, but the prevailing mood as the Board of Trustees meeting drew closer was that the trustees would uphold the recommendations of Dr. Morgan.<sup>118</sup> It is hard to imagine a vote in favor of the dismissed professors when a "prominent member" of the board had stated that "a housecleaning [sic] may ensue . . . if such a drastic step is necessary to assure 114 per cent [sic] of faculty co-operation with Pres. Morgan," and that, if need be, the "wastebasket will be filled by the process of decapitation."<sup>119</sup> Board of Trustees member Spencer Thomas believed that students should submit to authority, and that if their parents did not approve of how the current administration operated the school, they should remove their children. Thomas insisted that professors who wanted "to teach something that undermines the Christian faith" that parents have implanted in their children should "go off to themselves . . . . They surely have no right to teach such in a state university."<sup>120</sup> Morgan said that he would resign if the board did not uphold his decisions, and the U. T. trustees did not want to lose the man who had led the state university to its greatest overall success to that time. Therefore, the board stood ready to back the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 4, 14 July 1923.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 11 July 1923.

<sup>119</sup> "Trustees Are Squarely Behind Dr. Morgan's Administration in Enforcement of Their Policies," Knoxville Sentinel, 3 June 1923, 1, 7.

<sup>120</sup> "Spencer Thomas Believes That Constituted Authority At U. T. Should Be Accorded Support," Knoxville Sentinel, 15 July 1923, 1.

administration.<sup>121</sup>

At the July 17 Board of Trustees meeting, U. T. officials presented their reasons for terminating the professors. The administration charged Schaeffer primarily with promoting opposition to the administration through meetings and the newspapers. They insisted that Ellis, Mulvania, and Radford had desired administrative reorganization and were hostile toward U. T. officials. Reading from a lengthy letter written by McDermott, President Morgan said that Neal's dismissal stemmed from his failure to perform his duties adequately and responsibly and from his disregard for university regulations. The Board of Trustees Minutes also included letters from Dean Hoskins and Professor Thackston that recounted the events leading to the dismissals of Sprowls and Withers.<sup>122</sup>

An intense energy filled Ayres Hall when it was announced that the professors' cases would be heard. Ellis, Mulvania, Radford, and Neal each used their allotted twenty minutes to address the board. The board allotted ten minutes each to those who had asked to speak on behalf of a professor. Ellis explained that his dissatisfaction stemmed from the proposed merger of the department of psychology under the control of Professor Thackston and the education department, but emphasized that all of his efforts had been for the benefit of the University. Mulvania told the board that he had never been censured in his seventeen year career at the University of Tennessee, that he never attended any of the meetings held by faculty members to discuss Sprowls' dismissal, and that he had told Dean Hoskins of his intention to survey the faculty and Hoskins had not objected. Radford noted his admiration for the

<sup>121</sup> "U. T. Trustees Are Slated To Uphold President Morgan," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 16 July 1923, 1,2.

<sup>122</sup> "Record of Deans' Meeting, June 29, 1923," Minutes, 405-407; Dean M. McDermott to Dean Hoskins, 29 June 1923, printed in Minutes, 408-413; refer to Appendixes A, B, C, and D.

work of both Morgan and Hoskins and reiterated that his only connection with the Sprowls controversy was the meeting of inquiry held in his room, which he called an "indiscreet action" at most.<sup>123</sup> Neal appeared shocked, and students "hissed . . . in a great uproar," as President Morgan read the lengthy list of charges against him. Dr. Neal's supporters burst into spontaneous applause and cheering as Neal prepared to speak. Neal insisted that he was hearing the charges for the first time, and he claimed that he could prove most of the charges false if only given adequate time. Neal had been told many of the general reasons for his dismissal at a meeting in Hoskins' office, and Dean McDermott had scheduled a meeting with Neal on July 5 to discuss his case, but Neal had failed to appear.<sup>124</sup>

With all visitors excluded, the Board withdrew into executive session to consider what they had heard. By a vote of ten to two, the trustees upheld President Morgan and the administration; Governor Peay and Bolton Smith, trustee from Memphis, cast the two dissenting votes. Peay and Smith thought that the cases could have been voted on separately, but each later explained that their vote should not be construed as a vote against Morgan. Several members of the board appear to have been against some of the dismissals, but they explained that they had little choice, believing that a vote for the professors would erode university discipline for the next year and would force the

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<sup>123</sup> "Record of Deans' Meeting, June 29, 1923," Minutes, 399; "Effort To Re-Elect Prof. Neal Made By Gov. Peay and Smith," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 18 July 1923, 1; "Sturdy Defense Is Offered by Instructors and Their Friends But Administration Sustained," Knoxville Sentinel, 17 July 1923, 1, 4; "Trustees Sustain Dr. Morgan; Seven Professors Dropped; Get Opportunity For Hearing," Knoxville Sentinel, 18 July 1923, 4.

<sup>124</sup> "Effort To Re-Elect Prof. Neal Made By Gov. Peay and Smith," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 18 July 1923, 1; "U. of T. Trustees Back Up Morgan," Nashville Tennessean, 17 July 1923; M. McDermott to H. A. Morgan, 20 July 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 20.

resignation of President Morgan.<sup>125</sup>

Ironically, on the same morning, the trustees amended the university by-laws to allow the U. T. faculty to select two of the four faculty representatives to the Board of Trustees administrative council. Faculty members for this council, which held final jurisdiction in all matters of discipline, had previously been chosen by the university president.<sup>126</sup> Dean Hoskins commented that it would provide “an added chance for the members of the faculty to participate in the government of the university” and President Morgan added that “it’s a fine thing to do, glad it happened.”<sup>127</sup> In addition to this concession, the trustees voted to create a Dean of Men position “in order to relieve the Dean of the growing pressure of student personnel problems.” The new dean would do “all in his power to promote among students and faculty a spirit of mutual understanding and good will.”<sup>128</sup> These changes appear to have been a direct result of the summer’s events. It hardly seems a coincidence that, after the ordeal, President Morgan regularly attended faculty meetings, although before the disturbances he had delegated this task to Dean Hoskins.<sup>129</sup>

A myriad of underlying causes created the potential for trouble, but Sprowls’ claim that evolution and the book caused his dismissal ignited the controversy. One could posit the hypothesis that movements throughout the country to grant faculties greater control in university administrations and to

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<sup>125</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 257-58; “Effort To Re-elect Prof. Neal Made By Gov. Peay and Smith,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 18 July 1923, 1.

<sup>126</sup> “U. T. Faculty Will Choose Two of Administrative Councilmen,” Knoxville Sentinel, 17 July 1923, 1, 9; “Faculty To Name 2 Administrative Council Members,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 18 July 1923, 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> James D. Hoskins and William E. Cole, “In Service To The State: A History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1934,” unpublished manuscript, 22 April 1941, 221, MS-1060, Archives and Special Collections, James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>129</sup> Montgomery, Threshold, 36.

allow for student government, honor systems, and increased student autonomy in student affairs, would cause discontent to surface eventually. While this is possible, a controversy of the magnitude of the 1923 disturbance seems unlikely without the controversial and timely issue of evolution.

Previous conflicts and differing opinions between spirited individuals on the faculty are essential in determining the course of the administration's actions, but these personal conflicts did not alone produce the dismissal of the seven professors. President Morgan's willingness to allow faculty members to criticize him and the administration for years supports the probability that a "house cleaning," comparable to the 1923 dismissal of five Ph. D's, one professor, and one assistant professor, was highly unlikely based solely on the professors' antagonism. Only problems and incidents deemed potentially damaging to the university's public image moved Morgan to act. Past incidents involving some of those dismissed in 1923 played a significant contributing role, although not a leading role, in the dismissals.

The dynamics of the moment galvanized some students to push for more liberties and greater influence in student organizations. Although not a general movement throughout the entire student body, unrest grew among those U. T. students who were keenly aware of the freedoms granted to students at many other universities, and they wanted an honor system, control of student publications, and a student government. In such a climate, the administration's censorship of student publications, namely the Mugwump and the Orange and White, the abolition of the independent art department, and the firing of Withers and Sprowls moved some students to push the administration to listen to their opinions.<sup>130</sup> Circumstances already existed for a student movement, but the

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<sup>130</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 223-23.

publicity surrounding Sprowls' firing seemed to convince student leaders that the time had come to act. They charged university officials, particularly Dean Hoskins who handled student discipline, with being unresponsive and recalcitrant with respect to genuine student concerns; student protesters wanted concessions from an administration that they saw as too restrictive in student affairs.

The general commitment of university administrations to advance their institutions and build a positive rapport with their states limited the amount of unrest that university officials could tolerate. Morgan had worked hard to make the University of Tennessee a gem in the eye of Tennesseans, and Hoskins brought an alumni's pride to his duties as University Dean. As the story of Sprowls' dismissal spread across the state and nation, the administration held its breath and hoped that the negative publicity would soon subside. But when the underground newspaper and media coverage of faculty dissatisfaction heightened the unrest, Hoskins took the lead in handling the trouble, playing a pivotal role in both the course of action taken by the administration and in the number of faculty members dismissed.

Hoskins had previously labeled certain individuals as troublemakers among the faculty, and he felt certain that an investigation of the campus unrest would turn up the same malcontents. Knowing that the Knoxville News must have received their information from an inside source, Hoskins believed that some professors, unhappy with the organization of the university, had played a role in the student movement and the anonymous newspaper. The campus unrest gave Hoskins the opportunity to conduct a long overdue "house cleaning" and rid the university of unwanted agitators. Because faculty members met to discuss the Sprowls firing without first asking the administration

about the facts in the case, Hoskins concluded that the meetings were in opposition to the administration. Withers may have been a "difficult" person, and Sprowls had often made fun of Hoskins. However, the evidence suggests that the administration dismissed them primarily because they were dissatisfied with the professors' job performance. Asa Schaeffer had called himself to the attention of university officials on several occasions and had a past history of criticizing the administration. Despite impeccable academic credentials, Schaeffer's connection with Edward Meeman, his release of stories to the Knoxville News, and his history of controversy provided enough justification for the administration to fire him. Hoskins had wanted to remove Professor Radford for some time due to Radford's occasional outspokenness and involvement in controversial off-campus matters, and Radford's connection, however minimal, with the 1923 faculty controversy provided Hoskins with the needed excuse. The same appears true for Professor Mulvania. He conducted his faculty survey with good intentions, and the unfortunate release of the "constitution" story to the press, worded as to give the impression of widespread faculty discontent, was Schaeffer's responsibility. However, Hoskins was probably more than happy to settle an old score with Mulvania for past joking and teasing at Hoskins' expense. In Ellis' case, his unrepentant tone, his willingness to disapprove openly of Sprowls' dismissal, and his differing views concerning the direction of the psychology department moved Hoskins to include him with the others. Numerous reasons existed that could have cost Neal his job, but the administration had tolerated his laxness for years. Extremely popular with students, Neal had served U. T. with loyalty for fourteen years, and had turned out numerous, capable law students. Neal's past record of service to the university should probably have earned him a probationary period in which to



correct his questionable job performance. The consolidated effort to quell the unrest by ridding the university of trouble makers afforded Dean McDermott the opportunity to remove Neal. With specific reasons in hand, Hoskins had no objection to including Neal with the rest, and after his promise to support Hoskins, President Morgan went along with the dean's request.

Moreover, the hierarchical administrative structure helped, in some ways, to make the firings possible. Some have suggested that Thackston and McDermott had personality conflicts with some of those dismissed, and they made the first move in removing Sprowls and Neal. This structure alone, however, could not produce the 1923 controversy, for at several points along the chain of authority, higher-ranking officials could have refused a department head's request to dismiss someone. However, this closed system lacked sufficient constraints, and in the hands of traditional-minded administrators under the sway of the national and state climate of opinion and their own biases and limitations, became the mechanism for the firings. All of the ingredients were on hand to make a highly-visible controversy, and the U. T. faculty firings acquired a dynamism greater than the sum of its parts.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVOLUTION: PERCEPTION IS STRONGER THAN REALITY

Conspicuous in the struggle between the old and the new during the 1920s was the battle between fundamentalism and modernism. To some, Jesus resembled Bruce Barton's up-and-coming business executive with his twelve-man board of directors; yet, others saw a biblical savior who wept at the decadence of modern American life. Fundamentalism made a strong showing in the era as millions retreated into a simple faith based on an inerrant Holy Bible. Church membership declined while converts to behaviorism, scientism, Freudianism, and secular humanism increased. Led by the fundamentalists, alarmed Protestant churches prepared to battle, and Darwinian evolutionary theory became the targeted enemy. Richard Hofstadter has noted the toughness and violence of expression that emanated from fundamentalists by the 1920s.<sup>131</sup> Jesus Christ "was no dough-faced, lick-spittle proposition," Billy Sunday exclaimed. "Jesus was the greatest scrapper that ever lived."<sup>132</sup> According to Hofstadter, fundamentalists sensed that they were losing their battle against modernism and rationalism around the turn of the century, and by the 1920s, fundamentalists stood ready to "overwhelm them by sheer violence of rhetoric . . . suppression and intimidation."<sup>133</sup> Fundamentalists viewed the implications of yielding to evolution as catastrophic, for evolution could undermine the book of Genesis and, by implication, the accuracy of the entire Bible. As William J. Bryan told an audience: "All the ills from which America

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<sup>131</sup> Gatewood, Controversy in the Twenties, 4; Richard Hofstadter, Anti-intellectualism in American Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 117-141.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 123, 135.

suffers can be traced back to the teachings of evolution. It would be better to destroy every other book ever written, and save just the first three verses of Genesis.”<sup>134</sup> Fundamentalists were ready to wage war for the survival of their faith and that of their children.

Still under the influence of Progressivism, the nation in the early 1920s had a growing interest in education, and thus stories about infringements on academic freedom made good copy. Attracting even more attention in the country during this time was the debate over evolution and the efficacy of evolution’s future in public schools’ curricula. Given the nationwide interest, it is not surprising that news of the U. T. faculty firings caused such a stir. Like a pebble thrown into a pool of water, the controversy produced ripples that reached far beyond the city limits of Knoxville. Within a short time, people read about the University of Tennessee’s campus unrest from coast to coast. In varying degrees, the public believed that evolution and related issues precipitated the administration’s actions in dismissing Professor Jesse Sprowls and had, thereby, set into motion the events of the campus disturbance.

The Knoxville News broke the story first, reporting that Professor Sprowls had been terminated because he had protested the administration’s decision not to allow his use of The Mind in the Making in a class. The newspaper concluded that the “Morgan-Hoskins-Thackston regime” ruled the university with an autocratic hand and that the university would suffer if an intolerant administration stifled its professors.<sup>135</sup> Other local newspapers picked up the story almost instantly. They repeated the story that Sprowls’ dismissal resulted

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<sup>134</sup> Maynard Shipley, The War On Modern Science: A Short History of the Fundamentalist Attacks on Evolution and Modernism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 254-55; quoted in Hofstadter, Anti-intellectualism in American Life, 125.

<sup>135</sup> “‘Autocracy’ In University Is Charge Made,” Knoxville News, 6 April 1923, 1; “Give Sprowls a Hearing!,” Knoxville News, 6 April 1923, 4.

from the evolutionary textbook and his views on evolution, and reasoned that his firing was the catalyst for the unrest that had been building between the faculty and the administration for some time.<sup>136</sup>

The administration steadfastly maintained that the textbook had nothing to do with their decision in the Sprowls case. Dean Hoskins asserted that neither evolution nor the use of Robinson's The Mind in the Making were ever charges against Sprowls, nor were those subjects discussed in the April 2 meeting.<sup>137</sup> President Morgan called the evolutionary charges "smoke screens" used by Sprowls and his supporters, and he deemed the controversy "nothing more than a strike on the part of a few of these men who associated with them students who were disgruntled largely through disciplinary measures that had been administered during the last three years."<sup>138</sup>

Other newspaper accounts from around the state echoed those given in the local Knoxville papers. The Nashville Tennessean wrote that the nationwide controversy over "the right of a college professor to tell his students what he believes to be the truth about science and the theory of evolution . . ." had arrived on the U. T. campus. According to the paper, Sprowls' dismissal, over his intended use of The Mind in the Making, had triggered faculty and student protests and had prompted some professors to ask the AAUP to investigate the "autocratic" organization of the university.<sup>139</sup> Newspapers in

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<sup>136</sup> "Storm Brews Over Dismissal of U. T. Professor Who Attempted To Use Text Book On Evolution Theory," Knoxville Sentinel, 7 April 1923, 5; "Dr. J. W. Sprowls Notified He Is Not To Remain," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 7 April 1923, 1; "Sprowls Says Incident 'Closed' but He Still Contends Man Is Brother of Ape and Aeons Old," Knoxville Sentinel, 10 April 1923, 10; "Prof. Sprowls To Tour Europe," Knoxville Sentinel, 26 April 1923.

<sup>137</sup> Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 2, M. P.

<sup>138</sup> H. A. Morgan to Bolton Smith, University of Tennessee Trustee from Memphis, TN., 16 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 1; Hoskins, "Controversy of 1923," 2, M. P.; Morgan to W. P. Connell, Louisiana National Bank, 1 October 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>139</sup> "Controversy On Evolution Theory Carried To U. of T.," Nashville Tennessean, 7 April 1923, 1.

Memphis and Chattanooga included similar stories.<sup>140</sup>

As the controversy grew, so, too, did the story's reach. The New York Times printed several articles about the disturbance at the University of Tennessee, reporting that a teacher had been "dismissed because of a tendency to teach Darwinism."<sup>141</sup> Later articles in the paper reported that after students and faculty began a movement to gain a greater voice in the governance of the university, Morgan and the administration discharged other professors who they deemed to be behind the "movement toward liberalizing the government of the university."<sup>142</sup> In September, 1923, a U. T. alumnus residing in Washington, D.C. wrote to President Morgan expressing concern about an apparent "organized propaganda" against Morgan and the university, writing that "there have been at least six articles in the Washington Papers, since June, denouncing the University."<sup>143</sup> John W. Smith from Alamogordo, New Mexico wrote to President Morgan in the fall of 1923 to tell him of a "very ugly article about you and the University of Tennessee," written by syndicated columnist Herbert Quick, and which appeared in a Los Angeles, California paper. The article claimed that Morgan struggled to fill the teaching vacancies because professors did not want to teach where "their thoughts are censored."<sup>144</sup> Demonstrating the changes that an oft-told story can have, an

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<sup>140</sup> "Views on Science Get U. T. Professor's Job," Commercial Appeal (Memphis), 7 April 1923, 18; "Spowles [sic] Case Storm Center," Chattanooga Daily Times, 8 April 1923, 6.

<sup>141</sup> "Garrett To Stay In House," New York Times, 8 June 1923, 4.

<sup>142</sup> "Teachers Ousted By Questionnaire; Seven University of Tennessee Professors Lose Posts For Favoring Student Control Plan," New York Times, 8 July 1923, 18; see also "Ousted Evolutionist Accuses His Chief," New York Times, 16 July 1923, 11 and "Tennessee University Disturbed By Row Over Faculty Dismissals," New York Times, 22 July 1923, Section VII, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Walter S. Diehl to H. A. Morgan, 24 September 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>144</sup> John W. Smith to H. A. Morgan, 3 October 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; Herbert Quick, "A University Afraid of Ghosts," exact source and date unknown, clipping found in P. P., Box 7, Folder 4.

article in a Salem, Oregon newspaper reported that President Morgan had “summarily discharged ten professors for believing in the doctrine of evolution.”<sup>145</sup>

Many other individuals and groups expressed their approval of the administration’s decision because they believed that U. T. officials had taken action against evolution or related issues. Churches and ministers lauded the president for “ ‘refusing to permit the teachings of unsound doctrines’ in the University of Tennessee” and for his “firm stand against the teaching of Evolution in the University.”<sup>146</sup> Speaking for the Cumberland area churches of Tennessee, the Journal and Tribune reported that “nothing in the history of the state university has ever served to arouse such enthusiastic and pronounced support in his favor, in this section of the state, as has President Morgan’s attitude with reference to the teaching of evolution.”<sup>147</sup> University alumni, businessmen, and farmers signed petitions, passed resolutions, and expressed gratitude and confidence in Morgan’s leadership and in his administration.<sup>148</sup> Various clubs and organizations applauded Morgan’s efforts at “old fashioned discipline” and viewed faculty and student clamoring for a larger voice in university affairs as merely an “attempt to make a newsy story” and “to appear

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<sup>145</sup> “In Darkest Tennessee,” Capital Journal (Salem, Oregon), 19 July, 1923, clipping found in P. P., Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>146</sup> “Church Votes Approval of Morgan’s Act,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 16 April 1923, 1; T. W. Callaway, Pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle, Chattanooga, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 24 May 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; see also Samuel L. Glasgow, Minister of First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville, to H. A. Morgan, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; “Churches Laud Sprowls Oust,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 13 April 1923; Resolution printed in “Minutes of Presbytery of Duck River Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.,” 18 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>147</sup> “Churches Laud U. T. President,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 19 April 1923.

<sup>148</sup> “Confidence In Morgan Expressed,” Knoxville Sentinel, 6 July 1923, 21; “Dr. Morgan and Faculty Given B. of C. Support,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 17 May 1923, 5; “Condemn Critics of University,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 17 May 1923; “Farmers Praise Dr. H. A. Morgan,” Knoxville Sentinel, 24 May 1923.

'modern' to an unwarranted extreme."<sup>149</sup> The Knoxville Council of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics "endorsed the move [Morgan] took in discharging Professor Sprowls and those connected with the teaching of Evolutions [sic]," while the Kiwanis Club of Athens, Tennessee gave the U. T. president a pat on the back for "seeing that no dangerous books are permitted in the University . . . at this time when Atheism and semi-athesim . . . is trying to get in their work."<sup>150</sup>

Tennessee residents from Knoxville and beyond praised President Morgan for excluding from university courses "such books as would tend to undermine the faith of the students in the teaching of God's word," and insisted that Professor Sprowls' right to freedom of thought ended when it stood to "poison the minds of the young men and women of this great state."<sup>151</sup> People from other states also felt compelled to congratulate Morgan and express their loyalty to him for removing evolutionist teachers from his faculty. A Baptist pastor from Arkansas wrote to Morgan saying, "Your fight has been a victory for the Truth that will have a mighty affect [sic] in the 'battle with the beast' that is on

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<sup>149</sup> "Rotary Directors Voice Full Faith and Confidence In Work of President Morgan of U. T.," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 17 July 1923, 10; "Kiwanis Club Upholds Hands U. T. President," Knoxville Sentinel, 7 June 1923, 9; see also "Let U-T Alone, Says Kiwanis," Knoxville News, 6 June 1923, 8; "Vote of Confidence is Given Dr. Morgan," Knoxville Sentinel, 20 July 1923, 11.

<sup>150</sup> J. W. Welester, Recording Secretary of Jr. O.U.A.M. Number 47, to H. A. Morgan, 16 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; W. T. Roberts, President of the Kiwanis Club, Athens, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 7 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>151</sup> Mrs. R. G. Walerhouse to H. A. Morgan, received 12 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; W. N. Elrod, Murfreesboro, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 10 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; H. K. Bryson to H. A. Morgan, 12 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; Mrs. F. A. Wilson, Chattanooga, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 19 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; John R. Weathers, Washington, D.C., to H. A. Morgan, 6 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; "University Alumnus Pleads For Old Fashioned Teaching," Nashville Tennessean, 20 July 1923, 4.

all over the land.”<sup>152</sup> Even city and county school superintendents from Tennessee offered messages of support and appreciation to Morgan in his “great moral battle” to protect the children against beliefs that might undermine “Christian faith and practice.”<sup>153</sup> In the minds of many Tennesseans, as reflected in editorials and letters, the state university had never been “esteemed as high” nor the job of the university president and his administration been appreciated more.<sup>154</sup>

Not everyone who read about the dismissals agreed with the action taken by the Morgan administration. Although acknowledging President Morgan’s value to the state university, an editorial in the Nashville Banner recognized the student, faculty, and alumni dissatisfaction and lamented that no university can survive in good standing if it fires professors “by wholesale.”<sup>155</sup> In a letter to Governor Peay, Knoxville resident Mrs. S. E. N. Moore insisted that the students did not like Morgan and that most Knoxville residents were against Morgan’s and Hoskins’ dismissal of the professors. The Nashville Tennessean reported that the alumni in Nashville were “divided” over the subject, and one

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<sup>152</sup> Dr. R. W. Douthat, Morgantown, W. VA., to “the President of the Board of Regents of ‘The University of Tennessee’, and his wise Advisors,” 17 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; Walter Diehl to H. A. Morgan, 24 September 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; Selsus E. Tull, D.D., Pastor of The First Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to H. A. Morgan, 1 September 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 5.

<sup>153</sup> Jeanette M. King, County Superintendent of Rutherford County Department of Public Instruction, Murfreesboro, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 15 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; A. J. Smith, Superintendent of City Board of Education, Clarkesville, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 11 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; J. C. Mitchell, Superintendent of the City Schools, Murfreesboro, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 11 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; L. E. Summers, Superintendent of Coffee County Dept. of Public Instruction, to H. A. Morgan, 8 May 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>154</sup> Mrs. S. E. N. Moore to Governor Austin Peay, 7 July 1923, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 2; “The State University,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 9 June 1923, 6; “One State’s Best Assets Is Head of Its University,” Knoxville Sentinel, 6 May 1923; “Dr. Morgan Is Upheld; Future of University,” Knoxville Sentinel, 18 July 1923, 8; “A Great and Growing University,” Commercial Appeal (Memphis), 20 July 1923, 8; “Trustees Are Squarely Behind Dr. Morgan’s Administration in Enforcement of Their Policies,” Knoxville Sentinel, 3 June 1923, 1,7.

<sup>155</sup> “Serious Conditions,” Nashville Banner, 16 July 1923, 6.



Nashville editorial commended those who stood with Sprowls, calling the professor's stand for his right to use the controversial text "as heroic as that of Martin Luther when he hurled defiance at the Diet at Worms, or as immortal as the old Greek philosopher who drank hemlock rather than see his search for Truth ended."<sup>156</sup> Southern Agriculturist editor E. E. Miller found it unconscionable that university officials would allow the public to believe that the institution would put a damper on scientific thought or evolution. "Surely the university is not going to become the leader in the fight to put the schools and courses of study under the direction of Billy Sunday, Billy Bryan and the rest of them," Miller agonized.<sup>157</sup> The Nashville Banner noted that people had generally supported Morgan and the U. T. administration until they dismissed Dr. John R. Neal, which caused "a change in sentiment."<sup>158</sup> A U. T. student from 1920 to 1924, W. Neil Franklin recalled that all of his friends "sympathized 100 % with the professors," and some who accepted Sprowls' dismissal still thought that the administration had been "arbitrary and unreasonable" in dismissing the other professors.<sup>159</sup> Others may have agreed with the comments of a Cookeville, Tennessee resident who saw President Morgan "weeding out" professors "too independent and high-minded to bow down and applaud [his] unjust and autocratic treatment of Prof. Sprowls," and believed that the Board of Trustees should ask for Morgan's resignation.<sup>160</sup> Having read

<sup>156</sup> "University of Tennessee Alumni Here Divided On Issue of Faculty Upheaval," Nashville Tennessean, 16 July 1923, 1,5; "Showdown to be Called For in U. T. Wrangle Tuesday," Nashville Tennessean, 15 July 1923, 1,3.

<sup>157</sup> E. E. Miller to C. A. Keffer, U. T. Professor of Horticulture and Forestry, 7 June 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>158</sup> "Trustees Will Meet Tomorrow," Nashville Banner, 16 July 1923, 14.

<sup>159</sup> W. Neil Franklin to J. R. Montgomery, handwritten response to Alumni Questionnaire, 16 December 1967, 1, M. P., Box 4, Folder 1; "The University Flare-up," Chattanooga Daily Times, 13 July 1923.

<sup>160</sup> Walter S. McClain, Cookeville, TN., to H. A. Morgan, 9 July 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 4; Walter S. McClain to Governor Austin Peay, 13 July 1923, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 2.

that evolution had caused the dismissals, Frank M. Dryzer called the administration's action a "step backward toward the superstitions and intolerance of the Dark Ages" and retorted that he was ashamed to be an alumnus of the University of Tennessee.<sup>161</sup> An Oregon newspaper disparaged the U. T. administration and declared Russia to be more receptive to liberal thinking than the University of Tennessee, which would probably soon teach that the "earth is flat, that the sun do [sic] move and that all modern science is bunk."<sup>162</sup>

Those in the best position to know the facts of the Sprowls firing believed that evolution was not an issue. Professor Maurice Mulvania said that the impression got out because of Sprowls' dismissal but that "we all k[new] that was not the case."<sup>163</sup> After a thorough investigation, the majority of the AAUP Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure concluded that Sprowls' desire to use the book "was not one of the reasons--certainly not the controlling reason--which led to the decision of the authorities to discontinue his services."<sup>164</sup> Sprowls himself told the AAUP committee in a letter that, "in all fairness to the administrative authorities[,] they have repeatedly denied to other people that the question of evolution had anything to do with my dismissal, and, so far as I know, they have given no other reason for my dismissal than that of my inability to perform the field duties which they thought I should be doing."<sup>165</sup> Sprowls confided to Philip Hamer just days before the trustees meeting that he "could hardly blame the authorities for firing him . . . because of his inability to

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<sup>161</sup> Frank M. Dryzer to H. A. Morgan, 5 July 1923, P. P., Box 6, Folder 18.

<sup>162</sup> "In Darkest Tennessee," Capital Journal (Salem, Oregon), 19 July 1923.

<sup>163</sup> Mulvania Interview, 7, P. P.; see also Radford, 17, P. P.

<sup>164</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 217.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

keep his temper [and] failure to work in harmony with Thackston.”<sup>166</sup> Time did little to clarify issues in the case of the professors. As the Board of Trustees meeting approached, newspapers continued to tell a tale of evolution and revolt. “Evolution, academic freedom, parlor Socialism and several kinds of advanced ideas are partly responsible for the row at the University of Tennessee,” was the word from a Nashville newspaper just days before the board met.<sup>167</sup>

Friends of Professor John R. Neal charged the administration with raising the issue of evolution and Robinson’s book “as a cloak or [some] sort of smoke screen” which produced a propaganda that insinuated, and in some cases charged, that the professors were atheists or that they held unorthodox religious beliefs.<sup>168</sup> Given Morgan’s probable belief in evolution, and the fact that Sprowls made the case for evolution, this charge appears baseless. However, charges that Morgan “never did anything to correct the popular impression that Professor Sprowls was removed because of his views on evolution” appear to have merit.<sup>169</sup>

On April 8, 1923, a joint session of Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches in Fayetteville, Tennessee passed resolutions praising the U. T. president for prohibiting the use of evolutionary textbooks and for his prompt dismissal of Sprowls.<sup>170</sup> After the Fayetteville resolutions appeared in the newspapers, Dr. R. M. Ogden of Harvard University wrote to Morgan saying, “I

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<sup>166</sup> Hamer, Diary, 14 July 1923.

<sup>167</sup> T. H. Alexander, “Showdown to be Called For in U. T. Wrangle Tuesday,” Nashville Tennessean, 15 July 1923, 1,3.

<sup>168</sup> Hicks Thesis, 177.

<sup>169</sup> Footnote in AAUP, Bulletin X, 218; Gam[m]on and others to Garner, Hicks Thesis, 176-181.

<sup>170</sup> “Fayetteville Churches Commend Prof. Morgan,” Nashville Tennessean, 11 April 1923, page unknown, clipping found in P. P., Box 6, Folder 18.

hope you were able to denounce publicly the resolutions supporting your stand in the Sprowls case."<sup>171</sup> However, Morgan did not set the record straight. Responding to a letter by the chairman of the Fayetteville Churches joint congregations, Morgan said, "I had seen in the paper the resolutions that had been passed at Fayetteville and also at Columbia. I greatly appreciate your expressions of confidence."<sup>172</sup> To those who wrote to Morgan asking about the book's, or evolution's, role in the Sprowls case or the larger controversy, Morgan responded consistently that neither the book nor evolution played a role in the administration's decisions. However, Morgan used the issue of evolution when it produced support for himself and the administration.<sup>173</sup>

With each telling, the story of the faculty controversy mutated slightly. Some versions credited dissatisfaction with the school's organization as the main reason for the later dismissals. Others mentioned faculty support for the student movement as a key reason in their being fired. Despite the confusion, the subtle shifts of emphasis when attaching blame, and the varied details, the public accepted the story that evolution was at the heart of the matter. Because of the way their actions were perceived, President Harcourt A. Morgan and his administration drew both support and criticism from the press, various groups and individuals from across the city of Knoxville, the state of Tennessee, and the nation. Citing his desire to be fair to those slated for dismissal, Morgan refused to comment on why the professors were not to be reappointed.<sup>174</sup> With no

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<sup>171</sup> R. M. Ogden, Harvard University, to H. A. Morgan, 30 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>172</sup> H. A. Morgan to H. K. Bryson, Fayetteville, TN., 17 April 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>173</sup> H. A. Morgan to Woolief Thomas, Washington, D.C., 12 June 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; H. A. Morgan to E. E. Miller, 12 June 1923, P. P., Box 7, Folder 3; Morgan to Smith, 16 April 1923, P. P.

<sup>174</sup> "Open Hearing on U. T. He Says Due the Public," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 17 July 1923, 1, 16; "Freedom Not Abridged By U. T. Trustees'," Knoxville Sentinel, 18 July 1923, 1,5.

specific charges from the administration other than a professor not “fitting into the organization,” speculation abounded. James R. Montgomery noted in Threshold of a New Day that “sentiment developed for the little guys . . . in the eyes of the general public,” but large numbers of Tennesseans still supported Morgan and the university deans.<sup>175</sup> In Tennessee, Morgan’s administration enjoyed more supporters than critics, especially the closer one traveled toward the U. T. campus. In the eyes of the Tennessee public, Morgan had led the University of Tennessee to its best days thus far. He was a friend to the farmer, the businessman, the church, the students, and the community. For many in Tennessee, Morgan increased the value of his human capital when the public became convinced that he had protected the taxpayers’ children from evolution and unsafe theories, and that he had preserved order and disciplined those who opposed duly constituted authority.

The AAUP committee investigated the firings and the conditions at the University of Tennessee in the fall of 1923. They found the method of appointing professors on one year terms unjust and “[in]compatible with the dignity of the profession of university teaching.” The investigators asked why those who were said to have performed unsatisfactorily for a long period of time, such as Dr. Neal, were not told sooner that they would be dismissed. They also questioned the Board of Trustees’ decision to vote on the dismissals collectively rather than “considering each case on its merits.”<sup>176</sup> The committee found that the “most regrettable feature” of what transpired was dismissing all but Sprowls and Withers “in the middle of summer vacation,” making it difficult for them to find another position for the next year.<sup>177</sup> However, AAUP investigators did not

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<sup>175</sup> Montgomery, Threshold, 28.

<sup>176</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 256-57, 259.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

“find any evidence that the religious opinions of any of the professors had anything whatever to do with their dismissals.”<sup>178</sup> The committee found adequate evidence to understand why the administration had fired Sprowls, Withers, Schaeffer, and Ellis; they maintained that the dismissals of Radford, Neal and Mulvania were excessive in light of the charges against them. Besides strongly disagreeing with the dismissal procedure, the committee believed that the administration could have spared several of the professors’ jobs by weighing each case separately.<sup>179</sup> As for the attitude of the faculty, J. W. Garner, chairman of the inquiry committee, commented: “I have found men who sided with the administration, and I found men who did not support its policy. But the great majority agreed with the administration.”<sup>180</sup>

In August, 1923, Assistant Professor of Economics and Marketing at the University Zenas B. Wallin resigned his position voluntarily. The Knoxville News quoted Wallin as saying, “In light of the present disturbed conditions at the university and in view of the lack of any definite policy on the part of the administration toward determining the future status of any member of the faculty[,] I considered it a wise thing to change while the changing was good.”<sup>181</sup> However, following Wallin’s late-summer departure, the new school year began without signs that the controversy had produced any significant, lingering, ill effects. Applications for student enrollment exceeded 1922 numbers by forty

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., passim; “Dismissal of U. T. Faculty Members Is Sustained By Professors’ Association,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 12 April 1924; “Report Clears University of Discrimination,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 13 April 1924.

<sup>180</sup> “President Morgan Gives Full Information To Representative of Association of Professors,” Knoxville Sentinel, 2 December 1923.

<sup>181</sup> “Another Loss For U-T; Prof. Wallin Quits,” Knoxville News, 6 August 1923, 1.

percent, and classes opened with a record number of students.<sup>182</sup> Despite skepticism voiced by several around the state that good replacements for the ousted professors would not be found, reporters for the Journal and Tribune found that the administration had filled all vacancies with experienced Ph. D.s of "wide reputation as authors and research men."<sup>183</sup>

Publicity from the controversy proved a boon for James Harvey Robinson. His book, The Mind in the Making, sold briskly around the Knoxville area, achieving an "almost unprecedented popularity." In August, the controversial book outsold the "best sellers" in only a few weeks, and one store reported having to restock the book four times with more orders still coming in.<sup>184</sup> Nor did Sprowls' ties with evolution reduce the number of students signing up for his summer school classes in "education, evolution and genetic psychology"; in fact, enrollment in Sprowls' classes jumped from 37 to 84.<sup>185</sup>

The former professors went on with their lives and careers. In 1925, John R. Neal opened a law school in Knoxville. Named in honor of Neal's father, the John Randolph Neal School of Law proved successful for well over a decade, at times rivaling the U. T. Law School in number of graduates. In 1943, after new state regulations required law schools to maintain full-time attendance, Neal's school closed.<sup>186</sup> The Chattanooga Daily Times reported that Jesse Sprowls had accepted a position as professor of secondary education at the University of Idaho where he was welcomed without reservation and awarded a

<sup>182</sup> "University's New Year Starts With Bright Prospects," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 16 September 1923; "U. T. Enrollment Approaches 900," Knoxville Sentinel, 18 September 1923.

<sup>183</sup> "First of New U. T. Profs. Here," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 6 September 1923; "Memphis Prof. Comes To U. T.," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 13 September 1923.

<sup>184</sup> "Book Denied U. T. Students Proves Best-Seller," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 6 August 1923.

<sup>185</sup> "Ousted Teacher's Classes Larger," Knoxville News, 26 June 1923, 1.

<sup>186</sup> Hicks Thesis, 44-48; Montgomery, Threshold, 35.

larger salary. Supposedly, J. F. Messenger, a former colleague of Sprowls and Dean at the University of Idaho, told Sprowls to “come with a book of evolution under each arm and a pistol on each hip.”<sup>187</sup> Later, Sprowls took a position at the University of Maryland.<sup>188</sup> Asa Schaeffer first became connected with Clark University in Massachusetts, then accepted a position at the University of Kansas before joining the faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia; R. S. Radford went first to Kenyon College in Ohio and later worked at Richmond College in Virginia; R. S. Ellis went to teach at Syracuse University in New York, and Maurice Mulvania entered graduate school at the University of Wisconsin.<sup>189</sup> Mrs. Withers stayed in Knoxville as her husband, Professor Alfred M. Withers, continued to teach Spanish at the university. Resentful about how his wife and the other professors had been treated, Alfred Withers continued to criticize U. T. officials. After Hoskins heard about Mr. Withers’ remarks, the administration terminated him in 1930.<sup>190</sup>

Sustained by vengeance, loyalty, and pride, the controversy died a slow death. On September 3, 1923, “The Truth: The Alumni Edition” circulated around the state defending the dismissed professors, calling their July 17 hearing “a travesty of justice,” and asking Governor Peay to investigate the “illegally constituted” University of Tennessee Board of Trustees. The handout pointed out that only one accredited U. T. alumnus sat on the Board at the time of the July 17 meeting in violation of the one third minimum alumni membership

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187 “Sprowls Lands Berth In Idaho University,” Chattanooga Daily Times, 18 July 1923, 10.

188 Montgomery, Threshold, 35.

189 AAUP, Bulletin X, 223; *Ibid.*

190 Montgomery, Threshold, 35, 48.



required by state law.<sup>191</sup> On October 26 and 27, 1923, attacks centered more specifically on President Morgan. Critics of the Morgan administration distributed "Bulletin No. 2, Alumni Truth" at the East Tennessee Educational Association. This handbill maintained that Morgan was not an American citizen when he was elected president of the University of Tennessee, that he had voted illegally for over twenty years, that he monopolized too much power by holding three positions in the university, namely president, Dean of the Agricultural Department and Director of the Experimental Station, and that his salary was "kept a profound secret." This handbill further warned that "every dollar unwisely or extravagantly expended on the University is just so much taken away from the elementary schools."<sup>192</sup> The barrage of charges against Morgan and the administration finally produced a state probe into the university's financial affairs. After a lengthy investigation, the legislative committee cleared the university, but the whole ordeal generated enough protest in the state to block an appropriations request for more university funds in 1925.<sup>193</sup>

Despite the uproar produced by the 1923 faculty firings, University of Tennessee officials showed no apprehension as they dismissed more professors in 1924. In late May, the local newspapers reported that the administration planned to dismiss four more professors, two of whom were friends of the "Sprouls [sic] faction." According to the local papers, W. E.

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<sup>191</sup> "The Truth: The Alumni Edition," undated, P. P., Box 7, Folder 2; to establish a date for, and provide summary of, "The Truth" see " 'Truth' Asks For New U.T. Board," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 4 September 1923.

<sup>192</sup> "Bulletin No. 2, Alumni Truth", undated, P. P., Box 7, Folder 1; to establish a date for, and provide a summary of, "Bulletin No. 2" see "Dr. Morgan Again Attacked In Anonymous 'Truth Bulletin;' Appeal To Prejudice Is Made," Knoxville Sentinel, 28 October 1923.

<sup>193</sup> "U. T. Investigation Committee May Be Appointed Monday or Tuesday," Knoxville Sentinel, 8 February 1925, A-8; "Investigators Decide to Drop Allegations Against Morgan, Probe Those Against Trustees," Knoxville Sentinel, 23 February 1924; Montgomery, Threshold, 37-39.

Bullard, instructor in zoology and friend of Asa Schaeffer, had been passed over for a promotion. Although extremely disappointed that the status of his teaching and salary had remained unchanged, Bullard had told the head of the zoology department that, unless Bullard notified him otherwise, he planned to return the next school year. However, Dean Hoskins wanted Bullard's decision in writing. The fact that the dean had not asked other professors for a written statement of intent prompted Bullard to ask Hoskins if he had anything against his work. "It's your attitude," Hoskins replied. Later, Bullard received a letter from Hoskins telling him that he was being replaced because he had not replied by letter before April 15. Around the same time, the administration told M. A. Jacobson, an assistant professor of bacteriology who had been an instructor with Maurice Mulvania, that his \$2250 salary would be cut by \$600 for the Fall term. President Morgan told a Knoxville Sentinel reporter that the pay reduction was simply a matter of not having the money to pay Jacobson the \$600 raise that he had received in 1923. Morgan insisted that the cut in pay was not an incentive for Jacobson to leave and that the administration hoped that he would not. Charging that Morgan's statement did not fit the facts, Jacobson claimed that Hoskins had already approved the department head's proposal to add a teaching assistant to the bacteriology department, provided that the combined salaries of this position with that of the assistant professor did not exceed \$2250; therefore, contrary to Morgan's statements, the bacteriology department did not have to operate with reduced funds. Referring to Morgan's comments in the June 1 newspaper article to demonstrate Morgan's weak grasp of the situation, Jacobson pointed out that he had already resigned on May 27 and

that Dean Hoskins had accepted his resignation on May 30.<sup>194</sup> According to the Knoxville Sentinel, chemistry instructors W. T. Chambers and Jacob Stacks, and Assistant Professor of Law Robert Muir, were not fired, but had decided to leave to pursue advanced degrees.<sup>195</sup>

Apparently upholding their stated goal of protecting “college executives and governing boards” against unjust charges that could potentially damage the reputation and influence of universities, the AAUP Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure tempered slightly its concluding remarks about the U. T. firings in its 1924 report:<sup>196</sup>

The University authorities, it is readily admitted, acted within their legal rights and their procedure involved no violation of the contract rights of any professor, but over and above mere contractual rights and obligations there are considerations of equity, of abstract justice, of tolerance, and of fair and honorable treatment which cannot be justly ignored in the decision of cases involving the reputations, the professional competency and even the character of university professors.<sup>197</sup>

However, disturbed that certain individuals and newspapers had reached “erroneous conclusions” from the investigative committee’s 1924 report, the AAUP felt compelled to state more emphatically the organization’s opinion about the firings and the conditions at the University of Tennessee. At a 1925 conference of members of the American Council on Education, the AAUP adopted a resolution which stated that “none of the dismissals were justified”

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<sup>194</sup> “4 Instructors At University May Not Be Re-elected,” Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 31 May 1924; “More Let Out at University,” Knoxville News, 30 May 1924, 1; “No Reflection From Last Year’s Issue In University’s Faculty,” Knoxville Sentinel, 1 June 1924; “Prof. M. A. Jacobson Takes Issue With Dr. H. A. Morgan,” Knoxville Sentinel, 8 June 1924.

<sup>195</sup> “No Reflection From Last Year’s Issue In University’s Faculty,” Knoxville Sentinel, 1 June 1924.

<sup>196</sup> AAUP, Bulletin I, 40.

<sup>197</sup> AAUP, Bulletin X, 259.

and that a "wise administration" could have worked out the "complications" that led to the firings.<sup>198</sup> Because the "sanctioning" of universities didn't exist, the AAUP's sharp criticism represented the maximum penalty applicable by the national professors' association.<sup>199</sup> Feeling vindicated by the AAUP's resolution, Neal, Ellis, Radford, Mulvania, and Schaeffer took on the administration again by sending a letter, drafted by Neal, to members of the Tennessee legislature. In addition to previous charges of an illegally constituted Board of Trustees, the professors questioned Morgan's citizenship, called him "legally, morally, and mentally incompetent for the position of president," and insisted that he had established a "system of terrorism" over the students and faculty that had infected the institution "like a touch of leprosy." They claimed that quality professors refused positions at U. T. because of "unsatisfactory administrative conditions," and that the institution was falling behind other universities in attendance and scholarship. They further argued that, because of the publicity and the AAUP report, "the University of Tennessee is now regarded as a second rate institution" and urged the legislature to investigate.<sup>200</sup> In response to the professors' written challenges, U. T. administrative officers sent legislators a signed statement of support for Morgan. More than one hundred U. T. faculty members passed a resolution expressing their confidence in Morgan's "mental, moral, and legal" qualifications and in their working relationship with the administration. In addition, about 1200 students attended a campus-wide student meeting of the All-Students Club and endorsed a resolution expressing "the utmost confidence" in the president's

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>199</sup> Montgomery, *Threshold*, 35; "Professors Committee Is Coming," *Knoxville News*, 13 July 1923, 1.

<sup>200</sup> A. A. Schaeffer, R. S. Ellis, J. R. Neal, M. Mulvania, and R. S. Redford [sic] to Members of the Tennessee Legislature, undated, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 1.

ability and integrity. They voiced confidence in the U.T. faculty and trustees as well.<sup>201</sup>

The stories circulating that President Morgan had established himself as a bulwark against evolutionism did little to tarnish his image in the state of Tennessee. If anything, the scales of public opinion seemed to tilt in his favor, and lingering effects appeared to be minimal. Just one year after the controversy had surfaced, the United States Chamber of Commerce invited Morgan to Cleveland, Ohio to give the keynote address at their annual program in early May. This invitation was an honor, and was only the second time that a representative from a southern state had been asked to deliver an address at this event.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> "Dr. Morgan and University Put on Defensive," Knoxville Sentinel, 12 February 1925; Faculty Endorsement of H. A. Morgan to Governor Austin Peay, 11 February 1925, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 1; "Confidence Vote Given Dr. Morgan By U. T. Faculty," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 12 February 1925, 1, 16; Vick Robertson, President of the Student Body, to the Tennessee State Senate, 64th General Assembly, 12 February 1925, Peay Papers, Box 93, Folder 1; "U. T. Student Body Sends Petition to Legislators," Knoxville Sentinel, 12 February 1925.

<sup>202</sup> "National Body Highly Honors U. T. President," Journal and Tribune (Knoxville), 13 April 1924.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

A volatile mixture of personalities, issues, and decisions fused to produce the U. T. faculty firings. Events in the spring and summer of 1923 rocked the University of Tennessee and focused state and national attention on the institution. Why did seven professors lose their jobs in the summer of 1923? Although the controversy's complex nature obscures its causes, the evidence points to several basic conclusions. While the professors were by no means innocents in the controversy, the onus for the dismissals fell on the administration. The firings occurred because U. T. administrators alone defined what was in the best interests of the university. The administration desired a sound, efficient, and respectable university that met the expectations and approval of the community, and they measured professors' job performance and actions by arbitrary standards established to meet these goals. U. T. officials rewarded conformity, not individualism, and they narrowly defined professors' roles within the university; violations of administrative standards could have dire consequences. The hierarchical administrative structure in place at the University of Tennessee empowered U. T. officials to remove, with virtual impunity, those who did not conform to set standards or who failed to "fit in." This structure lacked sufficient constraints on administrative power, left professors without due process in matters of conflict or dismissal, and left little room for intellectual disagreement or controversy.

Personality clashes figured prominently into the nature and scope of the controversy. A conflict existed between Sprowls and the head of the Education department, J. A. Thackston. Jealousy, concerns over administrative matters,

and a differing style of law caused discord between Malcolm McDermott and John R. Neal. Nellie Crooks, head of the Home Economics department, clashed with Ada Withers over her unwillingness to teach applied art under Crooks' direction. Most importantly, the fierce-tempered and often dogmatic Dean Hoskins resented the past actions of several of these professors, and he despised criticism when he believed that he was doing his best. He remembered the barbs and the jokes made at his expense, and he never forgot. Negative newspaper publicity smeared his name personally, eroded faculty morale, and damaged the administration's standing in the community, he believed. Hoskins' personality and his affinity for discipline and order left little room for challenge. Those causing trouble were a cancer to be excised from the University of Tennessee, and Hoskins wielded the scalpel. He played a pivotal role in the dismissals, and his actions largely determined the extent of the firings.

In some ways, the 1923 controversy stemmed from an internal power struggle between the administration and the professors. More than a simple fight for control, this power struggle resulted from the competing groups' divergent visions of what it meant to be a university professor. On the whole, the Morgan administration viewed professors simply as employees of the university. To them, the institution would advance the needs of the community and meet educational goals if the school ran efficiently. To maintain a positive public image and keep the institution running smoothly, order had to be maintained through administrative control. Within this setting, a professor who failed to follow instructions or work within administrative guidelines became a risk to the university's stability and could face termination. To a growing number of professors, theirs was not the role of mere employee. At U. T. as was the

case elsewhere, many professors viewed themselves as valuable partners in the educational process. They desired to have a hand on the rudder, steering the University of Tennessee to a better tomorrow. Confident in their ability to best evaluate the needs of their students, some U. T. professors challenged what they believed to be unrealistic administrative restraints on curriculum and classroom instruction. Comparable to trends in American society in the 1920s, divergent viewpoints between professors and university officials represented, in many ways, a struggle between innovation and tradition. Mrs. Ada Withers' passion for fine art and her desire to teach it became, when viewed through the eyes of U. T. officials, an unwillingness to teach what was necessary. The administration observed Robert Radford's repeated attempts to move beyond Latin translation, not as progressive curriculum reform, but as obstinacy. John R. Neal loved his students and he reveled in their success, but his approach to law and his lack of emphasis on house-keeping duties created an impasse with Dean McDermott that led to his dismissal. Thinking its actions to be in the best interests of the institution, the administration maintained its control over all administrative decisions. Also with the university's best interests at heart, several of the professors sought increased autonomy and greater input into the governance of the university. The clash between stability and change and the proper role of professors contributed significantly to the faculty controversy and the dismissals that resulted.

To what degree was evolution involved in the firings? The public believed that evolution stirred at the heart of the matter. However, while the issue did generate widespread publicity about the controversy, evolution played no direct role in any of the firings. The firing of Sprowls and Withers might have been an article in a few local papers had it not been for Robinson's The Mind in



the Making and Sprowls' charge that his dismissal centered around evolution. Sprowls maintained that his dismissal resulted from his views on evolution and his plans to use the book, and he refused to accept that unsatisfactory job performance had led to his dismissal. However, the administration never claimed evolution to be a factor in any of the dismissals, the AAUP investigating committee determined that evolution was not a cause, and most U. T. professors, even some who were eventually released in 1923, did not believe it to be an issue in the firings. However, the majority of the public believed that evolution had caused one or more of the dismissals. Sprowls' charge, made first to the faculty and then repeated to the media, became a seed of misunderstanding planted in the public's mind. Led by the Knoxville News' attack on the Morgan administration, a circulation-hungry press accelerated the seed's growth by repeating the story that evolution had started the process of decapitation. In what proved to be a poor decision, President Morgan led the U. T. administration in remaining silent about the details of the firings, and this reticence added to the muddle of inaccurate information consumed by the public. At times, the issue of evolution became a pawn in the hands of those on opposing sides. Morgan used evolution when it stood to benefit himself and the administration. Knoxville News editor Edward Meeman used the issue to both get at the administration, which he found to be repugnant, and to boost newspaper sales. As the story spread across the region, the state, and the nation, details became confused, reality became distorted, and opinions became divided.

In 1959, when recalling the U. T. disturbance, President Harcourt Morgan wrote that dissatisfied AAUP members opposed the recommended changes made by the deans of several colleges, and that the professors' "opposition to

these changes was largely responsible for the introduction of the Anti-Evolution Act in the Tennessee General Assembly” in 1925.<sup>203</sup> Can a connection be made between the 1923 U. T. faculty firings and the 1925 Scopes trial? Did the dismissals act as a precursor for the famous “monkey trial?” A strong case can be made for this argument, but not because evolution caused the dismissals. The firings and the related controversy brought added publicity to an issue already receiving national attention. Particularly in the South, reactionary state legislatures required little urging to introduce anti-evolution legislation. For example, the Kentucky legislature had attempted to enact anti-evolution legislation in 1922.<sup>204</sup> Even if it had not occurred in Dayton, Tennessee, a showdown between fundamentalists and modernists still seems possible, even likely. By attracting the public’s interest and focusing state and national attention on evolution and academic freedom, the U. T. controversy compelled people to examine the issues and to take a stand. The notoriety of the U. T. faculty firings, and the lingering agitation by some of those terminated to find vindication, brought attention to the topic of evolution and allowed it to remain a vibrant and fresh issue in 1925. One could argue that the 1923 dismissals ensured that Tennessee took center stage in the fundamentalist-modernism showdown. If the connection can be made between the firings and the Scopes trial, it is because of what was thought, rather than what actually, happened. Perception and point of view determined whether the administration was criticized or praised, whether the dismissed professors were martyred or vilified, and whether the public welcomed or feared the direction taken by the state university. Sometimes public perception can be stronger than reality.

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<sup>203</sup> J. H. A. Morgan, recollection of events while U. T. president, typed transcription, Fall 1959, M. P., Box 4, Folder 6.

<sup>204</sup> Frank L. McVey, The Gates Open Slowly: A History of Education in Kentucky (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1949), 224-25.

American universities experienced some substantial growing pains in the early twentieth century. Many universities had gradually altered their structures to allow for greater faculty and student participation in the governance of the university while others clung to the more traditional hierarchical pattern of which the University of Tennessee embraced. Although clinging stubbornly to tradition, the U. T. administration was not entirely rigid and intractable to the idea of change. Forced to consider demands made by professors and students, and able to deem a change as being in the best interest of the university, the administration accepted a modification in the university by-laws that allowed the faculty to vote for two members of the Board of Trustees' administrative council. Rather than turn a deaf ear to students' complaints, the Morgan administration also agreed to create the position of Dean of Men to improve relationships with students and better meet their needs.

It would be a mistake to view conflicts over evolution and academic freedom as dead issues belonging to a bygone era. Although both issues remained relatively quiet throughout the depression years of the 1930s and the war years of the 1940s, struggles involving both have resurfaced many times over the years.

Following the 1925 Scopes trial, only Arkansas and Mississippi passed lasting anti-evolution laws, yet the effects of the fundamentalist crusade persisted for decades as numerous school districts voluntarily restricted evolution through such measures as self-censorship and the adoption of biology textbooks that contained watered-down evolution theory. The Soviets' successful launching of Sputnik in 1957 shook Americans from their complacency and forced a reevaluation of the state of American education. The renewed focus on science and mathematics afforded textbook writers the

opportunity of placing evolution back into the science books. The courts overturned the Arkansas and Mississippi Scopes-era anti-evolution laws in 1968 and 1970 respectively, but creationists refused to submit. Since that time, they have adopted more sophisticated approaches to combat evolution and promote creationism, even turning the tables to argue that the first amendment is on their side. Some have argued that secular humanism is a religion based on evolution theory; therefore, school boards that adopt textbooks that teach evolution violate the establishment clause of the first amendment. Between 1972 and 1983, Tennessee, Louisiana and Arkansas attempted to pass balanced treatment legislation that would have allowed both creationism and evolution to be taught in public schools, and more recently, creationists have used the academic freedom approach. In lawsuits brought between 1990 and 1992, two public school teachers and one university professor claimed that academic freedom and first amendment freedom of speech rights protected their right to teach creationism both in and out of the classroom. In March 1996, Tennessee senator Tommy Burks introduced a bill to have evolution taught as a theory, not as fact; the senate voted against the bill 20 to 13.<sup>205</sup>

Academic freedom has proven to be just as fragile and vulnerable as it was during the 1920s. By the late 1940s, a pervasive fear of communism gripped the nation, and cold war "witch hunters" made sweeping efforts to find subversives who threatened the security of the nation. The conservative-minded associated nonconformist ideas and liberal views with communism, making higher education a target of anti-communist crusaders. In January, 1952, the McCarran report to the Senate Judiciary Committee insisted, without

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<sup>205</sup> For a detailed discussion of the evolution versus creation debate, particularly in Tennessee, see Joyce F. Francis, "Creationism v. Evolution: The Legal History and Tennessee's Role in That History," Tennessee Law Review 63 (Spring 1996): 753-774.

proof, that the United States Communist party had targeted the teaching profession and had found its greatest success in recruiting college and university professors. During the McCarthy era, the House Committee on Un-American Activities targeted such universities as Washington, California, Rutgers, and Michigan as sanctuaries for communists and subversives. Hundreds of professors lost their jobs and many careers were ruined by accusations of communist activity, sympathies, or cover-up. In 1954 alone, the AAUP had 165 academic freedom cases pending for review, a large number, but one that did not reflect the countless cases settled quietly.<sup>206</sup> The cautiousness and self-censorship generated by the McCarthy era persisted into the Vietnam war years, and struggles for academic freedom continued. In 1965, Rutgers University Professor of History Eugene Genovese jeopardized his tenure by making pro-communist comments concerning the unpopular war in Vietnam. Narrowly escaping termination, Genovese left Rutgers University voluntarily in 1967.<sup>207</sup>

Debates involving evolution and academic freedom continue today. One would be wise to remember that future challenges to the teaching of evolution are as close as the next conservative legislature, or cautious Supreme Court, or evangelical revival. For academic freedom, curtailment is as close as the next unpopular war or time of national crisis when the words and ideas of the few are perceived as a threat to the majority.

<sup>206</sup> Brubacher and Rudy, Higher Education in Transition, 321.

<sup>207</sup> Clyde N. Wilson, ed., Twentieth-Century American Historians (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983), vol. 17, Dictionary of Literary Biography, 179; for information concerning academic freedom from the late 1940s through the 1950s, see Richard Hofstadter, Anti-intellectualism in American Society, 3-5; Brubacher and Rudy, Higher Education in Transition, 308-329, passim; Christopher J. Lucas, American Higher Education: A History (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 223-227; Robert M. MacIver, Academic Freedom in Our Time (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 158-201; Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 325-332.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### SPECIFIC REASONS FOR DISMISSAL IN EACH CASE <sup>1</sup>

Dr. A.A. Schaeffer, Professor of Zoology. Does not cooperate with the administration and has not done so for a long period of time.

He has actively engaged in antagonism to the administration and has held meetings for the promotion of antagonistic opposition. Has invited professors to meet with newspaper representatives to arrange for the publicity of the antagonism. Has given to the newspaper representative statements for publication that were detrimental to the institution.

Dr. R.S. Ellis, Professor of Psychology and Philosophy. Engaged in antagonistic agitation both within and without the institution. Dissatisfied with the organization and operation of the University. Does not show a willingness to cooperate and is hostile in his attitude.

Dr. R.S Radford, Professor of Latin and Roman Archaeology. As head of a Department called a meeting in opposition to the Administration without first informing himself about the acts of the Administration in the Spowls case. Protests against method of employing and releasing professors. Wants a change in the organization of the University. Methods of conducting his work not satisfactory. Erratic and injudicious.

Prof. Maurice Mulvania, Dean of Pre-medical Course and Associate Professor of Bacteriology. Engaged in agitation showing his dissatisfaction with the organization and operation of the University. Conducted propaganda for a change in the organization, including the Board of Trustees, the Faculty and the provisions for student government.

<sup>1</sup> The following summary was included in the Board of Trustees, Minutes, 17 July 1923, 406-407.

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER FROM MALCOLM McDERMOTT TO DEAN HOSKINS CONCERNING JOHN R. NEAL. 2

June 29, 1923

Dean James D. Hoskins  
University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, Tennessee

My Dear Sir:

I hereby submit to you a detailed statement of my specific reasons for recommending in my final report of June 5, 1923, that Dr. John R. Neal be not reelected to the Faculty of The College of Law.

1- He invariably delays in meeting his classes at the beginning of each term, and almost without exception has closed his classes and left the city before the end of the term. As examples of this fact I mention specifically that in February 1923, he was some three days late and in February 1922 he was at least one week late in beginning the second term's work. On both of these occasions he was absent on pleasure trips. In February 1921 he was likewise several days late but I have no knowledge of the cause of his absence. These same delays have occurred at the opening of the University in the Falls. He has also deliberately left his classes toward the close of the term's work and departed the city, usually upon the ground that some relative was ill or that he was anxious to meet some friend. It is, of course, of utmost importance that instructors be on hand at these important periods.

2- He has on numerous occasions left the city and his classes during the course of the term, without any explanation or without any arrangements being made for his absence.

3- He will not hold his examinations in accordance with the schedule prepared. Without a single exception during the past three years, he has without consultation and contrary to repeated requests, changed the time of holding his examinations to enable him to condense them into a brief period, and then he leaves the city. It thus happens that students are often given two or more final examinations in one day, and the schedule disarranged.

4- He will not hold his final examinations in accordance with the regulations of the University. He will not remain in the examination room, as required by the University regulation. For example, prior to the last examination period he was expressly notified in writing of this regulation (see copy of letter attached) and asked to observe it, but almost invariably I found him out of the examination room, on one occasion seated in his office smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper, while the students were left quite alone.

5- His final examinations are in large measure a farce. Frequently they consist of not more than four brief questions. In some instances his final examination papers have never been graded. For example, in January and February 1922, when he left the Law School for a two weeks' tour of Muscle Shoals, the final examination papers turned in by his students during his absence were left unlocked and scattered about his office which was open to everyone. A final examination in the University is supposed to occupy a three hour period and to test, in a fair degree, the students' knowledge of the term's work. His examinations are practically always over in less than an hour, only a few meager questions being put to the students.

6- He insists upon his classes being scheduled so that he will spend as little time at the University as possible. During the session 1920-21, he undertook, without any consultation, to change the hours of his classes so as to be able to leave the University earlier in the day. Despite requests that this be not done, he again, in the session 1921-22, undertook with his students to vary the published schedule until he was notified in writing that we would insist before authorities, if necessary, that the published schedule of classes be adhered to. So unpleasant has this matter become that during the year just passed, his classes have been scheduled as he wished so that he spends as little time at the University as possible.

7- He either cannot or will not make an effort to grade the ability of the students in his various courses. During the entire period of his connection with the Faculty, not a single student, so far as I have been able to ascertain, has failed or even been conditioned in his courses. Any instructor knows that this is an impossible record if students are graded with any degree of accuracy. Students who rank low in all other courses are given highest grades in his. It has frequently happened that he has turned in reports giving to every member of the class an identical grade of highest rank. Reference is here made to the records on file in the Registrar's office where, for example, it will be found that all his students in certain courses were given the identical grade of 95%. There is but one conclusion from these facts and that is that students are merely given grades in his courses without any relation to their merit.

8- He will not keep an attendance record of his classes. At the beginning



of each year he has been asked to keep accurate attendance records and the importance of so doing has been impressed upon him.. It is, of course an important rule of the University that an accurate report of student attendance be filed each week. It has been impossible to get him to keep such a record. For a few weeks at the beginning of each year the report comes in but then it ceases. He does not even call the roll at his classes and for months during the session just closed made no pretense of keeping an attendance record. This is the habitual course.

9- He frequently spends the lecture hour in discussing topics wholly unrelated to the law subject at hand. My office opens into a class room occupied by him one hour each morning and I cannot but hear the topics discussed. On numerous occasions the entire period has been devoted to a discussion of current events or to some bit of political gossip appearing in the morning papers. All of this is no doubt interesting to students and may be in some degree valuable, but it is not giving instruction in law. It also frequently happens that his classes are dismissed before half of the hour has been used.

10- In matters of discipline, while he has always championed the cause of the students and counseled with them, he has never counseled with the head of this department in regard to such matters.

11- He has discussed with students and others criticism of the operation of the College of Law. It is not contended that the present administration is free from criticism but it is a fact that he has never come to the head of this department with such criticisms or with suggestions for betterment.

12- He appears to have no sense of responsibility and is utterly careless in respect to University matters. For example, two years ago this department was asked by the President to submit to the Supreme Court a brief in a certain case testing the constitutionality of the Torrens Act in which it was said farmers of the State were deeply interested. Dr. Neal, an instructor in Constitutional Law, was asked to prepare this brief and he agreed to do so. The record and briefs already filed were turned over to him. He was repeatedly asked to keep his promise but never did so. He allowed the record to lie around the building in which the Law School was then housed, for over five months and left at the close of the session never having touched the matter. He later claimed that the record was lost during the following summer. This is a matter of keen embarrassment to this department to have lost a Supreme Court record under such circumstances. Again, last year, the Association of American Law Schools, of which this college is a member, undertook to publish a list of all the professors serving in member schools and asked for data for each member of the various faculties. Dr. Neal received a questionnaire from the Association but never returned it, later saying that it had been misplaced. At the request of

the Association I supplied him with another copy, but this was never sent in. It thus happens that the published list of faculties did not contain the name of one of our full time professors. These incidents indicate the general carelessness of the man which is reflected in his personal appearance.

13- He has little regard for the regulations of the University. For example, he has endeavored to give students credit for work not done as required by regulations. He undertook to give credit to a law student in certain subjects merely by accepting the students statement that he had read certain books during the preceding summer, and this was done without ever examining the student. Reference is here made to the minutes of the Committee on Degrees where this matter came up and the student was denied credit. Giving a student passing grades in subjects under such conditions is not only contrary to the rules of this University but also those of the Association of American Law Schools, and in fact to every idea of modern educational methods.

Again, he was notified as were all other members of the University Faculty that smoking would not be allowed in Ayres Hall and members of the Faculty were urged to cooperate in this matter in order to set students a proper example. It has been with considerable difficulty that law students have been led to abandon the use of tobacco in the University buildings. Despite these facts Dr. Neal habitually smokes in Ayres Hall.

14- He gives to the College of Law as little of his time as possible. As above stated, he leaves the University as soon as possible in the mornings. He spends practically no time in the Law Library and fails to contribute to the atmosphere of scholarship which must be in the Law School if it is to develop. According to my observation it appears that the College of Law and his work therein is a side issue with Dr. Neal.

In conclusion, permit me to make several general observations.

I wish to emphasize that there is not the slightest ill will or personal feeling involved in this matter on my part. It is by no means a pleasant task to take a stand against one's associate. Dr. Neal has some likable traits, and it is only a sense of duty which has impelled me to make this recommendation.

In the second place, I call your attention to the fact that these complaints as to Dr. Neal's action during the past three years have not been passed over and are not being adverted to merely for the present occasion. You will recall, I am sure, that repeatedly have I made complaint to the administrative authorities as to his methods. Each year that I have been here I have suggested the advisability of not reelecting him to the Faculty, but did not make the express recommendation because it was deemed advisable to give him further trial.

To sum up the situation, it is this: according to my best judgment, which I must exercise as the head of this department, Dr. Neal's policy is to let the students do as they please; give them all good grades; and let the College of Law drift along with as little attention from the Faculty as possible. I am unalterably opposed to such a policy and am constrained to ask that he be no longer retained on this faculty.

Sincerely yours,

Malcolm McDermott

<sup>2</sup> The verbatim letter was included in the Board of Trustees, Minutes, 17 July 1923, 408-413.

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER FROM J. D. HOSKINS TO H. A. MORGAN CONCERNING J. W. SPROWLS<sup>3</sup>

July 13, 1923

Dr. H. A. Morgan, President  
University of Tennessee,  
Knoxville, Tennessee

Dear President Morgan:

I am submitting the recommendation from Dr. J. A. Thackston, head of the Department of Education, that Dr. J. W. Sprowls, Professor of Secondary Education, be not reappointed. I concur in this recommendation.

Sometime in March Dr. Thackston informed me of the situation in the case of Dr. Sprowls. After careful consideration it was decided that Dr. Sprowls should be called to my office and notified by Dr. Thackston that he would not be recommended for reappointment because he was not adapted to the field work and had failed in getting satisfactory results in this work.

This notification was given to Dr. Sprowls on or about April 1st. He left the Dean's office and immediately began an agitation of protest. He questioned the authority of the Administration to notify him that a change should be recommended, sought legal advice and assistance, and gave the impression that he had been dismissed in violation of academic freedom. He did not confine his agitation to the faculty but he extended it to the students and to the public.

Respectfully submitted,

James D. Hoskins, Dean

<sup>3</sup> The following letter was included in the Board of Trustees, Minutes, 17 July 1923, 402.

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER TO H. A. MORGAN FROM J. D. HOSKINS CONCERNING MRS. A. M. WITHERS<sup>4</sup>

Dr. H. A. Morgan, President,  
University of Tennessee,  
Knoxville, Tennessee

Dear President Morgan:

I regret that it becomes necessary for me to recommend that Mrs. A. M. Withers, Assistant Professor of Art in the University be not reappointed for the following reasons:

Mrs. Withers was employed two years ago to give instruction in Art with the distinct understanding that she was to give most of her time to instruction in Applied Art. She was informed that special attention was to be given to that phase of the work which has to do with the application of Art to Home Economics. The Smith-Hughes Course in Home Economics requires certain courses in Applied Art. I learned sometime after Mrs. Withers began her work that she was neglecting the art work in the Home Economics courses. I had a conference with her and after considerable difficulty it was agreed that the instruction in Applied Art would be given according to the needs and requirements of the Home Economics Course. I found thereafter, upon investigation, that she continued to neglect this important phase of her work and that she refused to cooperate with the Home Economics Department.

The women students of the University who take the Smith-Hughes course in Home Economics are preparing to teach. This Smith-Hughes course in the public schools is rapidly increasing in importance. The Home Economics teacher must know something of the fundamental principles of Applied Art. We must, therefore have an instructor in the subject who is able and willing to cooperate and to give the instruction required. I am for this reason recommending that Mrs. Withers be not reappointed.

Respectfully submitted,

James D. Hoskins, Dean

<sup>4</sup> The following letter was included in the Board of Trustees, Minutes, 17 July 1923, 404.

## VITA

Stephen D. Chandler was born in Asheville, North Carolina on May 17, 1967. He attended schools in the Buncombe County public school system of North Carolina, began his undergraduate education in August 1985, and earned the Bachelor of Arts Degree from Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina, in 1990. From 1990 to 1996, he taught in the history department at T. C. Roberson High School in Asheville, North Carolina. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, he accepted a graduate assistantship from the Department of History and entered the Master's program in the fall of 1996. He is married to Ellie Waddell Chandler, also from Asheville, North Carolina.