

Statement of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Regarding the Importance of the Integrity of Science as Depicted in Film

For more than a decade, the nonprofit American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has been working to build a constructive bridge between scientific and religious communities through its Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion and other programs. There also have been many efforts by religious leaders to accomplish the same goal. For example, more than 11,000 clergy have signed an open letter supporting the view that faith and science should be seen as complementary, not competing. The leadership of the United Church of Christ recently sent out a pastoral letter expressing a similar position.

We were therefore especially disappointed to learn that the producers of an intelligent design propaganda movie called “Expelled” are inappropriately pitting science against religion. This production badly misrepresents the scientific community as intolerant of dissent, when, in fact, respectful disagreement and questioning based on physical evidence represent the core of the scientific process.

AAAS further decries the profound dishonesty and lack of civility demonstrated by this effort. The movie includes interviews with scientists who report that they were deceived into appearing as part of such a production, and advance segments broadly depict those who accept evolution as racist and sympathetic to Nazis. Such generalized insults are untrue and grossly unfair to millions of scientists in the United States and worldwide who are working to cure disease, solve hunger, improve national security, and otherwise advance science to improve the quality of human life.

The multi-faceted modern science of evolution — inaccurately and derisively described in the movie as “Darwinism” — is based on a diverse and robust body of physical evidence, from fossilized bones to radiometric measurements of the ages of the Earth’s rocks. Such verifiable evidence explains how species gradually evolved on Earth, beginning with single-celled organisms approximately 3.5 billion years ago. Advance segments of the movie use selective and misleading details as well as manipulative, sometimes frightening film techniques such as the juxtaposition of Holocaust images with narrative related to evolution to present a highly inaccurate view of evolution.

Proponents of the intelligent design movement believe that an intelligent designer, rather than evolution, is responsible for key developments in the emergence of life. Repeated attempts to wedge this religious viewpoint into science classrooms — which is the underlying goal of this movie as well as legislation now pending in several states — have been divisive and damaging. We hope lawmakers will follow the course of Judge John Jones III, who ruled in the Dover, Pa. case that intelligent design meets none of the tests of a scientific theory and is simply an updated version of century-old creationist arguments. At a time when the United States faces serious economic challenges, we cannot risk derailing efforts to provide the best possible science education for the next generation of problem solvers. Our children deserve no less.

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