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Review: Baylor officials among those demonized in 'Expelled'

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**By Carl Hoover**

Tribune-Herald entertainment editor

Ben Stein's *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* ostensibly looks at academic freedom, or the alleged lack thereof, at schools and universities, including Baylor University, on the issue of intelligent design.

The conflict between Baylor and engineering professor Robert Marks over his Web site and its ID-friendly research — the reason he said the university ordered the site off its server — qualified to add Marks to the list of some seven to eight scientists and researchers *Expelled* says are victims of an entrenched academic hostility toward intelligent design.

Intelligent design, by proponents' definition, is the study of patterns in nature that indicate an intent or purpose that's not mere randomness.

*Expelled*, however, shows its true hand midway through the film when it zeros in on militant atheist evolutionists such as Richard Dawkins and P.Z. Meyers who actively and publicly attack any belief in God.

That's the real issue of *Expelled* — atheist scientists versus God — even though it wholly undercuts statements by intelligent design researchers early in the film that ID has nothing to do with religion.

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.

Though Stein presents himself as a man of rational logic, his film's arguments are a rhetorical mishmash 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 that may cause your head to pop. It's a propaganda form highly polished by director/activist Michael Moore on the other end of the political spectrum.

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 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 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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