

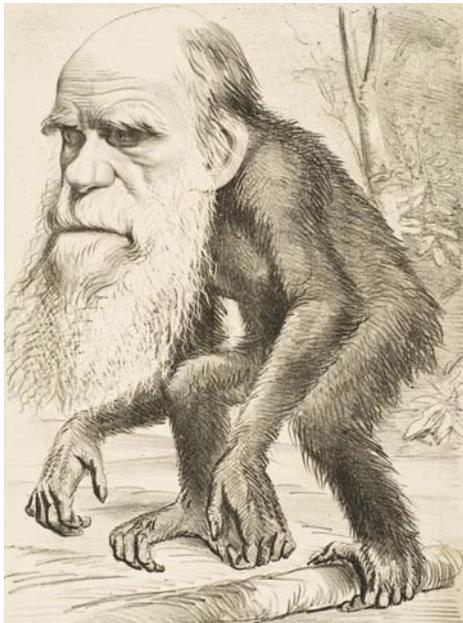
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Evolutionary Ideas

English Naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published his famous theory in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*, a relatively recent archetype of an evolutionary worldview going back to Ancient Greece. Greek philosophers such as Anaximander of Miletus had previously postulated the development of life from non-life and the evolutionary descent of man from animal. Taking into account the presence of fossils, Anaximander claimed that animals sprang out of the sea eons ago. The early humidity eventually evaporated, dry land emerged and, in time, adaptations occurred. Darwin simply brought something new to these old ideas (an explanatory mechanism called "natural selection", which accumulates and preserves minor advantageous genetic mutations. Through the years, New Orleanians (as well as others around the world) have taken their stabs at commenting on (or satiring) Darwin's Theory of Evolution.



Nobody likes to be made out to be a monkey, but in this 1871 caricature published in *The Hornet*, a satirical magazine, Darwin is pictured as "A Venerable Orang-outang". Darwin had something very

much in common with another famous person, Abraham Lincoln. First, they were both born on the very same day, February 12, 1809. Secondly, they were both ridiculed as primates. Lincoln was called "The Ape Baboon of the Prairie"; and, in an 1861 letter to his wife, General George B. McClellan called Lincoln "the original gorilla". After the Emancipation Proclamation, cartoons like the one below depicted Lincoln as some type of a simian-like creature, delivering his document to the people. Today such disparaging images are mostly forgotten.



In 1873, it was the Mystick Krew of Comus that presented its mocking interpretation of radical Republicans as "Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of the Species". Ulysses Grant was a tobacco grub; and "Spoons" Butler, carrying a large spoon, was a hyena.



Besides the two creatures above, there were countless others in the Comus procession. There was also some mutation of an alligator, elephant, fox, zebra, mouse and squirrel.



Receiving an account of the Comus satire, Darwin wasn't sure if he was being explained "in good faith" or whether his theory was totally misconstrued:

"I can't tell from the wonderful mistakes in the article," he wrote, "whether the writer is witty, ignorant, or blunders for the sake of fun."

The next interesting interpretation of Darwin was by the prolific musician, composer, bandleader and arranger, Dave Bartholomew. Born in 1920 in Edgard, Louisiana, Bartholomew (in his partnership with Fats Domino) brought the world some of his greatest successes. In the mid-1950s the team wrote more than forty big hits for Imperial Records and captured the country by storm - such great ones as "Ain't It a Shame", "Blueberry Hill" and "I'm Walkin'". Dave Bartholomew is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Songwriters Hall of Fame, Louisiana Music Hall of Fame and a 2012 Grammy Special Merit Award recipient (along with Steve Jobs).

Back in 1957, Dave Bartholomew recorded a song entitled "The Monkey". He believed we shouldn't be making fun of "The Monkey". No self-respecting monkey could ever evolve into a creature as unkind,

murderous, mean, cruel and cheating as man. It's the human beings who are the ones messed up:

"Now, three monkeys sat in a coconut tree, discussing things as they are said to be,

Said one to the other, now listen you two, there's a certain rumor that can't be true:

That man descended from our noble race, the very idea is a big disgrace.

No monkey ever deserted his wife, starved her baby and ruined her life,

Yeeaaaahhhh ... the monkey speaks his mind."

The above words Bartholomew pronounces in a deep stentorian voice over Justin Adams' excellent guitar playing. At the end of the song, "The Monkey" delivers his powerful concluding lines:

"Yes, man descended, the worthless bum, but brothers, from us he did not come."

"Yeeaaaahhhh ... the monkey speaks his mind."

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