Τέλος φόρμας

Cashman is Right -- We Need Science

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SUBJECT: Cashman's Right--We Need Science
From: "Sparks, Brad" <BSPARKS@IFEIRVE.BEAV.COM>
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Dear List Members,

I thought I must have written the following remarks by Mark Cashman in response to the UFO survey, since they follow my thinking so closely:

"The scientific foundations of UFOlogy need to be reestablished. Paranormal theories of UFOs have done significant damage to our ability to understand UFOs, and have represented an opportunity for crackpots of every kind. Focus needs to be shifted from paranormal and abduction research back to research on physical trace and effects cases, and attempts to bring mathematics and physics to bear are essential."

I endorse this position almost totally and would like to see if support can be raised for returning the study of UFO's to a scientific basis. The only qualifications I would add are that I do believe that the paranormal and occult are part of the UFO phenomenon, and that "crashed saucers" need to be included in the list of discrediting subjects. It is foolish to think that if UFO's are paranormal they therefore must be studied through "paranormal /

occult" means, whatever that might be. Absolutely nothing of scientific value has ever been developed from "paranormal" methods, such as seances, regression hypnosis, card reading, etc. The closest anyone has ever come was with the original regression hypnosis case, the Betty and Barney Hill case, with Betty's alleged "star map" (and correct me if I'm wrong but I think Betty drew the map in a waking state, not under hypnosis). The star map did lead to some interesting scientific work, though it seems now to have largely fizzled out. But to my knowledge there hasn't been a shred of any further genuine scientific or technological data obtained from abduction cases since. It's almost as if we swallowed the bait and now we're hooked.

It is a failure of good judgment to abandon scientific techniques involving physics, math, chemistry, etc. This is the most pervasive failing of "UFOlogy" -- lack of good judgment. It seems that even the best of "scientific" investigators cannot resist believing the wildest nonsense, the looniest fringe characters, or endorsing the shakiest and most questionable cases. There is unfortunately a major reason why UFOlogists gravitate towards sensationalism -- intellectual laziness. It's easy to pick up a tape recorder and record someone's alleged abduction experience and tall tale of seeing the crashed saucer and dead aliens. It's harder to make surveying measurements of the scene of a low or medium-strangeness case, to take sighting azimuths and elevations, to review astronomical data, check weather reports, search balloon launching records, examine and preserve possible ground traces, etc.

We can trace the change in UFOlogy from a semi-authentic scientific effort to what it is now, back in the early 70's. The Condon Report of Jan. 1969 had a devastating impact on UFO research, and many groups struggled just to survive (and many didn't, such as NICAP ultimately). The closure of Project Blue Book in Dec. 1969 surprisingly had a similar damaging effect but in a more subtle way. Veteran investigators such as Coral Lorenzen welcomed the departure of the Air Force from the scene because it would enable civilian

researchers to get on with the scientific study of UFO's. But ironically it had the opposite effect. Once there was no more "father authority figure" agency such as Blue Book to constantly have to "prove" one's case to, the pressure was off from doing any diligent, serious scientific investigation (or to even inquire as to what a "scientific" investigation would entail).

We should be thankful for having skeptical investigators to at least partially filling the void left by the Air Force in order to keep us on our toes (even though some of the proffered explanations have been at the nitwit level and Menzel's were the worst). But it hasn't been enough. UFOlogy still remains in an incredibly childish, immature state where people at conventions run around with bullseye-target tee-shirts superimposed over Philip Klass' face. Grow up and get a life!

In the countercultural atmosphere of the 70's the attitude of many was to question whether "science" even had any meaning and whether it was appropriate to apply to UFO's. Instead, there was a strong inclination to dabble in the occult. Hypnotic regression to interview alleged abductees started to become popular instead of EM effects and landing traces. Peddling a new crashed saucer tale was easier to do than diligently investigate a case. About the only positive new development has been the use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to pry loose new government file data, but it is still highly unorganized and un-centralized (it doesn't necessarily need to be centralized but rapid interchange of info over Internet would help reduce burdens on government agencies of having to respond to innumerable overlapping and duplicative requests -- which they use as an excuse to delay responding to everyone).

To sum up, I would like to hear from those who would join with me in reorienting UFO research towards the science, as Mark Cashman has so eloquently urged.

Brad Sparks

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