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From the Los Angeles Times

## DUST-UP

### Teach the controversy?

The Ben Stein documentary 'Expelled' posits a conspiracy to keep 'intelligent design' out of the classroom. Even if that case is exaggerated, is there an argument for considering some alternative theories that seem far-fetched?

April 16, 2008

*Today, Shermer and Lukianoff discuss efforts to include "intelligent design" and other such hypotheses in classroom curricula. Previously, they weighed allegations of instructor bias in college classrooms and debated what roles a school might have in the expressions of its students. Thursday and Friday, they'll discuss the extent to which teachers should accommodate ideological diversity and whether professors should get lifetime tenure.*

#### If you've got science, we'll talk

By Michael Shermer

Will anyone have the courage to stand up to Ben Stein and his money? Anyone? Anyone?

I will. I was interviewed by Stein in my office, am featured in his film "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed," saw a screening of it last month at the National Religious Broadcasters' convention (tellingly, a film allegedly about science education is being marketed to religious groups), and have written a thorough critique of it at [skeptical.com](http://skeptical.com) and [sciam.com](http://sciam.com) (see also [expelledexposed.com](http://expelledexposed.com)). Here I know of what I speak, and as such I can assure you of two things: First, the film is wrong in virtually every one of its factual claims about evolution and the alleged persecutions of those who challenge the theory, and second, viewers will be hoodwinked into believing all the lies for the same reason they were taken in by Michael Moore's films -- the power of filmic propaganda to trump facts and reason. Leni Riefenstahl and Joseph Goebbels would have praised "Expelled."

The facts are these: No one has ever been fired or denied tenure (or "expelled" from school) for challenging Darwinism or for promoting "intelligent design," or ID creationism. The details of each alleged case of persecution presented in the film can be found at the aforementioned websites, but take it from a former creationist (when I was an evangelical Christian) and current evolutionary theorist (I teach a course in the subject at Claremont Graduate University) that Darwinism always has been and continues to be challenged by scientists. In Charles Darwin's own time, of course, numerous books and articles were published critiquing his theory, and through the turn of the century there was still no underlying mechanism to explain how natural selection works and why so much skepticism remained. From the 1930s through the '60s, the neo-Darwinian synthesis and its many variants seriously revised many aspects of Darwin's original theory. In the '70s, Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge successfully remodeled Darwinian gradualism with their theory of punctuated equilibrium.

In the 1980s, Lynn Margulis overthrew neo-Darwinism in the microscopic world with her theory of symbiogenesis, demonstrating that random changes in DNA and natural selection alone do not lead to speciation (at a science conference I attended she said, "It was like confessing a murder when I discovered I was not a neo-Darwinist"). In the '90s, sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists battled Gould's and Richard Lewontin's belief that Darwinism cannot account for much of human psychology and culture. Currently, David Sloan Wilson's theory of group selection is making inroads into seriously modifying models of individual selection, and I even heard the highly respected evolutionary theorist William Provine (featured in "Expelled") tell an audience of scientists, "Natural selection does not shape an adaptation or cause a gene to spread over a population or really do anything at all."

What? How can this be? According to Stein, no one is allowed to doubt Darwinism, and yet scientific conferences, papers and books are full of challenges to the theory, all of which are taught in biology classes. What gives? Creationism, that's what. Despite the best efforts of the proponents of intelligent design to present their theory as pure science having nothing to do with religion, Stein has unwittingly debunked that myth in a film with a central thesis that intelligent design is a religious doctrine and that is why it is not taught. Because of that pesky establishment clause in the 1st Amendment to the Constitution, religion has been systematically expelled from classrooms to culture. Has it?

Of course not. Is there anyone in America who hasn't heard of intelligent design? These guys have created one of the most successful PR campaigns in the history of ideas, duping shills like Stein to pitch their case to the American public in hopes that no one will notice that their isn't a drop of science in ID. The reason ID isn't taught in science classes is because there is nothing to teach. Seriously. Nothing. Not a single experiment. No data. Not even a theory. As the ID proponent Paul Nelson (also featured in "Expelled") confessed: "Easily the biggest challenge facing the ID community is to develop a full-fledged theory of biological design. We don't have such a theory right now, and that's a problem. Without a theory, it's very hard to know where to direct your research focus. Right now, we've got a bag of powerful intuitions, and a handful of notions such as 'irreducible complexity' and 'specified complexity' -- but, as yet, no general theory of biological design."

So, Mr. Stein, and all you erstwhile ID proponents, when you have some actual science to present, we would be only too happy to consider it. We await your data.

*Michael Shermer is the publisher of Skeptic magazine ([skeptical.com](http://skeptical.com)), a monthly columnist for Scientific American, an adjunct professor at the School of Economics and Politics at Claremont Graduate University and the author of 10 books.*

#### How Ben Stein could really help students

By Greg Lukianoff

Don't hold back, Michael -- tell us what you really think!

I contacted the producers of "Expelled" on Wednesday and told them about this Dust-Up. They set me up alone in a Park Avenue theater in New York for an exclusive night screening of the film. I felt very fancy, indeed, but sat down wondering what it was going to be about. After all, having reviewed thousands of free-speech claims by college students over the years, I cannot remember one instance of a student being expelled for arguing for ID or against Darwinism.

I will try to sort through what I saw. The movie starts with images of the Berlin Wall and a string version of "All Along the Watchtower," followed closely by Johnny Cash's version of "Personal Jesus." It then highlights the cases of a researcher at the Smithsonian Institution and professors at Iowa State University, Baylor University and George Mason University who Stein alleges got in trouble in different ways for mentioning or defending ID. Next came interviews with scientists and representatives of the Discovery Institute, both for and against ID. The main "villain" of the film is introduced here: Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, ardent atheist and author of "The God Delusion."

The film then goes in a pretty disturbing direction, with images of the Berlin Wall and tanks turning to images of Adolf Hitler and his scientists exterminating the physically or mentally handicapped. Stein meets with the author of "From Darwin to Hitler" and then discusses how Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger and other Americans were leading proponents of eugenics. Next thing you know, Stein is at Dachau, where he says, "Evil can sometimes be rationalized by science," and strongly implies all this could happen again -- I guess if we don't reject Darwinism?

Stein leaves out the fact that there is quite a bit of difference between Social Darwinism (which he conflates throughout the movie with Darwinism) and current evolutionary theory. He also completely ignores that the other major faction of mass murderers in Europe -- the communists -- during the time of the Nazis rejected Darwinism and subscribed to the genetic theories of Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko's theories (for instance, that environmentally acquired characteristics could be passed down through genetics) were distinct from Darwin's, which the communists explicitly rejected as "capitalistic." And yet communists managed to kill millions without Darwin's help. "Expelled" then argues that Darwinism is bad because it devalues human life and that the rejection of ID is a threat to America itself.

The last major field trip of the film is to the remnants of the Berlin Wall. Stein once again equates the alleged conspiracy against ID to the building of the Berlin Wall and part of President Reagan's famous "tear down this wall." The ending of the film is supposed to be inspirational, with Stein arguing that "no lie can live forever" and ends with Stein repeating his famous "Anyone, anyone?" line from "Ferris Bueller's Day Off."

After one hour and 40 minutes, I was left a little perplexed as to what Stein was actually trying to say. America is heading toward death camps? Evolution is a lie? Dawkins does not believe in Ganesh or Allah?

But no matter what the point of the film was, my primary reaction to it was personal. Despite all of Stein's talk about honoring academic freedom and free speech, I had to wonder, where has he been all these years? As part of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, I have been fighting abuses of free speech on campuses and violations of academic freedom for most of this decade. I have seen literally thousands of examples of such abuses. And although FIRE has successfully fought hundreds of cases on behalf of wronged students and faculty, serious abuses persist. If Stein really cares about this fight, he needs to join it for real and not just on behalf of one allegedly forbidden argument.

If you are reading this, Mr. Stein, I ask you to please take a look at the cases I cited [yesterday](#). Please take a look at the violations against [religious students' rights](#) (including [banning "The Passion of the Christ"](#)), the gross violations of [due process](#), the crazy indoctrination of students, and the actual ideological litmus tests at schools as prestigious as Columbia University's Teachers College. Did you know that most colleges that FIRE surveys [maintain oppressive speech codes](#)? Did you know that many colleges maintain tiny and out-of-the-way free speech quarantines called speech zones? We could use some high-profile help here, Ben. With your power and influence you really could help bring a missing dose of liberty back to campuses. But if you only care about ID education, I suspect that you will only be preaching to people who already agree with you.

*Greg Lukianoff is a constitutional lawyer and the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ([thefire.org](#)). He is a frequent guest on national TV news programs and a blogger at the [Huffington Post](#).*

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