



The North Texas

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Expelled versus Flunked Out

by John Blanton

In a previous issue I cooked up a cute response to Ben Stein's anti-evolution movie, *Expelled*. I used the term *Flunked Out*, instead. The idea is these creationists are so dumb they simply flunked out instead of being *expelled*. Of course, everybody else jumped on this line after it appeared in the NTS newsletter.

Well, not so fast.

The alternative to *Expelled* was so transparent it must have taken copywriters around the world about five seconds to grasp the obvious. So, there isn't a lot of originality going to waste here. But it does make a good story, and there is a lot of news about *Expelled* and *Flunked Out* flying around the Web. Here is some of it.

The National Center for Science Education has a Web site devoted to *Expelled*. The site is *ExpelledExposed*,¹ and it gets into the Hitler thing and the linking of science and atheism, and it also takes a look at the central theme of the film. Specifically, that theme is: Honest professionals who support creationism get expelled—fired.

Expelled tells the stories of six respectable people who were unduly persecuted for supporting creationism. *ExpelledExposed* takes note that these stories are not quite so straight.

Richard Sternberg

Expelled claims that [Richard] Sternberg was "terrorized" and that "his life was nearly ruined" when, in 2004, as editor of *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, he published a pro-intelligent design article by Stephen C. Meyer.²

It would appear Sternberg favors creationism, and he used his voluntary and unpaid position to publish the Meyer paper without submitting it to review by the other editors. For that, Richard Sternberg apparently suffered terror and ruin.

If this kind of terror and ruin is the worst our country's enemies can inflict on us, then bring them on.

EVENTS CALENDAR

June Program

Saturday 21 June 2008
2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Subject of June's program to be announced later.

NTS Social Dinner & Board Meeting

Saturday 28 June
7 p.m.
Don Mexico
12225 Greenville Avenue in
Dallas

Let us know if you are coming. We need to reserve a table. Let us know if you are coming. We need to reserve a table.

NTS Hotline: 214-335-9248

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First, Sternberg did not lose his job with the PBSW. He resigned six months prior to publication of the Meyer paper, and official communications with BSW remained cordial throughout.

PBSW did retract the Meyer paper in embarrassment, which must have caused Sternberg his own embarrassment. See how cruel people can be?

While Sternberg did keep his job at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and his (unpaid) position at the Smithsonian Institution was renewed for another three years in 2006, his life was "ruined." He lost his office at the Smithsonian, and he had to turn in his keys.

Not so fast, Ben Stein. Not only did Sternberg lose his office, so did another researcher unconnected with creationism. They both had to move, because another department wanted the space. Both researchers were offered other office space. Sternberg declined the first offer, but accepted another office that was offered to him. Ruined!

His keys were confiscated. The Smithsonian likely sold them for scrap. They gave *everybody* 21st century key cards, instead. Including Sternberg. Ruined again!

Richard Sternberg needs to get over it. Take a week off and hit the beach.

Guillermo Gonzalez

This guy *did* lose his job. Actually, he kept his job, but it lost its luster when he failed to gain tenure as a professor at Iowa State University. Failure to obtain tenure usually, but not always, is followed by leaving. We have previously reported on the plight of Professor Gonzalez.³ His colleagues in the astronomy department voted him off the island when he applied for tenure to make his job permanent.

Expelled would have us believe Gonzalez was a rising star in his field. They cite an article in *Weekly Standard*:

He has published 68 peer-reviewed articles, which beat the ISU department's standard for tenure by 350 percent. He has also co-authored a standard astronomy textbook, published by Cambridge University Press, which his faculty colleagues use in their own classes.⁴

The NCSE takes a different view, citing the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

...a closer look at Mr. Gonzalez's case raises some questions about his recent scholarship and whether he has lived up to his early promise. ...

Under normal circumstances, Mr. Gonzalez's publication record would be stellar and would warrant his earning tenure at most universities, according to Mr. Hirsch [a scholar who analyzed the publication record]. But Mr. Gonzalez completed the best scholarship, as judged by his peers, while doing

postdoctoral work at the University of Texas at Austin and at the University of Washington, where he received his Ph.D. His record has trailed off since then.⁵

The NCSE also notes Gonzalez's academic output dipped the more as his involvement in creationism soared.

Repeating what we said in a previous issue, the tenure committee has to decide whether they want to work with a person for a very long time. And there are only so many times you can show up with your fly unzipped before you are no longer invited to the party.

Caroline Crocker

Here is the summation from the NCSE:

Expelled claims that Caroline Crocker was fired because she mentioned Intelligent Design in a class she was teaching. However, the evidence says otherwise. While there may have been grounds to fire her with cause, Crocker was not fired and continued to teach her course after student complaints; in addition, she did not just "mention" intelligent design, but rather was teaching demonstrably false creationist material. We do not know for certain why Crocker was not re-hired for her non-tenure track job. Such positions carry no promise that contracts will be renewed. Only tenure-track jobs come with such an expectation, and only tenured professors have a guarantee of employment.⁶

Expelled asserts Crocker was blacklisted:

Not only did she lose her job at George Mason, this highly qualified researcher suddenly found herself blacklisted, unable to find a job anywhere.⁷

We should all be so blacklisted. Crocker was able to get another job at Northern Virginia Community College, where she apparently continued to teach false science, including creationism. A note on Wikipedia informs us that NVCC did not renew her contract, and Crocker is not currently teaching at a mainstream school.⁸

Also, Crocker's claim that "I mentioned Intelligent Design on a couple of slides but I did not teach creationism" needs another look. A video on the Coral Ridge Ministries Web site has Crocker exhibiting the teaching materials she used.⁹ Very few are shown in the clip, but they are choice creationism propaganda. After claiming to take great pains to give a balanced view of both sides and to present only the scientific evidence, Crocker went even further.

One slide is about Charles Darwin. It carefully notes he "Failed at medical school," "Had some training as a clergyman," "Rich kid who enjoyed partying, drinking, and gambling," "Went to the Galapagos Islands" and "Father was not pleased." Crocker conveniently did not mention Darwin was one of the most prominent scientists produced by the 19th century.

Another slide talks about Archaeopteryx and the horse. The slide emphasizes there were birds (fossils) in the same "layer" as Archaeopteryx, and Archaeopteryx was really a bird and not a "reptobird." "Only one complete fossil and has been questioned as a fraud."

The slide also states that "Eohippus is found in the same layers as the modern horse," and it "is same as modern-day hyrax."

Crocker would have flunked on science alone with this slide.

Contrary to what Crocker may think, scientists, recognize Archaeopteryx as a bird with traits left over from reptile ancestors. The statement about one complete fossil should have been elaborated to mention that additional fossils have been found, and the assertion that the fossil is a fraud has been disproved.

Additionally, scientists agree Eohippus is the ancestor of the modern horse, and serious zoologists know the hyrax is more closely related to elephants.

A third slide states "Scientists are Confused." And more:

- Scientists have differing opinions on this issue. Intelligent Design model is gaining ground.
- Gould and Eldridge [sic] (evolutionists): "There is no validation for the position that speciation causes significant morphological change."
- Werner von Braun (rocket scientist), "It is unscientific to teach evolution only."

Scientists might be confused by Crocker's presentation, because the scientific consensus strongly supports evolution and opposes Intelligent Design. Our military generals should be so confused.

The Gould and Eldredge quote is a crock (wrong and completely out of context). As a creationist, Crocker can get a pass. Any reputable academic would have to take a serious hit over such a crack.

Werner von Braun was a pioneer in rocket engineering, and he made huge contributions to this country's space program.

His expertise related to modern biology is also well known. Except to me and to the scientific community.

Crocker now heads up the Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness Center,¹⁰ where she can address her real interests. Twenty-first century science is not one of these.

Robert Marks

Baylor University became concerned that a Web site on one of its servers might suggest a connection between the school and Intelligent Design. Robert Marks is Distinguished Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, but the site gave all the appearance of promoting Intelligent Design. Baylor shut down the site and negotiated with Marks for some changes. Baylor wanted, among other things, the removal of anything suggesting a Baylor laboratory. Marks declined, and he now hosts his site on somebody else's server.¹¹

Professor Marks continues to teach his engineering courses and to draw his full salary. Nobody seems to suggest his career has received any harm.

Pamela Winnick

Expelled makes the odd claim that supporting Intelligent Design can be a career killer for a journalist. The video cites the case of Pamela Winnick:

I was not taking a position in favor of creationism, I was writing about intelligent design.... And having merely written on a subject was enough to put you on this blacklist. If you give any credence to it whatsoever, which means just writing about it, you're just finished as a journalist.¹²

That was eight years ago, and Pamela Winnick no longer writes for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Possibly, a number of her submissions that leaned in favor of creationism caused editors to question her objectivity. While *Expelled* and the Discovery Institute may think that objectivity means showing equal favor toward science and Intelligent Design, the fact remains that ID is quackery, and evolution is well-demonstrated science. Responsible journalists need to make this clear.

A quick search illustrates what it means to be *finished* and *blacklisted*. Google points us to articles by Winnick published in The Wall Street Journal Online (2006) and The Weekly Standard (2005). A recent book *A Jealous God: Science's Crusade Against Religion* is selling on Amazon and is being promoted by the Conservative Book Service. The North Texas Skeptics Web site has an Amazon link to the book so skeptics can get their own copy. When is it going to be my turn to be *finished* and *blacklisted*?

Michael Engor

Here is what *Expelled* has to say:

When neurosurgeon Michael Egnor wrote an essay for high school students saying doctors didn't need to study evolution in order to practice medicine, the Darwinists were quick to try and exterminate this new threat.¹³

Few others saw Engor as a *new* threat. The majority of physicians, who are comfortable with evolution, have seen this kind of stuff before. Some are not pleased that a fellow of their profession will use the respectability of the white coat to promote quack ideas. Physicians "exterminated" this threat by speaking up. What a concept.

The future of *Expelled*

Expelled seems to have finished its run at your neighborhood theater. The Canadian release of *Expelled* is set for 27 June, but examination of the *Expelled* Web site and that of its producer, Premise Media, does not reveal any show dates in this country. If you missed your chance to see the video, you may have to wait for the DVD. When it's out we will have the link.



References

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Shakin' it up in SOCAL

by Greg Aicklen

The California arm of the NTS is still going strong, and what better place to learn about those mighty expressions of Mother Nature's disdain for humanity – earthquakes? The wine was good the last time we dropped in, and it's still free, so we couldn't resist another trip to the Center for Inquiry West for an excellent presentation by Eric Ponders of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

John Blanton, Barbara Neuser, and I dragged our engineering colleague from Texas, Alan Hochstein, down to Hollywood Blvd. for an informative look at the science of earthquakes, how they're studied, the damage temblors cause, and some of the myths that surround prediction and earthquake influences. Oh, and we got the definitive answer to the perennial question: could California drop off the continent and sink into the ocean? Can you guess?



Alan Hochstein, Barbara Neuser, John Blanton at CFI West

Ponders gave what was easily the best technical presentation I've seen in a long time; in short order the audience was up to speed on what earthquakes are, why they happen, and why LA is the absolute worst place to be when "the big one" hits (the City of Angels is built on land so removed from the bedrock beneath that the entire area shakes and wobbles long after surrounding lands have stabilized.) Then it was time to take questions from the audience and address some myths and urban legends.

What we learned: don't stand in the doorway (unless your home is made of adobe); outside, away from buildings, is the best place to be but when the quake hits you won't be able to get there; get under a heavy table or desk if you can – it may



Erik Ponders explains earthquake myths

keep you alive long enough for the searchers to find you; there's precious little evidence to support the contention that animals can predict earthquakes, but if they could it would only buy you seconds to get to "safety" – and then you'd have to be watching your pets and attuned to the possibility of an imminent natural disaster; California will *not* "fall into the ocean!"

Why won't the left coast sink into the Pacific? Because California is made up of lighter rock than the Pacific plate that's burrowing underneath; California would float! Still, I'm glad my home (and heart) is in Texas where the only dangers are tornadoes, floods, and creationists. □

Skeptics in Las Vegas

by John Blanton

This is another in our series on travel for skeptics.

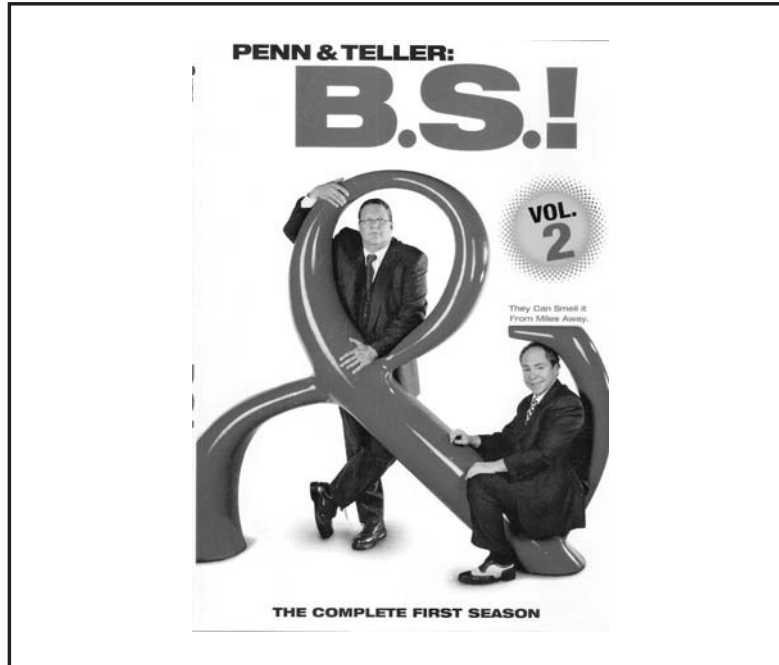
Magicians Penn and Teller are world-class skeptics, and for the past five years their act has been playing at the Rio in Las Vegas. During the same time they have also been starring in their own show on the Showtime cable channel. In case you've missed the program up to now, you can get past seasons on DVD. An abbreviated list of titles from the first season gives a clue of what to expect.

Episode 7 simultaneously takes on the pseudo science of feng shui and myths about bottled water. In the feng shui

segment multiple advisers are brought in to assess the décor of a Southern California house. The results are revealing, as you might expect. Multiple experts arrive at as many conclusions, with the result that the furniture continually gets rearranged as the test progresses.

This episode also throws light on the subject of bottled water. Users interviewed expressed the feeling that bottled water is more pure—has fewer pollutants than tap water. This belief turned out to have little support, and that was not all: Customers were consistently unable to distinguish between pricey water from a bottle and water from the municipal supply. In a sidewalk test, drinkers often preferred the tap over the bottle. At a trendy restaurant all the bottles were filled from a hose, and customers raved at the high-end tap stuff. Narrator Penn Jillette also noted the source of several brands of water is ultimately a municipal supply. Everest water, for example, does not come from the Himalayas. It comes from an industrial plant in Corpus Christi, and its label reveals Everest starts life at a tap.

Episode 8, about creationism, starts with Penn giving the lowdown on evolution after which he asks Teller to give the argument for creationism. Teller, who has no first name and never speaks, responds by swatting Penn with a large bible. And that seems to be the theme for remainder of the program.



Creationists continually put forward their belief in the bible as their argument for teaching creationism along with or in place of evolution. Many also cite “Intelligent Design” as an alternative to “creationism,” but their comments reveal they are not confused. Intelligent Design means creationism.

The centerpiece of this episode is the anti-evolution push in the Marietta, Georgia, public schools, which was going on about the time the program was produced. A common theme of the anti-evolutionists is “This is a democracy, and the majority wants creationism.” Penn and

Teller respond by taking a vote on the unknown sex of a rabbit they have on the show. The lesson is: the outcome of the vote does not determine the sex of the rabbit.

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

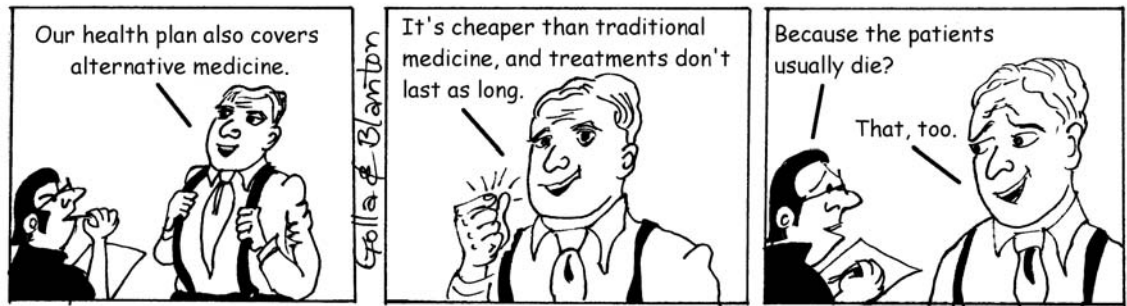
encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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At a trendy restaurant all the bottles were filled from a hose, and customers raved at the high-end tap stuff.

Depressingly, the Cobb County school board voted to put a cautionary sticker in the biology books pointing out that evolution is only a theory (and presumably should not be trusted). Even more depressing, this outcome is far from isolated in the U.S.

Episode 10 is about ESP, extrasensory perception. For the purpose of this show, spoon bending is also included.

Somebody is giving classes on spoon bending. Unlike some bending episodes we have seen, this class actually bends spoons. OK, they use their hands, but we shouldn't get picky where leading edge science is involved.

There's also remote viewing and another class. What used to require a week to teach can now be taught in a weekend. Given the money. Russell Targ, one of the RV godfathers (Harold Puthoff is the other) appears. RV studies at Stanford Research Institute consumed \$20 million of our tax money about thirty years ago when the CIA got interested. Skeptic Ray Hyman ex-

amined the research and disclosed his results. Remote viewing is a dud. That was the end of the CIA funding. James Randi gives the bad news that he could have provided the same result for \$1.75.

Psychic "detectives" pop up whenever there is a high profile crime mystery. Marc Klaas put up with them when his daughter was abducted and killed. Now he appears on the video to remind us these people provide no help in such cases, and Los Angeles police psychologist Kris Mohandie relates how working with psychics actually consumes valuable police time at a critical phase of these cases.

Stephen Walton is a professor of physics at the State University of California at Northridge. His review of ESP shows that, while initial studies by Joseph B. Rhine at Duke University showed promise, continued research over the last 70 years has demonstrated that any success at mind reading and such was due to chance.

Those are a few of the episodes of interest to skeptics. Season One of B.S. contains thirteen programs spread over three DVDs. You can order any or all of the first five seasons from Amazon.com through the NTS Web site. The NTS gets a commission. Here is a link:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/merchandise/video.htm>

If you are out to Las Vegas, make Penn and Teller at the Rio one of your stops. You can order tickets in advance. Log onto Harrah's Web site at <https://www.harrahs.com> and follow the links down to the Las Vegas Rio. For a limited time you can also use the P&T link on our home page at

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

Tickets are \$75 and \$85 directly from the Rio. Use your credit card on-line and use the same card to print your tickets at the kiosk in the hotel lobby.

P&T don't pull any punches talking about B.S. They call it what it is, and they call its perpetrators what they are. The show and the video are not for small children or creationists.



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