UFOlogy 2009: A Six-Decade Perspective

Waves of UFO sightings may be a thing of the past, but interest in UFOs is stronger than ever. Credulous cable-TV programs and sensationalized radio talk shows have replaced books and news media in spreading excitement and misinformation to millions. The UFO movement keeps changing, and today the outlook is largely conspiratorial.

ROBERT SHEAFFER

Belief in UFOs and visitors from other worlds remains high today despite decades of sensational claims unaccompanied by proof. A child born at the dawn of the UFO era becomes eligible to collect Social Security this year. The face of UFOlogy has changed much in these past sixty-two years, but it has not faded away as some rationalists naively assumed it would. Indeed, its mutability is indicative of the strength of the myth, not of its weakness. Here I examine how the UFO movement has changed over the years and what it has become today.

In The Beginning (1947–1973)

In the beginning there were sightings, and those sightings began with private pilot Kenneth Arnold on June 24, 1947. As soon as news stories appeared reporting Arnold's claim that he saw nine airborne objects that flew "like a saucer if you skip it across the water," others began reporting seeing the "saucers" too (a curious development, since Arnold did not say that the objects looked like saucers—they looked like boomerangs, he said—but skipped like saucers, a subtlety lost in the public's imagination). Soon sightings of "saucers" were pouring in from all around the country and from around the world. Sightings occurred in waves, which appeared to be fueled by media reports. A wave would typically start in one location, but as soon as news reports began to carry the story of the localized excitement, sightings activity would pick up nationally. Great waves of UFO sightings occurred in 1947, 1949, 1952, 1957, 1965–67, and 1973.

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With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that the last large-scale national wave of UFO sightings occurred in the fall of 1973. The reasons for this are not clear. One common-sense explanation is that after more than twenty-five years of sensational sighting reports ultimately leading to nothing tangible and no new evidence, the public's fascination with saucer sightings was wearing out. One prominent UFOlogist, the late Karl Pflock, later suggested quite seriously that extraterrestrial visitors actually did arrive around 1947 but departed sometime after 1973, and all subsequent UFO sightings were bogus. My preferred explanation is that this was right around the time that the majority of U.S. homes acquired color television, resulting in fewer eyes directed skyward, in addition to the ennui factor. Whatever the reason, the "buzz" was gone for mass waves of saucer sightings. Individual and even localized clumps of sightings continued to occur and to be reported in the news, but somehow they were no longer contagious. "Lights in the sky" no longer were a "shiny new thing," and the public required something else to generate excitement about UFOs.

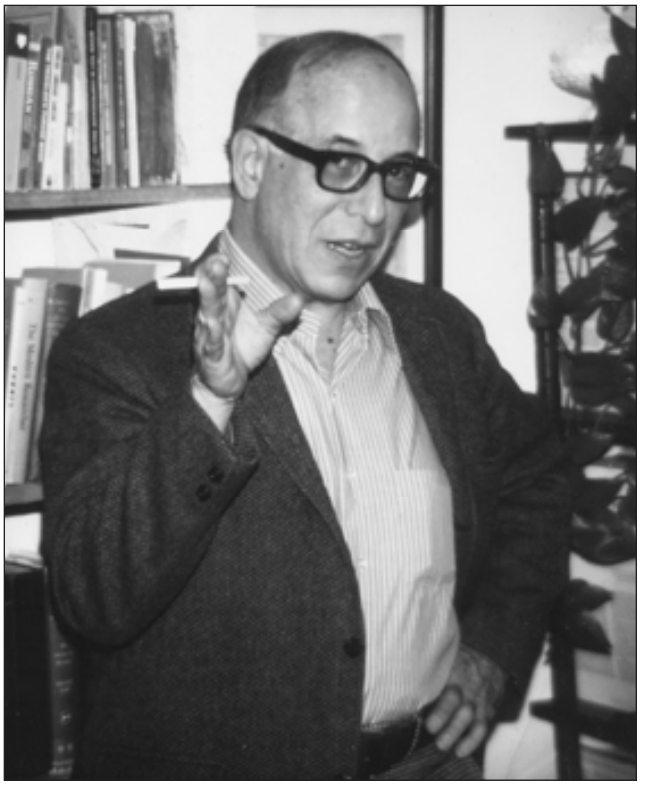
Photo: Robert Sheaffer

The late Betty Hill poses with a bust of the alien creature she says abducted her.

Abductions Gradually Replace Sightings (1966–1995)

Something genuinely new under the UFO sun occurred in 1966: the publication of The Interrupted Journey by John G. Fuller, a book detailing the alleged UFO abduction in rural New Hampshire of Betty and Barney Hill. The book reads like a thriller, telling the tale of an interracial married couple driving rural roads late at night, seemingly pursued by a UFO.

Upon returning home, Betty began having nightmares about being abducted by aliens. The Hills belatedly concluded that there was "missing time" and came to believe the abduction dreams may have reflected reality. Barney was under much stress prior to the "abduction" and got worse afterward, so the Hills sought therapy from a well-known psychiatrist, Dr. Benjamin Simon. Under hypnosis, they each told a UFO abduction story that largely matched Betty's nightmares (which Barney had heard her repeat many times).



Photot: Robert Sheaffer

The late Philip J. Klass, one of the leading UFO skeptics.

The Hills' story became a sensation, serialized in Look magazine, and was made into a TV movie, The UFO Incident. Soon others began making similar abduction claims. The famous Travis Walton abduction story, depicted in the movie Fire in the Sky, aired a few weeks after The UFO Incident aired. Typically, these abduction stories followed a general pattern: You are driving in a rural area at night. You see a light in the sky that seems to be coming closer. You become frightened, and you are unable to recall exactly what happened next. A UFO researcher helpfully puts you under hypnosis, and you suddenly recover repressed memories of an alien abduction. The paradigm of the Hills' abduction prevailed during the 1970s. Persons out on lonely roads late at night risked, in addition to usual earthly perils, abduction by extraterrestrials.

The face of UFO abductology changed dramatically with the 1981 publication of Budd Hopkins's Missing Time. No longer was it necessary to venture out on lonely roads late at night; UFO aliens might come right into your own bedroom to snatch you, and you were helpless to resist. More books, articles, and TV shows followed, and soon a new paradigm for abductions was established. Aliens became a presence akin to ghosties and ghoulies and things that go bump in the night. You don't go out and stumble upon them—they find you. Moreover, the theme of repeated abductions, typically beginning in childhood, establishes a personal relationship between abductee and abductor. No longer is abduction simply the result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, as was supposedly the case for Hill-style abductees. Instead, the abductee (overwhelmingly female) became a special kind of person with a mystical, cosmic-lifelong bond connecting her to unknown cosmic forces and beings. Most current abduction stories contain claims that rudely violate common sense even beyond the dubious idea of alien visitations. Often the creatures and the abductee are said to levitate or fly, to pass through solid objects, or to simply teleport themselves from one location to another. Hopkins has actually suggested, in all seriousness, that the aliens have the ability to make themselves and their victims invisible to better preserve the stealth of their operations. Given such claims, plus the frequently sexual nature of the abduction experience, the correlation with dream states and sleep disorders is obvious.

By the early 1990s, abduction mania had become a significant social phenomenon. It resonated well with other concurrent manias, including "recovered memories" of alleged Satanic Cult molestations, large-scale daycare molestations, etc. In 1992, CBS-TV ran an entire miniseries based on the claims in Hopkins's book Intruders, fueling widespread fears of sinister alien forces. Hopkins and his colleagues were so confident about the "scientific" status of their findings that in 1992 they arranged an Abduction Study Conference at MIT, hosted by physicist David Pritchard, in which I participated. While the participants were heavily slanted toward the pro-abduction view, there was a significant presence of skeptical professionals, and instead of solidifying the abductionists' claims, the conference highlighted their glaring weaknesses. Hopkins and his colleagues used the conference to first reveal details of a spectacular alleged multiple-witness abduction case that occurred late one night in Manhattan. This case became the subject of Hopkins's 1996 book Witnessed: The True Story of the Brooklyn Bridge Abduction. However, independent pro-UFO researchers were unable to confirm the ever-shifting

claims of multiple witnesses to the alleged abduction, and the abductees' ever-spiraling and ever-changing tales of encounters and intrigue became increasingly difficult to believe. The case that Hopkins and his colleagues had "bet the house" on, expecting it to finally establish their claims, ended up as a humiliation.

As might be expected, UFO abduction mania gradually faded as a force within UFOlogy. When abduction fever was rising, excited UFOlogists believed that it would finally deliver what UFOlogy has always wanted: validation of their personal belief in extraterrestrial visitors. But with the clear recognition that in the early 1990s the abductionists had taken their best shot and missed, UFOlogists gradually became disillusioned with abduction claims, realizing that they would ultimately fail to deliver. Thus, subsequent abduction claims failed to generate the same level of excitement. UFO abductions continue to be reported, alleged abductees continue to be hypnotized, and abductee-related support and research groups continue to operate. But abductees are seen today by many UFOlogists as something marginal and/or passé and are no longer looked to as the most promising area of UFO research.

"New Age" vs. "Science Fiction" UFOlogy

The major fault line in UFOlogy today is the division between what can be called "New Age" UFOlogy and what its proponents call "scientific" UFOlogy but is in reality "science fiction." Both are junk science and consistently ignore Occam's Razor (all other things being equal, the simplest solution is the best). Proponents fail to reconcile whatever hypotheses they invent with the rest of the body of established scientific fact. While the dividing line between the two groups is not hard and fast, and some UFO claims will contain elements of both, most major UFOlogists and UFO groups will fit clearly into one group or the other. "New Age" UFOlogy is dominated by women and "Science Fiction" UFOlogy by men, although you will find members of both genders in either group. We can think of members of the first group as fans of Oprah, the second as fans of the SciFi Channel. "New Age" UFOlogists often seem oblivious to the very idea that anyone should have to prove their claims, as if people are expected to simply accept unsupported accounts of extraterrestrial interactions (as is routinely done in such circles). If you expect to see any kind of proof, you need to hang out in different UFO circles.

"New Age" UFOlogy grew out of the "contactee" tradition of the 1950s, which is not based primarily on claimed "evidence" but instead on personal revelations. Contactees reportedly talk to extraterrestrials and receive cosmic wisdom from them, never offering convincing "proof" of such communications. Today's "New Age" UFOlogists largely claim to receive extraterrestrial messages via telepathy, channeling, dreams, or other subjective experiences, continuing the contactee tradition of having a personal relationship with the UFOs and their occupants. "New Age" UFOlogy often uses religious terms and themes, typically promoting the idea of an immanent cosmic, metaphysical change in the Earth and in peoples' lives: the "age of Aquarius," the "end of the Mayan Calendar," or some other ill-defined term that largely parallels the concept of the millennium in conventional Christian eschatology.

One well-known group falling squarely in the "New Age" UFO tradition is the Unarius Educational Foundation in El Cajon, California. Founded in 1954, the group's members believe that vaguely defined "energies" permeate the universe and claim they receive messages channeled from beings on other planets. They teach that "a new golden age for humanity" will begin as soon as we accept the wisdom and love of our space brethren.

"Science Fiction" UFOlogists claim the reality of visitations from extraterrestrials, or perhaps from "another dimension" or some other nebulous realm, based upon the weight of UFO sightings, photos and videos, alleged "trace cases," abductions, UFO crashes, etc. They eagerly offer "proof" when questioned, but it falls short by orders of magnitudes of the evidence required to support such extraordinary claims. They also typically fail to see how their claims contradict accepted science in very significant ways. When they do acknowledge the conflict, they insist it is time to invent a "new" science based upon the "evidence" of UFO incidents, not realizing the impropriety of having weighty, well-supported, time-tested scientific principles overturned by anecdotes, as if hummingbird feathers outweigh elephants. At the present time, the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) is the largest and best-known organization of its kind in the U.S., primarily made up of "Science Fiction" UFOlogists.

UFO Crashes and Retrievals (1980–present)

A large part of contemporary "Science Fiction" UFOlogy consists of promoting one or more alleged UFO crashes. The first alleged UFO crash to gain widespread attention was in the 1950 book Behind the Flying Saucers by Hollywood writer Frank Scully. Based upon the tales told by Silas Newton and Leo GeBauer (said to be an inventor and a government scientist, respectively), it told of a saucer allegedly crashing near Aztec, New Mexico, in 1948, which contained the bodies of several dead aliens. But a thorough investigation by San Francisco newspaperman J.P. Cahn revealed that Newton and GeBauer were actually con men, fleecing investors and getting in trouble with the law, and that Newton's alleged sample of strange extraterrestrial metal was in fact plain aluminum.

Cahn's thorough debunking of the Scully book created a stigma against crashed saucer tales, and for decades such claims

all but disappeared. But after twenty years or so, the stench of the hoax in Scully's book had faded somewhat, and crashed saucer tales began to reappear. Veteran UFOlogist Leonard Stringfield began collecting such stories, and by the late 1970s was writing papers about Retrievals of the Third Kind. However, Stringfield never offered any proof for his claims, and his crashed saucer stories were little-known to the general public.

The earliest crashed saucer claim to make it big in popular culture was the alleged crash near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. However, the event was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by the 1980 book The Roswell Incident by Charles Berlitz (of Bermuda Triangle fame) and William L. Moore. You will look in vain for the word "Roswell" in any UFO book or article published before 1980, even if the subject is UFO crashes. A long series of sensationalist movies, TV shows, books, and so on have made Roswell a household name synonymous with UFO aliens. By the late 1990s, it was clear to anyone who cared about facts that the supposed Roswell crash involved a once-secret balloon-borne intelligence-gathering initiative called Project Mogul. But once such an event, fictionalized or not, becomes embedded in popular culture, it doesn't matter at all if the "evidence" is proven to be exaggerated, distorted, and/or fabricated. The Roswell legend will live on as long as there are claims of UFOs.

Today, the list of alleged UFO crashes has expanded far beyond the few familiar names like Roswell, Kecksburg, and Aztec. Claims about UFO crashes and their cover-ups make up a major part of contemporary UFOlogy. Since 2003 a "Crash Retrieval Conference" has been held each November in Las Vegas. It is organized by Ryan S. Wood, who claims that there have been at least seventy-four UFO crashes worldwide. All of these incidents have, of course, been successfully covered up by the country in which the unfortunate extraterrestrials fell.

UFO Photos and Videos

Photos of alleged UFOs have played a significant role since the early years of UFOlogy. In the 1950s, the famous contactee George Adamski produced a number of photos of what he said were the space ships of his friends from Venus, some of which were supposedly taken at close range and others using his telescope. However, Adamski's photos never looked convincing, and few outside his circle of followers doubted that they had been fabricated using quite ordinary objects.

Certain "classic" UFO photos continue to have a wide following today among "Science Fiction" UFOlogists who defend them energetically. The Trent photos from Oregon in 1950 tentatively passed muster with the famously skeptical Condon Report, whose analysis suggested that the object was distant. However, that analysis depends on certain assumptions, and if the photos were fabricated using a truck mirror with a reflective surface (as now seems likely), the assumptions are incorrect. The Brazilian Trindade Island UFO photos of 1958 have been widely touted even though the man who took them was a specialist in trick photography. The Lucci brothers' photos from Pennsylvania in 1965, famous for being used in many UFO books and magazines, have recently been confessed by one of the brothers to be hoaxes. In recent years, the most famous photos and video are those of the Phoenix Lights of 1997. Widely observed and photographed around the entire region, they undoubtedly represent real objects. And they were indeed real objects—flares dropped by an Air National Guard unit training nearby. (UFO photos typically are taken by—and the object only seen by—one individual or small group, even though the object is allegedly flying near a major city.) However, there now exists a small cottage industry of individuals who write and lecture that they saw the Phoenix Lights doing impossible things, and hence the lights could not possibly have been flares.

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While there is considerable interest in UFO photos and videos today, few if any recent images are considered definitive. Nearly all of the recent "unidentified" objects in them appear as simply dots, blips, or lights. The famous Mexican infrared UFO video of 2004 turned out to be simply airborne images of distant oil well flares. Given the near-ubiquitous availability today of cell-phone and digital cameras, many of which are

capable of producing videos, it is most curious that we do not have clear, close-up photos and videos of the many reported close encounters and abductions. We do get, however, plenty of photos of blips and dots that could be practically anything. Also, with the proliferation of software such as Photoshop for altering and even creating photos and videos, a photo or video cannot simply "stand by itself" as evidence of anything. For a photo or video to be convincing, we must know a great deal about its origins, the photographer, the location, etc. A number of really clever digital photo and video UFO hoaxes have been created in recent years, but typically they are submitted anonymously via the Internet because the story of their origin would not withstand scrutiny.

Conspiracies Abound

Given the near-universal belief among "Science Fiction" UFOlogists that UFO crashes, secret programs, and even alien captures have taken place, it follows that there must exist conspiracies of gigantic scale with vast resources successfully concealing UFO secrets from the world at large.

There is a widespread belief in an alleged secret U.S. government group known as MJ-12 (or Majestic-12), whose job is to investigate UFO crashes and also arrange their cover-up. UFOlogists William L. Moore and Jaime Shandera announced in 1987 that they had anonymously received copies of government documents purporting to show the activities of a secret UFO crash/retrieval organization. Fearing a possible compromise of government documents, the FBI investigated and quickly concluded that the documents were "completely bogus." Other problems in the documents were soon noted. For example, one document was typed on a typewriter model that was not manufactured until fifteen years after the date on the document. Many UFO proponents strongly defend the authenticity of these "leaked" documents, but no proof of their authenticity has ever surfaced. Additional MJ-12 documents supposedly continue to be leaked to UFOlogist Timothy S. Cooper, far more than Moore or Shandera claim to have received. These newer MJ-12 papers are even less credible than the original ones. Dr. Robert M. Wood and his son Ryan S. Wood are the principal promoters of the "Majestic Documents" today via their Web site www.majesticdocuments.com, documentaries, conferences, etc.

Others hypothesize that NASA is involved in a giant conspiracy to hide UFO data uncovered during its various space flights. Rumors of astronaut UFO sightings abound, supported by misquotations and even outright fabrications. Comments from astronauts concerning sightings of not-then-identified space debris were taken out of context to make it sound as if they saw alien spacecraft. While a few astronauts have been believers in UFO claims (most notably Edgar Mitchell and the late Gordon Cooper), not one astronaut claims to have seen any non-earthly technology while on any spaceflight. During shuttle missions while the astronauts are sleeping, NASA often makes real-time video available of Earth from the orbiter's cameras, which is shown by some cable-TV services. Some UFOlogists, convinced that there are secret goings-on concerning UFOs and NASA, will record many hours of this uneventful video. Later, they scrutinize the recordings, looking for little dots or blips that to them represent alien spacecraft. Tiny pieces of ice or other orbital debris, sometimes kicked around by exhaust from the shuttle's attitude control thrusters, are trumpeted as proof of aliens cavorting about while watching our space missions, a secret said to be kept hidden by NASA.

Author Richard C. Hoagland has become famous by promoting claims of many varied space-related conspiracies, mostly involving NASA. Over the years he has claimed that NASA has been covering up knowledge of a face on mars, large alien artifacts on the Moon, anti-gravity forces, and civilizations on the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. His Web site, www.enterprisemission.com, is filled with notions about space conspiracies and "hyperdimensional physics," which apparently go far beyond anything known to ordinary physicists.

Another major purported conspiracy centers around the claims of reverse engineering of alien technology made in The Day after Roswell (1997) by the late Col. Philip J. Corso. According to Corso, a great deal of today's familiar technology, including integrated circuits, fiber optics, and lasers, were not actually invented by earthlings but were reverse-engineered from technology found in the alleged Roswell saucer crash. Corso also claims that he alone was able to understand this alien technology, after some of the nation's top scientists had tried and failed. Corso's claims have been extensively investigated and debunked by UFOlogist Brad Sparks and others but continue nonetheless to enjoy widespread acceptance, in spite of being entirely without foundation.

One group working to uncover the supposed Grand Conspiracy is called The Disclosure Project (www.disclosureproject.org), founded by Steven M. Greer, a physician. They claim to have assembled over 400 military and government witnesses to UFO events and projects who are willing to give testimony about them. "The weight of this first-hand testimony, along with supporting government documentation and other evidence, will establish without any doubt the reality of these phenomena" according to Greer. This evidence was presented to the media in a much-hyped press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on May 9, 2001. It should come as no surprise, given the media's love of reporting sensational claims, that the cover-up allegations of Greer and his colleagues were repeated widely on all the news outlets for

at least a few news cycles. After that they simply disappeared, failing to convince even the most sensation-hungry reporter that there was pay dirt under the dust and chaff. Not one of the "disclosure witnesses" could produce a single shred of evidence beyond their own unsupported words, and many of them carry such baggage that believing what they say becomes a Herculean task. Greer's claims of secret technology involving "zero-point energy," "anti-gravity," and even "superluminal" devices serve as red flags to knowledgeable persons that what follows is pure fantasy.

Another interesting contemporary exercise in UFO fantasy involves what is called exopolitics, "political implications of the extraterrestrial presence." It is the brainchild of Michael Salla, who, with a doctorate in government, travels worldwide to participate in conferences and retreats, campaigning for peaceful relations between humans and extraterrestrials and for an end to the alleged UFO cover-up. Since there is no actual evidence of any alleged "extraterrestrial presence," this discipline has much in common with medieval disputes concerning angels and pinheads. Nonetheless, it has become a significant player on the UFO scene, and Salla's Web site, www.exopolitics.org, receives several million visitors yearly. Exopolitics claims that "hidden agreements concerning extraterrestrial life have been secretly entered into by a range of government-authorized agencies, departments, and corporations. In some cases, these pacts involve representatives of advanced extraterrestrial civilizations whose existence has not been disclosed to the general public." They insist that such agreements should be made openly.

Promotion of UFO Belief Today

Initially, UFO excitement and belief was spread by news reports over mass sightings—a phenomenon that no longer occurs. Major magazines and books made sensational claims about sightings, which would generate much follow-on publicity. Pro-UFO books by Major Donald E. Keyhoe, Frank Edwards, John G. Fuller, and others became bestsellers and generated much interest and discussion of their claims. UFO groups such as NICAP and APRO appeared often in news stories about UFOs and were depicted as authoritative (rather than as groups devoted to promoting the idea of UFOs as interplanetary visitors).

It has now been over twenty years since a UFO book has become a bestseller and generated nationwide interest and controversy; the last two were Whitley Strieber's Communion (1987) and Transformation (1988). Today, first and foremost, the entertainment media play a major role in keeping UFOs alive, as well as radio and TV talk shows. News programs play only a very minor role. In the 1990s, cable-TV stations began producing entertainment programs based on popular UFO claims and themes, such as Roswell, the Alien Autopsy, and UFO abductions. In 2002, the Science Fiction (Sci-Fi) channel presented Steven Spielberg's Taken, a twenty-hour miniseries based on alleged UFO abductions. Soon there were many other entertainment programs featuring UFO themes, which even though presented as fiction many take to be "based on fact." Entertainment shows were soon bolstered by pro-UFO documentaries in which the skeptical view is given little or no voice and then by UFO "reality shows," such as The History Channel's UFO Hunters (2008; see the review in this issue). In that show, several "UFO experts" (all of whom are favorable to the pro-UFO position) investigate UFO claims and invariably find tantalizing evidence yet never any real proof.

Talk shows on radio and TV also reach millions of people with their sensational claims and uncritical analyses. Since the 1980s, the syndicated late-night, call-in radio show Coast To Coast AM has reached millions—now on over 500 stations as well as on XM satellite radio. Originally hosted by Art Bell, and now by George Noory, the show offers a dazzling array of wild tales about not only UFOs but cryptozoology, parapsychology, and conspiracies of every sort. Callers often relate their own allegedly paranormal experiences, and it seems that no claim is too bizarre to be given a respectful hearing.

Given the near-ubiquitous availability today of cell-phone and digital cameras, many of which are capable of producing videos, it is most curious that we do not have clear, close-up photos and videos of the many reported close encounters and abductions. We do get, however, plenty of photos of blips and dots that could be practically anything.

Even some of the biggest names in the broadcast industry have uncritically promoted UFO claims in an attempt to boost ratings. During the summer of 2008, Larry King Live on CNN ran a series of poorly balanced programs about UFOs that displayed shockingly low standards of critical thinking for a major journalist. In February 2005, ABC-TV ran in prime time a two-hour show, "Peter Jennings Reporting: UFOs—Seeing Is Believing." The late journalist, a former news anchorman for ABC News, said, "I began this project with a healthy dose of skepticism and as open a mind as possible. After almost 150 interviews with scientists, investigators, and with many of those who claim to have witnessed unidentified flying objects, there are important questions that have not been completely answered—and a great deal not fully explained." In spite of all the reporting and investigative resources that must have been available to Jennings, the program contained nothing significant that had not already been reported before, and was just a re-hash on primetime network TV of existing UFO claims and interviews with mostly pro-UFOlogists.

The Future

If the social phenomenon of UFOs tells us anything, it is that the future of the movement turned out differently than its proponents expected. For at least twenty years after Kenneth Arnold's sighting, believers expected that sometime soon, any day now really, a UFO would land openly—or would crash and be recovered—or otherwise be indisputably revealed. At the very least, believers hoped, the Air Force would end its alleged cover-up of the data it held about UFOs and disclose that information to the public. By the late 1960s, this expectation changed. With mass sightings having gone on for twenty years with no tangible result, UFOlogists' hopes transferred to UFO abductions providing the desperately sought Holy Grail of proof. When abductions had gone on for thirty years without producing anything tangible, excitement shifted to claims of crashed saucers. The idea of a major "disclosure" coming soon has long been a major hope and expectation in UFOlogy, paralleling the Christian fundamentalists' expectation of the Second Coming. The respected U.S. News and World Report published in its Washington Whispers column on April 18, 1977, "Before the year is out, the Government—perhaps the President—is expected to make what are described as 'unsettling disclosures' about UFOs." Perhaps the editors had forgotten that same magazine's cover story of April 7, 1950, "revealing" that flying saucers were in fact a secret Navy project. Every few years, UFO disclosure mania rises to a fever pitch but always subsides.

In the March 1991 issue of Fate magazine, UFOlogist Jerome Clark reviewed two new books on Roswell and excitedly predicted: "Major media—not just the usual tabloid papers—will pick up the story and recount their own investigations, which will confirm the UFOlogists' findings." Of course, this never happened. We're now coming up on the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of The Roswell Incident, and the case has sustained heavy blows by the disclosures about Project Mogul. Subsequent alleged saucer crashes never achieved anything near the level of belief or publicity that Roswell did (at least something did crash near Roswell, even if it wasn't a UFO). So it's likely that UFOlogy is ready for the "next big thing." What that will be is difficult to say. Skeptical researcher Martin Kottmeyer has famously described the UFO movement as "an evolving system of paranoia," and as such it's difficult to predict where its paranoia will evolve next. Whatever it may be, we can expect it to offer an element of personal relationship or involvement (like contactees and abductees), to sound exciting and at least a little dangerous, and above all to promise such stunning evidence as to blow the alleged cover-up sky-high. It will have to excite and to entertain simultaneously—a tall order, but one that UFOlogy has been able to fill thus far. □

Author's Note: Most of the UFO cases and individuals mentioned in this paper have been featured in my "Psychic Vibrations" column in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, appearing regularly over the past thirty years, where more details are available. Some of these columns are available online. A Google search on any person, book, or UFO case mentioned here will return a great deal of information and background, not all of it reliable. Consider the source in judging the credibility of any UFO claims you encounter.

Some recommended sources of information on contemporary UFO claims are:

UFO Sightings by Robert Sheaffer (Prometheus, 1998).

The UFO Skeptic's Page by Robert Sheaffer, available online at www.debunker.com/ufo.html

"Psychic Vibrations" column by Robert Sheaffer, in SKEPTICAL INQUIRER magazine (1977– present); "Give Me Disclosure, or Give Me Death!," March 2002 (available online at http://tinyurl.com/4nx5ju); "Where the UFO conspiracy theories roam," July, 2005 (available online at http://tinyurl.com/3vmynp); "Where have you gone, Commander Quasgaa?" Sept. 2002 (available online at http://tinyurl.com/4pdrnl).

"The Campeche, Mexico 'Infrared UFO' Video" by Robert Sheaffer. SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, September/October 2004 (available online at www.csicop.org/si/2004-09/campeche.html).

Roswell: Inconvenient Facts and the Will to Believe by Karl Pflock (Prometheus Books, 2001).

Book review, "The Day after Roswell" by Brad Sparks. SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, March-April, 1998 (available online at http://tinyurl.com/4dtl42).

NASA Conspiracies and "Astronaut UFOs": See James E. Oberg's Web site, available online at www.jamesoberg.com.

The Klass Files, some collected UFO writings of the late Philip J. Klass (available online at www.csicop.org/klassfiles/Home.html).

The UFO Invasion (Prometheus 1997), a collection of SKEPTICAL INQUIRER articles critically examining claims of UFOs, crashed saucers (nine articles on the Roswell claims), alien autopsies, alien abductions, and other UFO cases, plus crop circles.