

That's Entertainment! TV's UFO Coverup

Network television documentaries about UFOs have willfully ignored evidence that contradicts the pro-alien theme.

PHILIP J. KLASS

Don't be surprised or shocked if you discover that a good friend—a well-educated, intelligent person—believes in UFOs, or that he or she suspects that the U.S. government recovered a crashed extraterrestrial craft and ET bodies in New Mexico and has kept them under wraps for nearly half a century. Don't be surprised if your respected friend, or a member of your own family, is convinced that ETs are abducting thousands of Americans and subjecting them to dreadful indignities.

The really surprising thing is that *you* do not believe in crashed saucers, alien abductions, and government coverup if you spend even a few hours every week watching TV. There are many TV shows that promote belief in the reality of UFOs, government coverup, and alien abductions. And they attract

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Air Intelligence Report No. 100-203-79

ANALYSIS OF FLYING OBJECT INCIDENTS IN THE U. S.

Air Intelligence Division Study No. 203
10 December 1948

Directorate of Intelligence and Office of Naval Intelligence

DISTRIBUTION "C"

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Headquarters United States Air Force

Office of Naval Intelligence
Navy Department

Washington, D. C.

04121798

Authority: AF INVA/ALICE 5741 45
By: [Signature] DATE: 1/1/51
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very large audiences—typically tens of millions of viewers. Often they are broadcast a second, possibly even a third time.

TV has become the most pervasive means of influencing what people believe. That explains why companies spend billions of dollars every year on TV advertising to convince the public that Brand X beer tastes best, that you should eat Brand Y cereal, and that a Brand Z automobile is the world's best.

According to a recent survey reported in *Business Week* magazine, our children spend nearly twice as much time watching TV as they do in school.

Consider the problem that TV created for the Audi 5000 automobile and the claim that the car would suddenly accelerate and crash into the front of an owner's garage when the automatic transmission was in neutral. The Audi 5000 was introduced in 1978, and during the next four years only thirteen owners complained of a mysterious sudden acceleration incident. Then, in November 1986, CBS featured the alleged Audi 5000 problem on its popular *60 Minutes* show. During

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the next month, some fourteen hundred people claimed that their Audi 5000s had experienced sudden acceleration problems (P. J. O'Rourke, *Parliament of Whores*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991, pp. 86-7). Subsequent investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board revealed that the problem was the result of driver error—stepping on the accelerator when they intended to step on the brake.

Here's another example: several years ago, a man who claimed he had found a hypodermic needle in a Pepsi-Cola can became an instant celebrity when he appeared on network TV news to describe his amazing discovery. Within several weeks, roughly fifty other persons around the country claimed they too had discovered hypodermic needles in Pepsi-Cola cans. Investigation showed all these reports were spurious.

TV's brainwashing of the public on UFOs occurs not only on NBC's *Unsolved Mysteries* and Fox network's *Sightings*, but also on more respected programs such as CBS's *48 Hours* and ones hosted by CNN's Larry King.

Why pick on the TV networks? Cannot the same criticism be leveled at the print media? No. Generally, even cub reporters know that when writing an article on a controversial subject they should try to present both sides of the issue. If they fail to do so, their older and wiser managing editors will remind them. An article may devote 60 or 70 percent of its content to pro-UFO views, but with TV the pro-UFO content typically runs 95 percent—or higher.

TV news programs *do* try to offer viewers an even-handed treatment of controversial subjects. Thus it is not surprising that many viewers assume they are getting an equally balanced treatment in TV shows that follow the news, such as *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Sightings*. This is especially true when the show is CBS's *48 Hours*, hosted by news anchor Dan Rather.

This "schizophrenic" policy would be less troubling if such TV programs were required to carry a continuous disclaimer, such as "This program is providing you with a one-sided treatment of a controversial issue. It is intended solely to entertain you," or at least if such a disclaimer were voiced by the host at the beginning and the end of such a program. But alas, at best there is only a brief disclaimer which typically says: "The following is a controversial subject."

Consider a typical NBC *Unsolved Mysteries* show dealing with the Roswell "crashed-saucer" incident. The show, which aired Sept. 18, 1994, included an appearance by me. Prior to the taping of my interview, I gave the producer photocopies of once top-secret and secret Air Force documents that had never before been seen on TV and that provided important new evidence that a flying saucer had *not* crashed in New Mexico.

These documents, dating back to late 1948, revealed that if an ET craft was recovered from New Mexico in July 1947, nobody informed top Pentagon intelligence officials who should have been the first to know. One of these top-secret documents, dated December 10, 1948, more than a year and a half after the alleged recovery of an ET craft and "alien" bodies, showed that top Air Force and Navy intelligence officials then believed that UFOs might be Soviet spy vehicles.

When the hour-long *Unsolved Mysteries* show aired, I

appeared for only twenty seconds to discuss the early history of the UFO era. Not one of the once top-secret and secret documents, which disproved the Roswell myth, or my taped references to these documents, was used.

On October 1, 1994, the famed Larry King aired a two-hour special program on the TNT cable network. Its title was "UFO Coverup? Live From Area 51." (Area 51 is part of an Air Force base in Nevada where new aircraft and weapons are tested. UFO believers allege that one can see alien spacecraft flying over the area and that the government has secret dealings and encounters with aliens there.)

Approximately one hour—half the two-hour program—was broadcast live from Nevada. For this hour, four pro-UFO guests were allowed to make wild claims, without a single live skeptic to respond. To give viewers the illusion of "balance," the show included pre-taped interviews with Carl Sagan and with me. Sagan appeared in five very brief segments, averaging less than fifteen seconds each, for a total of one and one-quarter minutes. I appeared in four brief segments for a total airtime of one and a half minutes.

So during the two-hour show, the audience was exposed to less than three minutes of skeptical views on UFOs, crashed saucers, and government coverup. And because Sagan and I were taped many weeks earlier, neither of us could respond to nonsense spouted by the four UFO promoters who appeared live for an hour.

Some weeks earlier, when I went to the studio for my taped interview for this Larry King show, I handed producer Tom Farmer photocopies of the same once top-secret and secret documents I had given to *Unsolved Mysteries*. Once again I stressed that these documents had never before appeared on any television show. Yet not one of these documents was shown during the two-hour program.

Near the end of the program, Larry King summed up the situation in the following words: "Crashed saucers. Who knows? But clearly the government is withholding something. . . ." In fact, it was Larry King and his producer who were withholding the hard data that would show that the government is not involved in a crashed-saucer coverup.

Larry King ended the program with these words: "We hope that you learned a lot tonight and that you found it both entertaining and informative at the same time."

If you were looking for a truly "informative" program on UFOs, you'd expect to find it on the *Science Frontiers* program broadcast on The Learning Channel, right? Wrong!

Last spring, The Learning Channel's *Science Frontiers* program aired a one-hour program titled "UFO." Not one of the many "UFO experts" interviewed on the program was a skeptic. The British producer sent a film crew to Washington—where I

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8. THE ORIGIN of the devices is not ascertainable. There are two reasonable possibilities: (1) The objects are domestic devices, and if so, their identification or origin can be established by a survey of all launchings of airborne objects. Domestic flying wing type aircraft observed in various aspects of flight might be responsible for some of the reported flying objects, particularly those described as disks and rough cigar shapes. (See Appendices "C" and "D.") Among those which have been operational in recent years are the XF5U-1 ("Flying Flapjack") developed by Chance-Vaught, the Northrup B-35, and the turbo-jet powered Northrup YB-49. The present existence of any privately developed flying-wing type aircraft has not been determined but one such aircraft, the Arup tailless monoplane, was operational at South Bend, Indiana, prior to 1935. (2) Objects are foreign, and if so, it would seem most logical to consider that they are from a Soviet source. The Soviets possess information on a number of German flying-wing type aircraft such as the Gotha P80A, Junkers EF 130 long-range, high-speed jet bomber and the Horten 229 twin-jet fighter, which particularly resembles some of the description of unidentified flying objects (See Appendix "D"). As early as 1924 Tschernomyskiy developed a "Parabola" aircraft, an all

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objects have a domestic origin. Otherwise, if it is firmly indicated that there is no domestic explanation, the objects are a threat and warrant more active efforts of identification and interception.

12. IT MUST be accepted that some type of flying objects have been observed, although their identification and origin are not discernable. In the interest of national defense it would be unwise to overlook the possibility that some of these objects may be of foreign origin.

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live—to interview pro-UFOlogist Fred Whiting, who was given nearly three minutes of airtime. Whiting assured the viewers: "There is indeed a coverup." But I was *not* invited to be interviewed.

In early 1994, I received a phone call from a producer of the CBS show *48 Hours*, saying they were producing a segment on the Roswell crashed saucer and would like to come down from New York in mid-April to interview me.

In late March 1994, I visited Roswell in connection with a new crashed-saucer book that was making its debut there. Not surprisingly, the CBS film crew from *48 Hours* was on hand and they did a brief interview with me. In an effort to inform the viewers of the 1948 top-secret document, I pulled it out of my pocket and held it up in front of the CBS camera. And I promised to provide the producer with more such documents, never before shown on TV, when they came to Washington for the more lengthy interview.

CBS never came to Washington for my interview. And when the show later aired, with Dan Rather as its host, CBS opted *not* to include any of the brief interview with me in Roswell—holding up the once top-secret document.

Young children, and their parents, will experience similar "brainwashing" when they visit Disney World's new "Tomorrowland" in Orlando. A new dynamic exhibit is called "Alien Encounters and Extra-TERRORestrial Experience." To encourage parents and children to visit the new UFO exhibit, in mid-March 1995 Walt Disney Inc. broadcast a one-hour TV show on ABC titled "Alien Encounters from New Tomorrow-

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ultrasonic) or cetaceans yell (in the infrasonic), but those are viable methods of communication. Perhaps the ETs have a language we can't hear."

Tom, we know that at least half the stars in this galaxy are in binary- or multiple-star systems. The only single-star system we know reasonably well has about nine planets. Recent Hubble images suggest our solar system may not be unique in the galaxy. Has life evolved elsewhere?

"I think a better question would be, Could life evolve elsewhere?" Tom says. "Probably. If planetary and stellar processes produce a planet at a decent distance from the primary star, and if the environment was peppered with some of the amino acids we see in space, or if there are acids formed by chemical reactions on the primitive planet, why not? Right now, I can't prove it did, and you can't prove it didn't."

We have no proof of ETs, but we do have proof that humans have active imaginations. The situation reminds me of an old *Pogo* comic strip in which a character said, "Either we are alone in the universe, or we are not. Either way, it's a mighty sobering thought." □



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land."

The show began by showing several brief home-video segments of bogus "UFOs" while the narrator intoned: "This is not swamp gas. It is not a flock of birds. This is an actual spacecraft from another world, piloted by alien intelligence. . . Intelligent life from distant galaxies is now attempting to make open contact with the human race. Tonight we will show you the evidence."

The Disney show included the Roswell crashed-saucer case with considerable emphasis on government coverup. At one point, the narrator noted that Jimmy Carter had had a UFO sighting prior to becoming president. The narrator added: "Later, when he assumed the office of president . . . his staff attempted to explore the availability of official investigations into alien contacts."

Then, as the camera rapidly panned a typewritten document, it zoomed in on the words "no jurisdiction," and the narrator said: "As this internal government memo illustrates, there are some security secrets outside the jurisdiction even of the White House." The implication was that even the president did not have access to UFO secrets.

In reality, the memo was an FBI response to a White House

inquiry about FBI involvement in investigating UFOs. The memo said that the FBI had "no jurisdiction" to investigate UFO reports and referred the White House to the Air Force. But the camera panned and zoomed so fast no viewer could read the memo.

Near the end of the program the narrator said: "Statistics indicate a greater probability that you will experience extraterrestrial contact in the next five years than the chances you will win a state lottery. But how do you prepare for such an extraordinary event? At Tomorrowland in Disney World, scientists and Disney engineers have brought to life a possible scenario that helps acclimate the public to their inevitable alien encounters."

More recently, Walt Disney Inc. has purchased the ABC television network. I won't be surprised if Disney and ABC use UFOs to attract more viewers.

For the tiny handful of those who produce TV and radio shows dealing with claims of the paranormal who truly want to provide their audience with both sides, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) is an invaluable resource in providing the names of experienced skeptics. The same is true for print-media reporters. If TV shows on UFOs are 95 percent "loaded" to promote belief, without CSICOP they would be 100 percent loaded. □