

1. Recently Kyrie Irving, a professional basketball player, announced: “This is not even a conspiracy theory,” Irving said. “The Earth is flat.”

“What I’ve been taught is that the earth is round. But if you really think about it from a landscape of the way we travel, the way we move and the fact that, can you really think of us rotating around the sun and all planets aligned, rotating in specific dates, being perpendicular with what’s going on with these planets?”

This prompted me to revisit a topic I had previously presented in a humorous vein. It’s not funny anymore. Ignorance may be bliss, but it can hurt you.

2. Almost all ancient, pre-scientific civilizations envisioned a flat earth. Their cosmology may have varied in detail, but the basic concept was that the earth was a plane or a disk floating on water or air covered with an inverted bowl. For some, the base of the universe was a rectangle making it look more like a round top trunk than a domed stadium. In every case, the firmament (the cover) was a real physical object held up by the water and/or invisible pillars. Stars, tiny things, were attached to the firmament. The wondering stars (planets), the sun, and the moon, all small objects, were placed about 200 miles above the earth and somehow moved across the sky.
3. The concept of the spherical earth first developed in Greek astronomy with Pythagoras in the 6th century BC with some rather convincing observations however the idea of such a world was not readily accepted. It wasn’t intuitive or logical. Too many other concepts had to change to allow such a world. Most Pre-Socratic philosophers held on to their flat earth model some modifying them to account for the observations. Finally Aristotle declared the world was a sphere around 330 B.C.
4. While there may have been individuals who believed the world was flat there were no serious advocates for such a cosmology in the west after the 1st century BC until Samuel Birley Rowbotham, under pseudonym “Parallax” published a 16 page pamphlet,

“Zetetic Astronomy. Earth Not a Globe” announcing a series of lectures on the subject in 1849.

5. In his lectures, Rowbotham steamrolled all opponents by appealing to common sense and referencing the Bible making it difficult to counter without seeming godless. Except for the Book of Enoch that describes the earth as a domed stadium, the Bible does not directly declare that the earth is flat, it is implied. For instance, the order of creation with the creation of the sun and stars on the fourth day is only logical for a flat world. This should not be surprising since the ancient Hebrew had a flat earth cosmology. In his lectures he told his audience that might as well throw their Bibles away if they thought the earth was a globe.
6. To Rowbotham the earth is flat. The continents float on an infinite ocean with a layer of fire beneath. The known world is surrounded by an infinite expanse of snow and ice bordered by an immense circular “ice-cliff.” The North Pole is the center of the earth. The sun, moon, planets and stars, all tiny, are all a few hundred miles above the earth. The sun orbits around the North Pole at a constant altitude. The moon glows on its own and not by reflected light. Eclipses are caused by unknown object occulting the sun or moon.
7. The basis for Rowbotham’s claim that world was flat was a series of observations he made in 1838 on a slow flowing drainage canal of the Old Bedford River that ran uninterrupted in a straight line for 6 miles. In one of his experiments he waded into the middle of the canal and with a telescope mounted just 8 inches above the surface of the water watched a boat with a 5 foot mast row away from him to the bridge six miles away. He could still see the banner on the mast at the end of the journey when the boat should be 11 feet below the line of sight!
8. On May 11, 1904 Lady Elizabeth Blount, founder of the Universal Zetetic Society, hired a commercial photographer to take a picture from Welney of a large white sheet she had placed, touching the surface of the canal six miles away. The photographer mounted the camera equipped with a telephoto lens 2 feet above the water

and in terrible, misty weather was able to take a picture of the target. He was surprised that he could see the sheet from such a low position. Lady Blount published the picture far and wide countering the refraction explanation for the Bedford phenomena and once more had a surge of flat worlders

9. After World War I, the “flat earth” movement suffered a slow decline until Samuel Shenton of Dover, England founded *The International Flat Earth Society* in 1956. However it was not until advent of manned spaceflight that he was able to attract wide attention claiming that the Apollo Moon landings were a hoax staged by Hollywood and thus attracting many who believe likewise not associated with the society.

At the time, I saw this development as quite humorous. I never considered that Shenton actually believed the world was flat—we just went to the Moon! I would say most people didn’t take this group seriously. And, at that time, when I visited no one asked me if it was a hoax. Everywhere I went, when people learned that I worked in the space program, asked me for details of the program. I even had a lady in Mexico city volunteered her estranged husband as an astronaut—we wouldn’t have to bring him back! Apparently she was going through a nasty divorce. The lunar landing had a huge impact on the world.

That has changed. Now I’m always asked if it was a hoax. No it is not a hoax. As difficult, complex and dangerous as the project may have been, to pull off a hoax of that magnitude before the world in a program that involves thousands of people, and I was one of them, would be even harder. And we did it six times! 12 Americans have walked on the moon and that’s a fact!

10. Charles Johnson took over the reins of the flat earth society.