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'Evil, Evil Woman' speaks at CSUF

Philosophy Professor Barbara Forrest tells of her testimony in intelligent design trial

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The Women's Studies Department kicked off Women's History Month with a lecture by evolution proponent Barbara Forrest in the Titan Student Union, Pavilion C.

The lecture, "Evil, Evil Woman: What it was like to be the only female witness in the Dover Intelligent Design trial," focused on Forrest's experiences during the 2005 Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District trial, in which Dover High School board members in Pennsylvania attempted to integrate intelligent design into ninth-grade biology classes.

"People are fascinated by the trial and they want to hear about it," Forrest wrote in an e-mail. "So I get invitations [to speak]."

The Liberal Studies Student Association originally picked Forrest, a professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University, to speak during its annual Liberal Studies Week.

"During these events, we try to highlight speakers or films that exemplify the interdisciplinary nature of liberal studies," said Jim Hofmann, the chairman of the liberal studies department at Cal State Fullerton. "[Forrest's] research on the sources and activities of the intelligent design movement requires knowledge of constitutional law, comparative religion and philosophy as well as various aspects of evolutionary science."

One particular aspect Hofmann wanted students to learn from Forrest's lecture was the understanding of where the intelligent design movement fits in with promoting anti-evolutionary agendas in the public school system.

"[Forrest] will be able to give them a detailed account of how this movement is funded by a Seattle-based think tank called the Discovery Institute," Hofmann wrote in an e-mail. "Students will also learn about some of the legal tactics used by advocates of intelligent design and why these tactics failed in the Dover trial."

Starla Gonzales, 26, a Liberal Studies Student Association representative for the Associated Students Inc., presented a proposal to ASI and succeeded in obtaining a \$1,700 honorarium to have Forrest visit the campus.

"I'm going into the teaching profession and I think she's a really important figure in the issue of separation of church and state," Gonzales said. "I think intelligent design, or creationism, shouldn't be taught in schools. I grew up going to a private school and learned about creationism. I feel private schools is where that should be taught."

Forrest began her lecture with an explanation for why she was chosen as a witness for the trial. She co-authored a book with Paul Gross titled "Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design" They describe the intelligent design movement as a religious movement, or in other words, creationism, and they document the execution of the movement's strategy.

"When Paul and I published our book in January 2004, we knew eventually somewhere there would be a lawsuit," Forrest said. "So we were very careful in our documentation and in our arguments because we figured that book would be very useful and, as it turned out, it was."

Forrest's role in the Dover trial almost came to an abrupt end when the attorneys for the school board attempted to have her eliminated from the case because she didn't have scientific credentials.

"I wasn't called as a scientist, so that didn't work," Forrest said.

Forrest said the most disturbing aspect of intelligent design comes in the form of religious exclusionism and the attempt to remove the idea of separation of church and state from U.S. government. According to Forrest, the intelligent design movement the government is trying to implement is a system guided by the religious right.

"Intelligent design isn't really about science," Forrest said. "It's about using politics to advance a religious movement that they intend to make the foundation of public policy, especially with respect to public education."

The "they" Forrest refers to is the people representing the Center for Science and Culture within the Discovery Institute. Forrest said the Center is promoting a sectarian religious agenda as a scientific program.

"They themselves have described what they are doing as a religious program," Forrest said.

Casey Luskin, an attorney and staff member for the Discovery Institute, said the Institute is a secular think tank, or a think tank not connected with religion.

"Dr. Forrest has a long history of misrepresenting the Discovery Institute and promoting blatantly false conspiracy theories about intelligent design and 'theocracy,'" Luskin wrote in an e-mail. "I do not consider her to be an accurate or reliable source when it comes to Discovery Institute or intelligent design."

Judge John Jones ruled in favor of the plaintiff Tammy Kitzmiller, the mother of two daughters attending Dover High School during the trial, on Dec. 20, 2005. Eight of the nine creationist school board members were voted out of office and had to pay \$1 million in court fees,

according to Forrest.

"The first and most important thing I hope people learn is that intelligent design is merely another variant of creationism, and there is virtually nothing there in any scientific sense," Forrest said. "Intelligent design has been shown over and over again by competent scientists and other scholars to be scientifically empty."

Forrest said her religious beliefs shouldn't be an issue, but she no longer hesitates saying she is not a religious person in any sense.

"I was devout for a good deal of my early life, so I certainly understand how important religion is to people," Forrest said. "However, I think Americans are coming to realize that one can live a good life morally and can function in every way without endorsing any theological doctrines."

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