



The North Texas

Skeptic

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Flunked out

by John Blanton

It's time for creationism again.

The hottest topic in these days is the new creationist film by Ben Stein. He calls it *Expelled* with the subtitle *No intelligence allowed*. It's a joke. Get it?

Having only seen only the trailer (explanation to come) I can say this: Stein hammers on the theme of people losing their jobs for pushing creationism. Here are some instances from previous issues of *The North Texas Skeptic*:

Witness Nancy Bryson told the story of how she lost her position as head of the Department of Science and Mathematics at Mississippi University for Women after she spoke out against evolution in 2003. After that, she said, other faculty members would slip into her office after hours to talk with her about the situation, saying that it was "not safe" to talk openly.

California high school teacher Roger DeHart testified that administrators reassigned him from biology to earth science because he had been telling students about what he called the "misrepresentation" of evolution as an explanation for life. When the controversy eventually forced DeHart to move to a different school, he was warned by one of his new colleagues, "I'll be keeping an eye on you."¹

Rather than keep you in suspense, DeHart ultimately transferred to teaching at a religious school and became a spokesman for the Discovery Institute.

Guillermo Gonzalez, an Iowa State University astronomer allegedly denied tenure because of his belief in intelligent design, has announced his plans to sue the university.

Religious conservatives have rushed to his aid, and the Discovery Institute – an intelligent design think tank to which Gonzalez belongs – released email excerpts of tenure discussions that suggest the university's decision was based on Gonzalez's beliefs, not his science.²

EVENTS CALENDAR

April Program

Saturday 12 April 2008

2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit
Management

2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Rodrigo Neely will discuss mind-body medicine for the April program. Neely is a neuroscience major at UTD

NTS Social Dinner & Board Meeting

Saturday 19 April 2008

7 p.m.

Don Mexico

12225 Greenville Avenue in
Dallas

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need to reserve a table.

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So, these unfortunates promoted intelligent design and were *expelled*, because there's no *intelligence* allowed. Hence the title.

Let's give Stein his due. Where intelligence is concerned, this guy has legs. After schooling with Carl Bernstein, Goldie Hawn and Sylvester Stallone, he graduated with honors from Columbia University (economics), and he attended Yale Law School with Hillary Clinton. Only, Ben Stein graduated as valedictorian.

Then it was teaching at Pepperdine University followed by a career in showbiz. He was Ferris Bueller's economics teacher, and later he created a hit TV show, *Win Ben Stein's Money*. There's a lot more, and we only have four sheets of paper.

Just when we are beginning to think Ben Stein has a lock on smart, we learn more about what goes on in his head. For one, he has the impression there is a strong link between "Darwinism" and Nazism, Communism and a host of evils, including imperialism:³

Darwin offered the most compelling argument yet for Imperialism. It was neither good nor bad, neither Liberal nor Conservative, but simply a fact of nature. In dominating Africa and Asia, Britain was simply acting in accordance with the dictates of life itself. He was the ultimate pitchman for Imperialism.

And further:

Darwinism is still very much alive, utterly dominating biology. Despite the fact that no one has ever been able to prove the creation of a single distinct species by Darwinist means, Darwinism dominates the academy and the media. Darwinism also has not one meaningful word to say on the origins of

organic life, a striking lacuna in a theory supposedly explaining life.

So, we get a hint at what to expect from *Expelled*. Sorry, a hint is all you are going to get. The movie comes out 18 April, and until then it's previews by invitation only. Just ask biologist P. Z. Myers.

Two evolutionary biologists — P. Z. Myers of the University of Minnesota, Morris, and Richard Dawkins of Oxford — tried to go to the movies at the Mall of America in Minneapolis Thursday evening. Dr. Dawkins got in. Dr. Myers did not.⁴

Myers and Dawkins were in Minneapolis for a convention of atheists when they thought they might want to see a pre-release viewing of *Expelled*. After all, they both appeared in the movie, having been interviewed during the film's production.

Only, Myers and Dawkins thought they were being interviewed for a film about religion and science called *Crossroads*. It would appear the more things stay the same, the more things change. Including topics and titles.

This is not the first time Dawkins has been hoodwinked by those mischievous creationists.

As we reported back in 1997 an Australian film crew came to Oxford to interview him. Part way through the session, the interviewer started playing “stump the skeptic,” and Dawkins realized he had seriously misunderstood the aim of the conversation. Gotcha!⁵

In any event, Myers registered himself plus some family and friends and Dawkins as guests and showed up at the Mall of America for an evening of enlightenment. Myers missed the enlightenment.

A security guard at the theater disinvited Dr. Myers and allowed the others to enter. Here is what Myers missed:

...a defense of intelligent design, an ideological cousin of creationism. People who have seen the movie say it also suggests that there is a link between the theory of evolution and ideas like Nazism, something Dr. Dawkins called “a major outrage.”⁶

Why did Dawkins make the cut and Dr. Myers did not? Ask Mark Mathis.

Mark Mathis, a producer of the film who attended the screening, said that “of course” he had recognized Dr. Dawkins, but allowed him to attend because “he has handled himself fairly honorably, he is a guest in our country and I had to presume he had flown a long way to see the film.”⁷

Past that point, America ran out of hospitality.

Mr. Mathis said in an interview that he had confronted Dr. Dawkins in the question and answer period after the screening and that Dr. Dawkins withered. “These people who own the academic establishment and who have great friends in the media — they are not accustomed to having a level, open playing field,” Mr. Mathis said. “I watched a man who has been a large figure, an imposing figure, I watched this man shrink in front of my eyes.”⁸

That would have been something to see, indeed. I predict Mr. Mathis has rather too large an opinion of his own energies.

According to Dawkins, “Mr. Mathis said ‘enemies’ were attempting to interfere with the film.” Dawkins also had remarks about how public relations might better be handled.

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Eugenie Scott, director of the National Center for Science Education, a group that opposes the teaching of creationist ideas in public school classrooms, said in an interview that her organization was setting up a Web site to counter the arguments made in the film.

Dr. Scott said she and other supporters of the teaching of evolution have been having “a horselaugh” over the events as Dr. Myers recounted them, immediately, on his blog, Pharyngula.⁹

She said it was “just tacky” that the producers barred Dr. Myers from the screening, but added, “I don’t think it’s inappropriate for us to have a good laugh at the creationists’ expense.”

Dr. Dawkins said the hoopla has been “a gift” to those who oppose creationism. “We could not ask for anything better,” he said.¹⁰

Dawkins at *Expelled* is creating some interesting buzz on the Web. Surprisingly, Discovery Institute chairman Bruce Chapman in the Evolution News blog tells us Dawkins *crashed* the showing in Minneapolis.

Dawkins apparently acknowledged that he had not been invited and did not have a ticket. A sophomoric side to his ideological campaign is thus revealed.

Dawkins, understandably is nervous about this film, among other reasons because Ben Stein has him on camera acknowledging that life on Earth may, indeed, have been intelligently designed, but that it had to have been accomplished by space aliens! This is hilarious, of course, because Dawkins is death on intelligent design. But it turns out that that view applies only if it includes the possibility that the designer might be God.¹¹

Oops again. What happened to the notion Intelligent Design is not religiously motivated.

Creationists are on the move again in Florida, trying to get around a recent decision to use the E word in biology classes. Stein has taken his film there, showing it around to support the cause.

Stein said his documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* shows that the academic freedom bill is needed.

“If there were complete freedom of speech, I don’t think this bill would be necessary,” he said. “There are plenty of people who ask what seem to be innocent, sensible questions about the flaws and gaps and lacunae in Darwinism and they get severely punished for it.”

Stein said he didn’t think the bill was aimed at “protecting” Intelligent Design. One of the drafters of the legislation, John Stemberger, president of the evangelical Florida Family Policy Council, said Intelligent Design can’t be taught, though “criticisms” of evolution could.¹²

The Miami Herald-Tribune blog provides some insight into *Expelled*:

The introduction to Stein’s film shows a series of provocative images as he narrates.

A fetus appears on the screen as Stein talks about Darwinists who want people to believe humans are the result of a clash between mud and lightning. The intro also uses footage of Adolph Hitler to demonstrate what Stein views as a stifling of free speech. Stein interviews scientists complaining about being ostracized for challenging Darwinism. And all

the while he writes Do Not Question Darwinism Authority on a chalkboard over and over again like a punished student.¹³

Time out for a reality check.

What is Ben Stein talking about, and what are all those creationists asking for? Forget about mud and lightning and Hitler. They say they want academic freedom. Freedom to do what?

They say they want freedom to discuss alternatives to evolution. Could one of these alternatives be Intelligent Design? If you guessed yes, you are on a roll. Could one of these alternatives be space aliens? Possibly. Explanations from other religions? Let’s not get crazy here.

Creationists are on the move again in Florida, trying to get around a recent decision to use the E word in biology classes. Stein has taken his film there, showing it around to support the cause.

When the creationists finally find themselves face to face with the rebuttal of the stupid alternative (see above), they like to back into their second line of defense. They want students to learn about arguments against evolution. OK, that seems to work. What could be more fair?

Ah, reality again.

What the creationists are really saying is they have no evidence and have neither the funding nor the influence to convince the American public to abandon evolution. Lacking that, they want the American taxpayer to pick up the tab, and they want to use the power of the public schools and the authority of the public school teacher with the American flag in the background to make the argument they have neither the evidence nor the respectability to make. What could be more fair than that?

Skeptics, let’s give it to Ben Stein. Intelligent Design never had a better advocate or slicker marketing engine. Nobody does it like Hollywood. Just take in the Web site.

Skeptically trip over to *Expelled*’s Web presence and please be impressed. It’s an anti-evolution-Ben Stein full court press. There are movie trailers, t-shirts, press resources and banners. I plan to get the DVD when it comes out. Unless you are a Ben Stein junkie, save your cash and borrow my copy. But not my t-shirt. Call me psychic, but I predict this will become a collector’s item. Here’s the link. Enjoy:

<http://www.expelledthemovie.com/home.php>



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Skeptics in Hollywood

by John Blanton

Who would believe it? The NTS has gone Hollywood.

With three of us out in (North) Hollywood and up to no good, we decided to drop in on the Center for Inquiry West. Good idea.

Among other attractions the Center features the Steve Allen Theater, a grand venue for jazz, comedy, cartoons and skeptical gatherings. It's named after the great entertainer and noted skeptic, and the hospitality makes being far from home immensely bearable.

We sipped wine, munched cookies and took in a presentation on vertebrate evolution given by a retired zoo guide. I was glad to insert a small contribution into the jar. Here is a partial schedule:



Skeptics Barbara Neuser and Greg Aicklen go over notes at the Center for Inquiry West.

Freethinkers, Toastmasters

2-4 p.m. second and fourth Saturdays
Martin Ross 818-766-9028

Skeptic's Book Club

7 p.m. second Wednesdays
Sheri Andrews at
Put CFI|BOOK CLUB on the subject line

If you go:

CFI West and the Steve Allen Theater
4773 Hollywood Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90027
<http://www.cfiwest.org>



North Texas Skeptics

Future Meeting Dates

May 17, 2008

June 21, 2008

Letters

So, what's bothering you? Your girlfriend discovered you're a creationist and gave you back your ring? You just learned you've overdosed on a homeopathic remedy, and you're wondering what your children will look like? Is that what's on your mind?

Then unload on us. We don't have all the answers. We're not *psychic*. But maybe your letter will reach a real psychic. It could *be* the truth really *is* out there.

Here are some rules:

Do keep, stay on topic, and please limit your novel to about 1000 words. Of course, if what you have to say is true, that will help a lot. If not, we've seen that, too.

What works best is e-mail. U.S. post works, also, but that will make us have to retype your letter into our computer.

Oh, yes. We need your real name. And your address. We will print your name but not your address. We may even contact you to make sure you are who you say you are. Did I mention we are skeptics.

Send to:

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Carrollton, TX 75011-1794
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Skeptical news page

What's going on? We're glad you asked. Thanks to the modern miracle of the WWW, you can check out current events on the Skeptical News page.

We don't write the stuff. We just trawl the Internet scooping up news of skeptical interest. It's all posted at the link below.

We keep a front page with the most recent news, and when that gets full we save it off to an archive. Just click on the News Back Issues link to see a reverse chronology of past articles. Practically all article have links to the original source or to relevant pages.

If Skeptical News seems to have an ungodly share of creationism and alternative medicine, that's because there's a lot of it out there. If you think we are leaving out your favorite news, then it's up to you to clue us in. We aim to please.

Here's the link:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news.htm>



The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

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Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.bobpark.org/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

PERPETUUM MOBILE: THIS YEAR LIKE EVERY YEAR.

I probably missed a few, but I estimate that every year I see about five perpetual motion machine claims. You may recall Steorn, the Dublin company that assembled a jury of scientists to evaluate its 2006 claim of generating free energy from “rotating magnets”. In 2007 the company went belly-up. The first one this year is the Perepiteia invented by Thane Heins of Almonte, Ontario, who fits the mold perfectly. The 46-year old Heins is not scientist; he dropped out of an electronics program, but earned a chef’s diploma. The secret? “Rotating magnets.” His wife took the children and left over his obsession with Perepiteia. “I have mild dyslexia and don’t do well in math,” Heins told the Toronto Star, “so I don’t do well in school.” But wait, two weeks ago an MIT Electrical Engineering Professor, Marcus Zahn agreed to view a demonstration. Heins held a permanent magnet a few centimeters from an induction motor - and it speeded up. Wow! The Toronto Star contacted Zahn, who said it surprised him. WN is trying to reach Zahn.

NCCAM: JOSEPHINE BRIGGS NAMED DIRECTOR.

The second Director of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, she replaces

Stephen Straus who died last year and is expected to continue his policy of rigorous science. Asked by Science if anything that works had come out of CAM, she paused and replied that, “the tai chi for shingles was very nice.”

OTHER DIMENSIONS: THE GOVERNMENT’S UFO COVERUP.

I was invited this week to join a panel of “experts” on “It’s Your Call with Lynn Doyle,” an Emmy Award-winning, viewer-interactive news talk show on the Comcast Cable Television Network. The subject was “Are we alone?” The object was to increase advertising revenue by pandering to a public that lives in a mythical world. I was the token scientist; Ted Schick, a philosophy professor from Muhlenberg, was the other rationalist. Then there was a delusional M.D. who saw lights she couldn’t explain over Phoenix, and the delusional head of the Paradigm Research Group, devoted to exposing the imaginary UFO cover-up. But the “experts” hardly mattered; the stars were the callers, with tales of strange lights and space aliens who can walk through walls. Is that really possible? “Of course it is,” a caller explained, “quantum physics has proven it.” The aliens, another cautioned, may be in another dimension – “there are eleven you know.” What have we done?

MIRACLES: THERE ARE NONE IN SCIENCE.

The morning ABC News had an a commercial for the Oprah Winfrey Show about a guest on her show today, an NFL player who had a serious injury and was told he would never walk again. He now walks fine. She said it was a “miracle.” She uses the word a lot, but there are no miracles in science. The correct word is “misdiagnosis.”



Bob Park can be reached via email at whatsnew@bobpark.org

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Application for Membership

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