

SEAN GREEN

'Big Bang' excitement fizzles

This must have been a frustrating week for George Smoot. Smoot, an astrophysicist at California's Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, said Thursday that he had found the oldest remnants of the "Big Bang," the primeval explosion that is believed to have created the universe 15 billion years ago.

With this discovery, Smoot may have added his name to a very short list of scientists who have changed the way we think about the universe.

Some members of this exclusive club include Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Einstein and now, if his claims are correct, Smoot.

But to call a star cluster a star cluster, the reaction to Smoot's discovery seems to have been, in a non-word, underwhelming.

As a scientist finding what some are calling the "Holy Grail" of cosmology, Smoot must be disappointed by the lack of outcry that has accompanied his discovery.

Galileo, for example, was told by the Catholic Church he would have to either admit that he was wrong about "that planet thing" or lose his golfing privileges at Club Vatican.

Galileo's was an environment a scientist could work in. He faced bodily injury at the hands of religious leaders who had nothing to fear but knowledge.

God forbid the great unwashed should ever find out Rome was not the center of the universe. Such knowledge would be bad public relations for the Vatican, pure and simple.

So Galileo had something to work for. True, he admitted he was wrong and put his blasphemous telescope in storage, but his discoveries changed the course of history.

For Smoot, things haven't been as challenging.

What Smoot found were slight variations in background radiation emitted by clouds of primeval dust, the largest cloud spanning 10 billion light years, or two-thirds of the known universe.

Allow me to repeat myself: TWO-THIRDS OF THE ENTIRE FREAKING UNIVERSE.

These clouds are the key to understanding how widely dispersed primordial gases produced by the Big Bang coalesced into stars and galaxies and MTV.

They also lend credence to the theory that the entire mass of the universe, before the Big Bang, was compressed into a sphere smaller than the period at the end of this sentence.

Had Smoot made this claim during the height of the Roman Catholic Church's influence, he would have



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been bonfire kindling by now.

But as far as I know, no one has threatened to burn Smoot at the stake for his heretical claims. He probably hasn't even received a death threat, unless Jim Bakker has telephone privileges.

Twentieth Century America does not burn its heretics at the stake. It ignores them.

Galileo faced ignorance, superstition and fear for announcing his discoveries. Smoot faces all of those things, but he also faces indifference.

Ted Koppel's "Nightline" Friday night was about the implications of Smoot's monumental discovery.

Koppel began the program by saying "In the beginning . . ."

Those who translate the Bible literally still say God created the universe and made Adam out of a lump of clay in six days, Adam being the masterpiece of God's creation.

The Big Bang theory states that the universe as we know it came about in a millionth of a second and man didn't show up until most of the fireworks were over.

In other words, by the time "Adam" and "Eve" crashed the party, the keg was almost empty and the really good-looking women and men were gone.

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Faced with such a spiritual crisis, past generations have filled the streets with rioters quoting the book of Revelations and tearing their hair out.

But Smoot's announcement didn't

even make the lead story of most television newscasts. They didn't have footage.

The Big Bang theory isn't exactly new. Scientists have been arguing about it for years. But they have never had this kind of evidence before.

As physicist Joel Primack of the University of California-Santa Cruz said, "It's one of the major discoveries of the century. In fact, it's one of the major discoveries of science."

And humanity's response to this news will be lukewarm, for a number of reasons.

First of all, Americans have grown accustomed to the advances of science.

We have made more technological advances in this century than have been made in all the time before it. Discoveries and innovations that would have shaken the foundation of 15th Century Europe don't even hold our interest for a weekend.

Another reason for the indifference is a presumed lack of practical application. We believe the universe, as a whole, has very little to do with our everyday lives. The opening of Euro Disney, on the other hand, affects us all.

On a deeper level, the depressing, post-modernist types had it right when they said humans have become cut off from the bigger questions, the purpose of existence.

They say, "God died in 1968, and yeah, so maybe there really was a Big Bang, but it's all part of a cold, unfeeling universe anyway, so who the hell cares? By the way, have ya seen my cigarettes?"

When a televangelist stands up on his pulpit and promises a quick and dirty end to the world with muchas fire and brimstone for the guy who borrowed your snowblower and didn't return it, people listen.

When a headline on page six of the Omaha World-Herald says "Scientists Find Remnants to Support 'Big Bang,' people say, "Well, gee, that was swell of them. Is 'Cheers' on?"

There's no point in getting preachy about the lack of interest we show for discoveries such as this. We don't even get too excited about rain forest depletion anymore.

Smoot probably will win a Nobel Prize for his discovery, and might have the primeval clouds named after him.

But thanks to the downright rude indifference of the American people, he probably won't be burned at the stake.

Green is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter and columnist.

Gay section stereotypical

I would like to commend you on the April 23 issue of Diversions — "Alternative Nightlife." It contained a lot of good information, and I enjoyed it very much. However, some aspects troubled me.

I feel that the issue will reinforce anti-gay feelings that some readers might have. After seeing the cover of Diversions, some readers with anti-gay feelings most likely thumbed through the issue looking at the pictures, not bothering to read the articles.

The point was made that the "leather boy" or "drag queen" stereotype might be seen in a gay bar, but that it was not the norm. This was contradicted by the photos,

which were very stereotypical in nature. Most of the photos showed either men in leather or men in drag.

Also, the statement was made to the effect that homosexuality is a "chosen lifestyle." Homosexuality is no more a chosen lifestyle than heterosexuality. You would have to be crazy to choose to be gay in our society.

Maybe a broader, more complete view of the gay community can be presented in the future.

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'Men's movement' attempt to halt progress

I was both appalled and disgusted to read Chris Halligan's April 15 column "Feminism robs masculinity." In his attempt to critique the impact of the feminist movement on society, Mr. Halligan mistakenly indites what he perceives is the source of the problem — women. This shallow analysis results in three very poorly constructed arguments against the movement. The first argument is that female empowerment "created a blind cowardice disguised as strength that allowed women to think selfishly, many times without consideration of the effects on other people involved in the marriage." My interpretation of Mr. Halligan's argument is that he's essentially blaming women for leaving abusive marriages because of the emotional impact on the children. This position is flawed for three reasons. The first reason is that it assumes that a woman's primary social role is to be a mother. I'm sorry Mr. Halligan, but there are a lot of women who deserve to be considered more than a pair of breasts and ovaries. The second flaw is that he assumes that women who want to escape abusive marriages are selfish. This claim is both absurd and also grounded in selfishness. Finally, this argument fails to account for the role of the husband in a bad marriage. Mr. Halligan would have us believe that casual reading of

Gloria Steinem or Shulamith Firestone caused droves of American housewives to abandon hearth and home to follow the whimsical path of empowerment. In Mr. Halligan's worldview, the poor, loving, hard-working breadwinners are left blameless for a disastrous marriage.

The second argument Mr. Halligan advances is that the feminist movement has resulted in a new awareness of rape. I'm sorry, but I don't quite see how this is an indictment of the feminist movement. On the one hand, you praise the movement for calling our attention to the horrors of rape. Yet, on the other hand, you condemn the movement for creating a situation in which women abuse this awareness.

For example, you assert that "we also have seen clear abuse on the part of women in dealing with situations of these sorts." Correct me if I'm wrong, but what "clear abuse" are you referring to? I understand and sympathize with the confusion that people must endure when defining appropriate sexual behavior. However, blaming women for this confusion is somewhat foolish. It's like blaming a victim for not wanting to be victimized further. Finally, fear of placing your destiny in the hands of a woman you want to have sex with is effectively mitigated by obtaining her

consent. Mr. Halligan's final argument is essentially a call to arms for all men who want to regain the masculinity that was robbed from them. Mr. Halligan would have us return to a golden time when "men could depend on women for complete support and recognition of their maleness." All of those bad, bad feminists have lost their most potent power — "the inherent male trust of females." What do you mean by masculinity? The power to exploit sexually and economically? Should we return to the time in which recognition of maleness meant subjugation? Don't you think that the inherent male trust of females really means that men trust women to be submissive? The call for a men's movement is a reactionary impulse — an anachronism in an age when the world is beginning to see the dawn of freedom. Whenever a social group faces the imminent loss of its ability to dominate others, its knee-jerk response is to conjure up the demon of tradition to battle against the forces of change. Just as we have been victorious against three horsemen of the social apocalypse, so shall the forces of reason prevail against the darkness of gender oppression.

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