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Sound and Sight

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Entertainment editor Carl Hoover riffs on movies, theater, media and, well, stuff. Brazos Living reporter Wendy Gragg comments on music, television and anything else that bubbles up in pop culture. Brazos Living editor Catherine Atkinson dishes on movies, music and dining out.

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The entry titled "'Expelled' muddled mish-mash," and any of the comments about it.

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"Expelled" muddled mish-mash

By Carl Hoover | Friday, April 18, 2008, 02:52 PM

The first screening of Ben Stein's documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* at Starplex Galaxy 16 on Friday misaligned the on-screen image, lopping off the top part of the head for many of the film's personalities.

Turns out that was a fitting metaphor, as trying to follow Stein's logical threads through a labyrinth of straw men, red herrings, guilt by association, quote harvesting, gotcha interviews and *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore because of this) associations may cause your head to explode. It's a propaganda form highly polished by director/activist Michael Moore on the other end of the political spectrum.

Ostensibly a look at academic freedom, or the alleged lack thereof, at schools and universities (including Baylor University) on the issue of intelligent design, *Expelled* shows its true hand midway through the film when it zeros in on militant atheist evolutionists like Richard Dawkins and P.Z. Meyers who actively and publically attack any belief in God.

That's the real issue of *Expelled* - atheist scientists vs. God - even though it wholly undercuts statements by intelligent design researchers early in the film that ID has nothing to do with religion. Intelligent design, by proponents' definition, is the study of patterns in nature that indicate an intent or purpose that's not mere randomness.

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Stein, a conservative spokesman and actor best known for his *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* role as a droning teacher and as the smart host of the game show "Win Ben Stein's Money," frames *Expelled* as an exploration of academic freedom.

Given that debate and free exploration of ideas is a linchpin of American identity, Stein goes to the cases of such scientists and researchers as Richard Sternberg, Guillermo Gonzalez, Caroline Crocker and Baylor's engineering professor Robert Marks, who claimed their institutions and professional colleagues punished them or ruined their careers once they dared to suggest ID's validity.

It's telling, however, that any opposing explanations of the circumstances in question come toward the film's end and either are dismissed or used as a "gotcha" moment, as in the case of Baylor engineering dean Ben Kelley. Kelley denies that Marks' work in ID-friendly studies led to Baylor's demand that he move his Web page off the university server, only to have an image of a memo sent to Marks that cites "intelligent design" as a concern pop up on screen.

Although William Demski, a former Baylor professor, and Baylor engineering professor Walter Bradley are among the ID advocates interviewed in *Expelled*, there's no mention of their Baylor connections - or controversies - in the film.

Stein interviews more than a score of scientists, administrators and journalists on the evolution-ID debate. Unfortunately, most are reduced to a series of pullout quotes.

Those coming to *Expelled* hoping to learn something about any research behind ID, a fair appraisal of weaknesses in evolutionary theories or - perhaps the film's most glaring and telling omission - how Christian evolutionists reconcile faith and science will leave sorely disappointed. The latter is quickly dismissed by a chain of quotes that brand them as liberal Christians and duped by militant atheists in their efforts to get religion out of the classroom.

Even though interviewees on opposite sides of the discussion qualify their statements with "it depends on how you define evolution," *Expelled* conveniently blurs the definitions of evolution, biological evolution, Darwinism, neo-Darwinism and origin of life.

Stein also frames and underlines certain comments with visual clips from such movies as *Inherit the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Planet of the Apes*, black-and-white 1950s educational movies and Cold War propaganda films with marching Communist armies.

Viewers also are treated to Stein's argument that evolution leads to disbelief in God, the loss of ethical and moral standards, eugenics, Nazism and the Holocaust, Planned Parenthood and abortion, before returning to the issue of academic freedom and equating science's resistance to ID as a Berlin Wall that needs tearing down.

I kid you not. Then again, I'm part of the Academy-Organizations-Media-Courts cabal that works to enforce evolution as accepted belief. Stein says that, too.

It's clear *Expelled* will reinforce strongly held opinions on extreme sides of the religion-science question rather than explore the considerable middle ground - nay, the continent - that's there.

It's smoke, mirrors, a lot of heat and little light - although the hand of a creator is clearly in its design.

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Comments

By KDF

April 20, 2008 2:45 PM | [Link to this](#)

I have yet to see the movie, but I have all ready seen a couple of reviews. Carl, you dislike the movie and mention several reasons why. The Yahoo news entertainment writer wrote and explained why it was such a great movie. He also listed why it was so good.

Movie critics can come and go as far as I am concerned. One man's choice may be another's garbage. Bless you Carl on this Day of the Lord!!!!

By SRM

April 21, 2008 6:16 PM | [Link to this](#)

To quote Matt Lewis, a conservative commentator, "[T]his is a thought-provoking movie that is sure to arouse anger from the Left." And so it does. Hoover states it's a propaganda film on the polar opposite of those by Michael Moore. Yet the Left including Hollywood loved Moore's mockumentaries enough to give him an Academy Award for one. Go figure. Any chance Ben Stein will receive an Oscar for his movie?

By Robert Jacks

April 22, 2008 6:24 PM | [Link to this](#)

The reviews of *Expelled* all seem to be five stars or one. The reviewers, methinks, are viewing it through the lens of their ideology. I thought *Expelled* was the best film I have seen this decade. Do I arrive at this assessment using the lens of my ideology? You betcha. The whole premise of the film is that I should not suppress your right to be a left wing ideologue, nor you my right to be a virile insightful intellectual.

By JKW

April 23, 2008 1:33 AM | [Link to this](#)

As someone who considers himself a Christian and not a member of the so-called "Left," I am appalled by the mainstream Christian reaction to this film. Admirable though its message may be, most of its arguments are simultaneously slip-shod and antagonistic. That the other side resorts to similar tactics is no excuse. Quite the opposite. If we're right, then surely we can rise above such petty and counterproductive behavior.

It is foolish to suggest, as a commenter above does, that extremist propaganda is acceptable because propaganda exists on the opposite extreme. Any sincere and honest conservative should decry such reprehensibly-biased polemic, just as sincere and honest liberals speak out against the propaganda of Michael Moore (and many do).

The whole premise of the film is that I should not suppress your right to be a left wing ideologue, nor your right to be a virile insightful intellectual.

How someone can use a phrase like that and accuse someone *else* of being an ideologue in the same breath defies imagination. It is precisely this sort of unfair, slanted bomb-throwing, present in the very subtitle of the movie under discussion, that *Expelled* is promoting. By entering a serious, complex debate wielding a foregone conclusion and an a** of cheap shots, the movie (and its supporters) have no hope of bringing a respectful, fair and honest tone to this debate. I am tempted to wonder if they are any more interested in being respectful and fair towards their opponents than said opponents (as depicted in the movie) appear to be towards them. This is clearly not the way gain that respect.

Along the same lines, that we agree with the message of films like *Expelled* is not justification enough to compromise ourselves in their defense. As Christians, we must be our own harshest critics: First, because the highest standard is the only acceptable standard for a Christian. Second, because if we are not, then a very transparent double-standard will exist, and everyone will see it. Third, because if we do not examine everything we say and believe with the most intense level of scrutiny possible, eventually someone who does will come along and destroy it.

Expelled does not meet this high standard with respect to its argumentation ... and all of you would be quick to point that out if it supported the cause of Darwin instead. We cannot give it "a pass" just because we agree with it. That makes us look as though we care nothing for good scholarship. And, while Christians laud this film to the skies, everyone else is busily deconstructing its faulty arguments into the ground, making us look doubly foolish.

Perhaps the most damning source I can cite in support of my view is an excerpt from a statement made by the scientists of "Reasons To Believe," a Christian organization dedicated to the highest standards of both faith and science. Their view (the full text of which can be found [here](#) is summed up as follows:

"In Reasons To Believe's interaction with professional scientists, scientific institutions, universities, and publishers of scientific journals we have encountered no significant evidence of censorship, blackballing, or disrespect. As we have persisted in publicly presenting our testable creation model in the context of the scientific method, we have witnessed an increasing openness on the part of unbelieving scientists to offer their honest and respectful critique.

"Our main concern about *EXPULSED* is that it paints a distorted picture. It certainly doesn't match our experience. Sadly, it may do more to alienate than to engage the scientific community, and that can only harm our mission."

By KDF

April 23, 2008 10:11 PM | [Link to this](#)

All films like *EXPULSED* are going to support the left or right. That is how it is. My wife and I went last night. She thought it was great. I thought it was good.

The most dominant interview was with Dr Dawkins. He was quite flusturd by Mr Stein's questions. Dr Dawkins went to say there is no God, then intertained the possibility of an *Highly intelligent entity (out there in the universe - somewhere)*.*" Personally the interviews were "ask a question" listen for an answer. As to Michael Moore, never does an interviewee walk away due to set-up questions. <><

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