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## Alien Abduction: Looking Back at America's First Case

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By [Benjamin Radford](#)

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The University of New Hampshire today is hosting a public forum surrounding a new exhibition called the "Betty and Barney Hill Collection." The Hills were an interracial couple in the 1960s, and the exhibit discusses Barney Hill's civil rights activism. However, the couple is best known for giving the first reported incident of an alleged alien abduction in America.

Today, due to television shows and films, the scenario is familiar: UFOs chase down terrified witnesses on a desolate road and take them onto the spaceship to ask them questions or probe them in awkward places.

It began one night when Barney and Betty Hill claimed they were [pursued by a glowing UFO](#) through parts of New Hampshire. Betty soon had vivid nightmares (which she interpreted as fragmented memories) about the incident, and the couple came to believe

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that they had been abducted by the UFO's occupants, who then [erased their memories](#). The couple sought the help of a psychiatrist, and under hypnosis both Hills soon reported full-blown, detailed "repressed memories" of their abduction.

The Barney and Betty Hill story was celebrated as the most important UFO-related event in the 1960s, and spun into a media sensation. Their experiences became fodder for many magazine articles, books, and a made-for-TV film called "The UFO Incident." Betty became a [UFO celebrity](#), giving media appearances and writing a book about her story.

As the years passed, however, the story lost its gloss.

No other witnesses could support their account, parts of it were implausible, and the validity of "repressed memories" was called into question. Betty Hill's own reported experiences cast doubt on her credibility. In the decades since her original 1961 experience with her husband Barney, Betty claimed not a few, nor dozens, but hundreds of [UFO sightings](#).

Though UFO investigators desperately wanted to believe her, that became more difficult. One UFO researcher who worked with Betty noted that she was "unable to distinguish between a landed UFO and a streetlight." In other words, she saw UFOs where none existed.

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Investigator Robert Sheaffer, author of "UFO Sightings: The Evidence," examined the path that the Hills claimed they followed in 1961 while pursued by the UFO. He noted that the area is populated by several towns, and that "it seems impossible that nobody would have noticed a car madly speeding down Route 3, screeching around corners and running stop signs and traffic signals with a low-level UFO in close pursuit."

Even many [UFO believers](#) reluctantly admit that much of Betty Hill's experiences and stories cannot be true and instead are likely imaginative fantasies of a sincere but confused woman. With little or no corroborating evidence and no eyewitnesses to support their remarkable story, the Barney and Betty Hill abduction case is, as often happens, inconclusive at best and a complete fabrication at worst. It's a shame that their dream- and hypnosis-inspired alien abduction story has overshadowed the Hills' legacy as advocates for civil rights.

- [10 Alien Encounters Debunked](#)
- [In 2009: UFO Hoax Was a Social Experiment](#)
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Benjamin Radford is the Bad Science columnist for Live Science. He covers pseudoscience, psychology, urban legends and the science behind "unexplained" or mysterious phenomenon. Ben has a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in psychology. He is deputy editor of Skeptical Inquirer science magazine and has written, edited or contributed to more than 20 books, including "Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries," "Tracking the Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore" and "Investigating Ghosts: The Scientific Search for Spirits," out in fall 2017. His website is [www.BenjaminRadford.com](http://www.BenjaminRadford.com)

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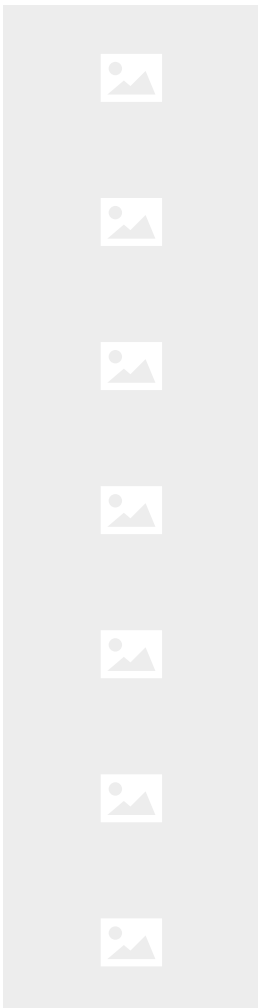
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