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Dust-Up Round 3! Ben Stein's Expelled

Posted April 16, 2008 | 06:33 PM (EST)



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Three whirlwind days of on-line debating at the *LA Times* "Dust-Up" feature and I am starting to forget what it was like to not to write columns all day long. Today's topic is sure to ruffle some feathers: Ben Stein's defense of intelligent design and his offensive against Darwinism in [Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed](#).

Scientific American's Michael Shermer wastes no time laying into the movie:

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.

Meanwhile I report:

Yesterday I contacted the people producing *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* and told them about this upcoming "Dust-Up." They set me up alone in a theater on Park Avenue for an exclusive night showing 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 "Intelligent Design" or against Darwinism.

And then I try my darnedest to explain the movie I just saw. My biggest revelation in this, however, was more personal than academic: if Ben Stein cares so much about free speech and academic freedom, where has he been all these years? I conclude:

If you are reading this, Ben Stein, I ask you 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 brainwashing of students, and the actual ideological litmus tests at schools as prestigious as Columbia's Teachers College. Did you know that most colleges 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 you will only be preaching to people who already agree with you.

Well, with the movie coming out on Friday, my guess is it will be like a narcotic to cable news and debate shows. My hope is that somewhere in the news coverage, the fact is mentioned that there are real and serious threats to free speech on college campuses that you may never hear about in a theater near you.

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