

CFI In the Media: 2006 Report

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2006 was a banner year for the Center for Inquiry in the media, as we continue to exert a powerful influence in the marketplace of ideas, defending scientific naturalism, secular humanism, and skepticism through hundreds of regular media appearances and newspaper citations. We share some highlights from 2006 in this report.

CSI (formally CSICOP)

As in the past, the media continues to frequently turn to CSI for commentary and interviews from experts on the skeptical and scientific side of paranormal and pseudoscientific issues. Joe Nickell's investigative work was featured in such print media as *The Toronto Star*, *Newsday*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and many other newspapers, including *Peru 21* (Lima, Peru). His work was also cited in *Outside* and other magazines. Nickell has also appeared on podcasts and radio shows, as well as television shows such as CNN's *Paula Zahn Now* (May 22, 2006) and NBC's *Today Show* (March 22, 2006), where he was profiled and interviewed.

Nickell has continued to work with National Geographic Television on their popular investigative series *Is It Real?* (Nickell often says it isn't!) For one investigation, he made an undercover appearance at a "healing" event featuring the Brazilian spiritualist who calls himself "John of God"; for another, he recreated one of Peru's giant Nazca drawings. He also worked on documentaries for the Discovery Channel and Warner Brothers—the latter in association with a forthcoming film inspired by Nickell's work and starring Hilary Swank. (*The Reaping* is now slated for release March 30, 2007.) Lecture opportunities took Nickell to various places around the world, where he conducted several new investigations: Peru (the Nazca lines, Ica Stones, etc.); Canada (the Cadborosaurus sea serpent); Alaska (a haunted hotel); the Netherlands (e.g., "the Visionary of Amsterdam"), and Belgium (the Holy Blood at Bruges, and others). He gave the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Society for Amateur Scientists, which described him as "one of our country's great citizen scientists." He also participated in the large annual Kentucky Book Fair.

Following his *Secrets of the Sideshows* and *Lake Monster Mysteries* (coauthored with Benjamin Radford), is Nickell's latest book (forthcoming March 2007 from University Press of Kentucky), *Relics of the Christ*. Several other writing projects are underway.

CFI/Council for Secular Humanism:

David Koepsell, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, was quoted at length in a January 14, 2006 Associated Press story celebrating the life of Benjamin Franklin, 300 years after his birth. Koepsell has been interviewed on a variety of radio talk-shows, including Air America's *State of Belief* in May and, in November, the *Marc Lemay Show* in Massachusetts (WCCM), the *Tim Collins Show* on Clear Channel's Battle Creek, Michigan, affiliate, and the *Chuck Morse Show* in Providence, Rhode Island (WARL). Koepsell has taken these opportunities to discuss religion and politics, church-state issues, intelligent design vs. evolution, and the phenomenon of Christian reconstructionism.

Ibn Warraq, a Senior Research Fellow here at the Center for Inquiry/Transnational, responded to the uproar over the series of cartoons lampooning Islamic prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper. Warraq's piece is titled "Democracy in a Cartoon," and it appeared in the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*. Warraq also appeared on Public Radio International's program *To the Point* (February 6, 2006), heard around the world.

A flurry of media attention surrounded *Free Inquiry's* decision to print four of those controversial Danish cartoons directed at Muhammad and Islam in its April/May 2006 issue. On March 8, Associated Press writer Carolyn Thompson wrote a story, "Magazine to Publish Prophet Cartoons," and *The Buffalo News* ran a front-page article featuring Paul Kurtz explaining the reasons behind *Free Inquiry's* decision. This media attention intensified when the North American chain Borders Books and Music declined to stock the issue of *Free Inquiry* containing the cartoons. This led to an Associated Press story appearing worldwide ("Borders Won't Carry Magazine Containing Prophet Cartoons," March 29, 2006); editorials criticizing Borders and supporting *Free Inquiry* in the *Washington Times* (March 31, 2006) and *The New York Post* (April 2, 2006); and an explosion of commentary on the blogosphere and at various Web sites. Paul Kurtz's comments defending freedom of expression were included in the "Arts, Briefly" section of *The New York Times* (April 1, 2006). In addition, Tom Flynn and Paul Kurtz were seen and heard on a smattering of TV and radio programs discussing the controversy, including CNBC's *Closing Bell* and Air America radio.

Center for Inquiry/India garnered significant media attention with the grand opening of its office in Hyderabad, India, on February 19, 2006. The largest newspaper in India, *The Hindu*, ran a story on CFI and its defense of science and secularism on February 23, and, on March 17, *The Daily Star*, the leading English newspaper in Bangladesh, ran an op-ed titled "An American Secularist in Bangladesh" by Austin Dacey, who was on hand for the Center's inauguration.

CFI/West has received wonderful media coverage surrounding the Steve Allen Theatre. The February 1 edition of *LA Weekly* ran a lengthy profile on the theater and the efforts of the Center. *The New York Times* sent a reporter to Los Angeles to report on the play,

Hollywood Hell House that was produced at the theater and played for several weeks. The review was titled, “A Pastor-inspired Play That’s Anything but Evangelical.”

CFI/MetroNY took advantage of its location to influence news and opinion makers. Austin Dacey, Executive Director of the Center for Inquiry/MetroNY had an op-ed titled "Believing in Doubt" published in *The New York Times* on February 3. Dacey presented his views on Pope Benedict's charge of relativism being inherent in secular society. Additionally, Dacey was seen discussing the wearing of Islamic religious symbols in public on the Sky News Network, broadcast throughout Britain. His appearance came in the wake of a controversy that erupted in London when a public official decried the wearing of the hijab (face covering) by Islamic woman.

C-SPAN recorded “An Evening with Salman Rushdie” on October 11, part of the Center for Inquiry's "Voices of Reason" series at the Ethical Culture Auditorium in New York City. Ibn Warraq, a fellow of the Center for Inquiry, introduced Rushdie for a talk in which he called for a reform movement inside Islam. In addition, CFI/MetroNY staff appeared in the pages of *The Village Voice*, *The American Prospect*, *Newsday*, New York’s *Daily News*, *Newsday*, on CNN’s *Paula Zahn Now*, FOX News, *The Laura Ingraham Show*, and National Public Radio’s *Talk of the Nation*.

Free Inquiry magazine was featured in the June 23 broadcast of Bill Moyers’s *Faith and Reason* program on PBS. Moyers held up the magazine during his interview with Salman Rushdie and called it “a very interesting magazine published by the Council for Secular Humanism.” In addition, Moyers’s Web site featured prominent links to both the Council’s and the Center for Inquiry’s own Web sites.

Joyce Kryszak of Buffalo’s NPR affiliate WBFO profiled CFI’s Camp Inquiry, a summer retreat for young inquiring minds, on July 14. Jim Christopher, founder and director of SOS (Save Our Selves) was featured in a profile on the history and founding of SOS on American Public Radio’s *Weekend America* on July 29.

On November 13, *Free Inquiry* Editor Tom Flynn was a guest on *The Glenn Beck Show*, seen on CNN. Flynn confronted the issue of public displays of religious symbols during the end-of-the-year holiday season. In a similar vein, on November 28, CFI’s Office of Public Policy Legal Director Ron Lindsay made an appearance on *The Big Story*, a FOX News network program hosted by John Gibson.

On November 14, Paul Kurtz was interviewed by the PBS program *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*. The program aired the first weekend in January 2007, on PBS stations around the country. Kurtz took the opportunity to discuss the insidious intermingling of religion with science and the ethics of leading a good moral life, without the need for religion. R. Joseph Hoffmann, chair of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER), was a guest on Air America’s Tom Hartman show on December 20 to discuss the violent, messianic beginnings of Christianity.

The Center for Inquiry received significant press coverage about the opening of our new Office of Public Policy in Washington, D.C., with an Associated Press story “Think Tank enters public policy forum” on July 27 and the *Washington Post*’s November 15 article, “Think Tank Will Promote Thinking.” Stories about the new venture also appeared in the *Los Angeles Daily News* (November 11), *Buffalo News* (November 25), and the *Religion News Service* (November 15). This new endeavor raised the ire of the conservative magazine *National Review*, who on December 13 placed a somewhat caustic article on their Website titled “Secular Humanists to the Rescue!” Written by Father Thomas Berg, the same old canards were leveled against secular humanism as before, namely that we represent a “dangerous ideology” and a “de-legitimized ideological hangover from the Enlightenment.”

CFI received worldwide attention with the placement of a special ad on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* on November 29. The ad featured a condensed version of the Office of Public Policy’s new “Declaration in Defense of Science and Secularism,” endorsed by leading scientists and intellectuals from around the country. Plaudits and inquiries from around the world soon followed.

Cameras from the Penn & Tellers TV program *Bullshit!* were at the Center for Inquiry on December 14 to capture Paul Kurtz’s observations on a phenomenon he has discussed many times before: those who believe they are possessed by the devil and therefore must undergo an exorcism. The psychology of satanic cults was also discussed. Watch for this to air on the Showtime Network sometime in the Spring of 2007.

In addition to the aforementioned media coverage, CFI experts and spokespersons are regularly cited in leading newspapers and magazines around the country including, *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Newsweek*, *Wired*, *The Nation*, *Science and Spirit*, Reuters, and the Associated Press.