

The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics



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THE THIRD EYE

News and Commentary From the Weird World of the Media

By Pat Reeder

As I write this, night has fallen on El Casa de Reeder, and I am as worn out as a Kennedy family babysitter. Next week is Waxahachie's Gingerbread Trail Victorian Home Tour, and our house will be on it, which means we have been working our gluteus maxima off trying to get it into good enough shape to avoid sparking a ticket refund riot (The tour is June 7-8, so come down and see if we made it). Aside from sneaking in a shameless plug, I'm telling you this to explain why this month's column has no grand, overweening theme or deep, penetrating analysis (not that any previous columns have, either). Because I'm so pooped, it's just going to be a lot of random mutterings strung together haphazardly, in the manner of that impeccable prose stylist and USA Today columnist, Larry King. I'll even use lots of ellipses to separate my observations...

Like this...

Well, as everyone knows by now, Tony Blair's Labor Party won a huge landslide in the recent British election, just as political pollsters predicted. But how did the really professional prognosticators fare? Three days before the election, the chairman of the Astrological Association of Great Britain said the stars pointed to Labor. He declared, "The general feeling among astrologers is what is obvious to the rest of the country," which could also stand as a remarkably honest assessment of all astrological predictions. Not surprisingly, however, he hedged his bets, warning that "something weird or strange or mysterious is going to happen on polling day." That provided pretty wide butt coverage, even though the only weird thing that happened was that millions of Britons actually seemed to believe that voting for Tony Blair would make some sort of difference in their lives.

The Tories can take solace in knowing that they weren't the only losers on election day, for Britain's psychics also came a cropper. Craig Hamilton-Parker, a TV psychic on a popular British breakfast show, said the spirit world told him that John Major would pull out a surprise victory (he must've spoken to the ghost of Winston Churchill), and all his psychic pals agreed. He said the psychics were so sure of a Tory victory, "if we're wrong, I'll eat my hat. In fact, I'll eat my crystal ball." That must have made for a very entertaining episode of his breakfast show...

You know, I don't care what anybody says, the young Jerry Lewis was one fun-nee-ee-ee guy...

The season finale of *The X-Files* was one of the most thought-provoking episodes ever. Scully tracked down a government stool pigeon who revealed to Mulder that the alien/UFO stuff he had been obsessed with for years was all just a carefully orchestrated hoax designed to keep the public diverted from asking the Pentagon what it was really up to. The UFO sightings were all secret aircraft, the abduction memories were all planted during hypnosis, even Mulder's "X-Files" FBI investigations were created and nurtured to foster public belief in ETs. And Mulder's reaction? He may say "The truth is out there," but when he was informed of the truth and it didn't jibe with his cherished expectations, he couldn't handle it and apparently committed suicide at the cliffhanger ending.

Of course, we all know Mulder will be back next season, and creator/writer Chris Carter is already hinting that the suicide is a hoax; knowing this show, the hoax story itself will turn out to be a hoax, so the conspiracy can continue. But unlike most TV series finales, it does give us something to think about over the summer. For instance, UFO buffs often ask, "What would you say if a flying saucer landed tomorrow and you discovered these things were real?" I think I would say: "Son of a gun! These things are real! Well, let's find out more about them!" It wouldn't exactly shatter my deeply held beliefs, since I really don't have any on this subject. I've always said I'm willing to believe anything that anyone can prove. But would UFO believers be willing to stop believing in something if it were disproved, or have UFOs now become a religion, so that faith is paramount and evidence irrelevant? Will the Lone Gunmen take the Mulder way out? Did even Mulder take the Mulder way out? Tune in next fall, and we'll all find out together...

Put some M&Ms and some movie popcorn in your mouth at once and chew them up together. Good eating!...

My Favorite News Story of the Month comes to us from Santa Fe, New Mexico, where 50-year-old social studies teacher Roger Katz was put on trial for allegedly having an affair with a 14-year-old student. He used the Shirley MacLaine Defense: He claimed he owed her a debt of love because they were lovers during a past life in Tibet over 1,000 years ago, and she died by taking an arrow that was meant for him. But the judge didn't swallow it. He called Katz a "wolf" (perhaps he was, in a past life) and sentenced him to a year and a half in prison. I suspect that in a former life, the judge was the guy who shot the arrow...

Have you noticed that all banjo players fall into one of two camps? They either pluck the strings individually with their fingers, or they go "yuck-tucka-tucka-tucka" with their whole hand. Why the heck is that?...

Surely, we are living in the last days, and I don't just say that because Dennis Rodman is a national icon while Marv Albert is called a pervert. No, I say it because the religious news has turned apocalyptically wacky. For instance: A public school in New South Wales, Australia, banned the traditional Easter passion play because the depiction of Christ's crucifixion was too scary and violent. In one scene, the clothes were ripped off the back of the 12-year-old playing Jesus, revealing — gasp! — fake blood! School officials felt this sight could warp the younger kids for life, as if going to public school in Australia would not. Next year, look for a passion play in which Jesus is killed painlessly by Dr. Kevorkian's suicide machine...

At a Christian revival in the Philippines, a preacher poured oil all over the head of presidential candidate Aquilino Pimentel and declared that he was God's choice to be president. This is truly a miracle! We've actually found a country with politicians who are oilier than our own...

The Council on American-Islamic Relations demanded that Nike apologize and withdraw a line of sneakers because the logo, which was just meant to look like flames, resembles the word "Allah" in Arabic script. Even spookier, if you look at it upside down, it reads, "Help! I'm being held prisoner in a shoe sweatshop!" in Vietnamese...

Of course, in Islamic countries, even the Good Humor Man is in a bad mood. Islamic authorities in Kabul, Afghanistan, sent two ice cream vendors to jail for two days for selling ice cream to some women who were not completely veiled from head to toe. There was no official comment on how they could have possibly licked an ice cream cone through a veil...

And here in America, two long opposing factions, the Mormon Church and the National Organization for Women, have found common ground: polygamy. Polygamist wife Elizabeth Joseph, an attorney and college teacher, spoke to a recent

convention of Utah's NOW chapter and argued that polygamy is actually the ultimate, empowering feminist lifestyle. She said that because she shares her husband with seven other women (and no, her husband is not Dick Morris), she has much more freedom. She said the other wives are always available to babysit, and when she wanted to move 400 miles away to go to law school, she never had to worry about whether her husband had clean shorts in the morning and dinner at night (not that any other NOW members ever worry about that, either). It's a pretty convincing case, but somehow, I doubt that any man other than Bill Clinton could convince his wife that having a harem is just his way of promoting women's rights...

Speaking of Clinton, my friends at the Wireless Flash news service, who interview wackos so others don't have to, report this month that John Kennedy's ghost approves of Clinton renting out the Lincoln Bedroom to political donors. Portland, Maine, Spiritualist Rev. Gerald Polley claims that JFK told him personally that the president should be able to invite anyone he wants to sleep in his house. Sadly, JFK went back to the spirit world before he could pass along Marilyn Monroe's phone number...

I am also indebted to the Wireless Flash for informing me of the following news items, which would otherwise not be lodged in my brain, taking up valuable space —

- A self-proclaimed dolphin expert from America's Wackiness Capitol, Santa Fe, New Mexico, claims that dolphins are actually space aliens, which would explain the superhuman intelligence of Flipper. But it doesn't explain how you can be a dolphin expert in New Mexico...
- Psychotherapist Bellaruth Naparstek has a book coming out from the once-proud publishing house of Harper-Collins, in which she claims that the raging hormones in teenage girls make them extremely psychic. If she'd said the raging hormones in teenage boys make them extremely psycho, I might have bought it...
- A Scottish marine biologist claims he detects traces of cannabis at the bottom of Loch Ness, leading him to conclude that the Loch Ness Monster is addicted to pot, which would explain its elusive, paranoid behavior (and its collection of Willie Nelson records). He wants to lure Nessie to the surface by dumping 50 pounds of marijuana into the lake. If that doesn't work, try a humongous Oreo...
- A group of Wisconsin UFO fanatics says aliens are afraid to land here, so they asked everyone to wear purple ribbons on May 16 to show the aliens we're peaceful and kind. If wearing lapel ribbons attracts aliens, how come they didn't land at the Academy Awards?...
- A spiritualist minister in Tijuana claims that non-smokers who sometimes feel the urge to smoke are being possessed by the ghosts of dead smokers, of which there are quite a few, and apparently, they can't kick coffin nails even when they've stopped coughin' and laid down in a coffin. So if you find yourself suddenly craving a cigarette, call an exorcist. Or better yet, sue a tobacco company...

I got all this and more from the Wireless Flash, and I didn't even mention that chupacabras are running wild in Oregon or that dead people communicate with us through wild animals! That's much better than *Strange Universe*, whose best stories this past month involved some people who think John Tesh is a space alien sent here to undermine Earth's musical culture (hell, everybody knows that!) and that dusty old story about NASA faking the moon landing. Their source for the latter was a former associate of Lyndon LaRouche! Who's their story editor, Bigfoot?...

Speaking of feet, shoes may come and shoes may go, but nobody will ever improve on Hush Puppies...

A new book is soon to be published that's already stirring up controversy. In *The Manic Sun*, scientific journalist Nigel Calder claims that any climate change that's going on now is part of an endless, natural cycle caused by the sun, not by manmade pollutants. Calder claims that many scientists, particularly those in Britain's Meteorological Office, have fudged scientific data and ignored contradictory evidence in order to promote the politically correct "global warming" scenario, because by doing so, they gain grant money, media attention and access to top politicians. Environmentalists and global warming adherents are trashing Calder, but much of his data is supplied by the Danish Meteorological Institute, which seems to agree with his assertions. I'm looking forward to reading his claims for myself. Sounds like it would make a great summertime beach book...

...One final thought: The only thing better than getting a footrub is getting a footrub while listening to the music of Mr. Tony Bennett!...

"Don't Know Much About History"

A Study on Historical Revisionism

by Danny Barnett

(Part 1 in a four-part series on "A Theological Foundation for Paranoia")

Whenever our children study history in school, we want assurance that the magnifying lens they're provided with has no defects. The last thing we want to hear is that they are being fed revisionist history; such is the stuff of classrooms in Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, but we want none of it in the land of the free and the home of the brave. Unfortunately, however, revisionism is exactly what some people have in store for America's children. Much of it centers around the famous "wall of separation" between church and state that has been inferred from the First Amendment. Here's what Rick Scarborough, a Baptist minister from Pearland, Texas, says about church-state separation:

The tragedy of our nation's plight is that it proceeded from a lie. Satan, who engineered the philosophical foundation of the atheistic communist regime that kept one-third of the world's population in darkness for over seventy years, is the father of the lie...When the Supreme Court justices ruled that the Constitution erected a "wall of separation" between Church and state, they lied. Whether their actions were intentionally designed to subvert the truth or they acted in ignorance of the truth, is beside the point. The framers of the Constitution never erected such a wall. In fact, as we have demonstrated, they saw the necessity for a union to exist between the Church and state, without which there could be no morality.¹

There are many fundamentalists who express similar views on church-state relations, and many of them (including Scarborough) have written books on the subject. David Barton, founder of WallBuilders, may be one of the most influential. WallBuilders take their name from a statement by the prophet Nehemiah: "You see the distress that we are in...come, let us build the walls that we may no longer be a reproach." (Nehemiah 2:17) Barton, who lives in Aledo, Texas, writes and publishes books that deal with the Supreme Court, the Founding Fathers, and the Constitution of the United States. Contrary to what the name "WallBuilders" implies, Barton seeks to dismantle Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation" between church and state by advancing the notion that America is a "Christian nation." Barton's books, including *The Myth of Separation*, *Original Intent*, and *America: To Pray or Not to Pray* are treasured by evangelicals, fundamentalists, and those on the extreme right.

Barton first released *The Myth of Separation* back in 1988, and it went through several printings since then, with more and more people being turned on to the ideas presented in the book. Barton stated:

There is much to be said for knowing the truth about a subject. Truth has a very liberating effect — it brings a type of freedom...Therefore, it is important that we know the truth about the roots and foundations of this nation — we need to know what our Founders taught and what earlier courts ruled.²

The Myth of Separation attempted to do several things all at once. Its primary objective was to discredit the notion of church-state separation and affirm that the United States was a "Christian nation." To do so, *Myth* threw in plenty of quotes from Supreme Court rulings and from Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington that seemed to support Barton's theories. *Myth* also tried to show the downturn that American society took when "voluntary" school prayer was struck down by the Supreme Court by linking increasing rates in violent crime, divorce, and teenage pregnancies to the abolition of school prayer. In addition, the book also tried to make a case for preventing the Supreme Court from running roughshod over the Constitution and exhorted Christians to get involved in politics in order to support elected officials who preach the gospel of "Divine law."

Barton expressed various grievances in *Myth*. He criticized the legal standing of atheism in American society; "The legal usage of the word 'religion' has now become so broad that the Court now demands that atheism and secular humanism be co-equal with Christianity."³ He stated that morality was "acquired <>only from religious principles."⁴ He

also taught that the Founding Fathers wanted to unite church and state rather than separate them. Among the people he quoted were George Washington:

It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.⁵

Thomas Jefferson:

I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make us better citizens.⁶

And James Madison:

We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.⁷

The Madison quote was especially popular. It even issued from the lips of Rush Limbaugh on his daily radio program. Newt Gingrich (R-GA), the Speaker of the House, became a Barton fan. David Barton started appearing on religious talk-radio programs hosted by James Dobson, Beverly LaHaye, and Marlin Maddoux. Barton also addressed Christian Coalition meetings, and is active in the Coalition's Texas chapter. Pat Robertson, televangelist and founder of the Coalition, called Barton a "wonderful man" and stated, "I admire him for his breadth of information."⁸ Videotapes such as *America's Godly Heritage* and *Education and the Founding Fathers* were produced and sold by WallBuilders. Some teachers started clamoring for the tapes, hoping to expose their students to Barton's teachings.

Thanks to the above quotes from the Founding Fathers, WallBuilders publications started selling like hotcakes. Unfortunately for David Barton and WallBuilders, those same quotes were about to get them in trouble.

Church & State editor Rob Boston, who also authored books such as *Why The Religious Right is Wrong about Separation of Church and State*, related the following story of what happened when someone decided to track down the James Madison quote:

Robert S. Alley, professor emeritus at the University of Richmond and author of *James Madison on Religious Liberty*, undertook a dogged effort to track it down. Enlisting the help of the editors of *The Papers of James Madison* at the University of Virginia, Alley scoured reams of documents, books, and writings. After coming up empty-handed, the Madison scholar concluded that the quote was probably fictional.

Now the major purveyor of the quote, Texas-based Religious Right propagandist David Barton, has admitted it's bogus. Last year Barton's group, WallBuilders, issued a one-page document titled "Questionable Quotes," a list of 12 statements allegedly uttered by Founding Fathers and other prominent figures, that are now considered to be suspect or outright false.⁹

The James Madison quote appeared on the list of "Questionable Quotes." So did the George Washington quote. So did the Thomas Jefferson quote. Barton could only trace the Madison quote to the 1939 book *Liberty! Cry Liberty!* by Harold K. Lane, with a reference to Fredrick Nyneyer's 1958 publication *First Principles in Morality and Economics: Neighborly Love and Ricardo's Law of Association*.¹⁰ Alley, the man who called Barton's bluff, commented on WallBuilders' reliance on questionable material:

It's one thing to get up and make a speech and allude to something that isn't there, but when you have somebody parading a document in a book and that turns out to be an outright lie, it's more dangerous. The danger is that people will find credibility in what he does largely because he represents himself in that mode. He's a double fraud.¹¹

To add insult to injury, U.S. District Judge Neal B. Biggers Jr. ruled that WallBuilders materials such as the video *America's Godly Heritage* could not be used in public schools, stating that "teachers are attempting to indoctrinate the students in religious beliefs by claiming to teach Middle East history" with the aid of Barton's video.¹² It seemed that the credibility of WallBuilders had suffered a powerful blow, perhaps even a fatal one. Rob Boston, however, told a different story:

Incredibly, Barton appears to have emerged undamaged even after admitting that many of his quotes are bogus, and he continues spreading incorrect information throughout the Religious Right's media empire. During his most recent interview with Dobson May 2, Barton conceded that Thomas Jefferson's famous 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists of Connecticut calls for a "wall of separation between church and state." But Barton later went on to claim that later in the letter Jefferson says separation "means the government will not run the church, but we will still use Christian principles with government." In fact, Jefferson's letter says no such thing.¹³

Barton has also stopped printing *The Myth of Separation*. The text has been revised and repackaged in a larger book called *Original Intent*, which can be found today at many Christian book stores. It still argues many of the points found in *Myth*, but the spurious quotes are gone. *Original Intent* contains its share of errors and fallacies, but they're more subtle than the errors in *Myth*. Barton faithfully quotes Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, which includes this statement: "I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties."¹⁴ But Barton adds this commentary to Jefferson's quote:

By definition, "natural rights" included "that which the Books of the Law and the Gospel do contain." Very simply, "natural rights" incorporated what God Himself had guaranteed to man in the Scriptures.¹⁵

According to who? Turns out that Barton pulled that quote defining "natural rights" out of the writings of 16th-century British theologian and legal philosopher Richard Hooker, who borrowed the definition from a 12th-century philosopher named Gratian.¹⁶ But how did the Founding Fathers define "natural rights?" An article from the Web site of the San Diego *Union-Tribune* questioned whether the Founding Fathers even tried to define the term. They quoted the Ninth Amendment: "The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." Afterwards, they made this statement:

The Ninth Amendment's modern claim to fame is that Robert Bork likened it to an inkblot. It can't be interpreted because its meaning was never actually spelled out by the Founding Fathers, Bork said during his failed confirmation hearings for a seat on the Supreme Court.¹⁷

So what *were* the beliefs of the Founding Fathers regarding church-state separation? A complete analysis would be too lengthy here, but we can take a quick look at a letter from Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, in which he stated that a scandal in early America...

...had given to the clergy a very favorite hope of obtaining an establishment of a particular form of Christianity through the United States, and as every sect believes its own form the true one, every one perhaps hoped for his own, but especially the Episcopalians and Congregationalists. The returning good sense of our country threatens abortion to their hopes, and they believe that any portion of power confided to me will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly, for I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.¹⁸

This is not to say that Barton is deliberately pulling one over on the American people. Revisionist history is unbelievably easy to get mixed up in; all you need is a pet theory, a desire to promote it, and a few quotes to back it up. I myself stand as a witness to this.

Back in 1995, I wrote an article that was published in the Viewpoints section of *The Dallas Morning News* that criticized the Federal ban on "assault weapons." In this essay, I used two quotes that were attributed to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson that supported my position. Afterwards, I got a phone call from someone who asked where I got the quotes. As I explained where I had found them, I realized that my sources were newspapers and computer bulletin boards. What I really needed to do was consult the actual writings of Jefferson and Washington rather than get my information from a second-hand source.

I went down to the library at Richland College and tried to track down the Jefferson quote, looking through various compilations of his writings, but came up empty. I found other statements that Jefferson made defending the right to

keep and bear arms, but I never found *that* statement. If anyone wants to take a shot at tracking it down, here it is:

When governments fear people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

I didn't have a chance to track down the purported quote from Washington, but here it is:

Firearms stand next in importance to the Constitution itself...The very atmosphere of firearms anywhere and everywhere restrains evil interference — they deserve a place of honor with all that is good.

If any of you can track either of these quotes down to a reliable source, I'd be happy to learn where I can look them up for myself and in what context they're found. If I happen to find them myself, perhaps I can document the source material in a future issue of *The Skeptic*.

I risk embarrassing myself by telling you about my Viewpoints article because it should serve as a caution to anybody who wishes to quote anyone, especially historical figures who died long ago and are no longer able to speak for themselves. History is a very fragile institution, one that must be handled carefully and guarded with vigilance. It has only been some 52 years since the Nazi Holocaust in eastern Europe was finally brought to an end, and already there are elements in our society who are trying to convince the rest of the world that the atrocities at Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, and Sobibor never happened. When the last of the surviving eyewitnesses finally dies, will these neo-Nazi revisionists accelerate their attacks on children's textbooks?

David Barton is far removed from these Holocaust revisionists. He may truly believe that America was founded as a Christian nation. Revisionism, however, is still revisionism. The study of history remains a pursuit of the undiluted truth about our past. Barton must therefore prove his statements just like anyone else who represents himself as an authority on America's history. So must I. It's a sobering exercise in skepticism; your pet theories may be challenged by the facts, but that is the risk — and the challenge — that everyone accepts when they search for the truth.

1 Conn, Joseph L. "Bully Pulpit." *Church & State*. May 1996: pg. 11-12

2 Barton, David. *The Myth of Separation*. 3rd edition. Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 1993; pg. 9

3 Ibid., pg. 30

4 Ibid., pg. 265

5 Ibid., pg. 248

6 Ibid., pg. 175

7 Ibid., pg. 120

8 Boston, Rob. "Consumer Alert! WallBuilders' Shoddy Workmanship." *Church & State*, July/August 1996; pg. 12

9 Ibid., pg. 11

10 Barton, *The Myth of Separation*; pg. 304

11 Boston, *Church & State*, July/August 1996; pg. 11

12 Ibid., pg. 12

13 Ibid.

14 Barton, David. *Original Intent*. Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 1996; pg. 46

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., pp. 219-220, pg. 466

17 Stinson, Tom and Dwight Donatto. *The Bill of Rights*. http://www.uniontrib.com/reports/bill_of_rights/

18 Mayo, Bernard, ed. *Jefferson Himself*. Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1988; pg. 211

Heaven's Gate Linked To The Media

(This story is a press release from CSICOP, dated May 12, 1997)

Heaven's Gate continues to stun the world. Why would 39 seemingly gentle and earnest people in Rancho Santa Fe, California, voluntarily commit collective suicide? They left us eerie messages on videotapes conveying their motives: they wished to leave their "containers" (physical bodies) in order to ascend to a new plane of existence, a Level Above Human. Last week, (May 6th) two new attempts at suicide by Heaven's Gate Cult members, one tragically successful, followed on the heels of the original 39. According to newspaper reports a member of the cult fears that other Heaven's Gate followers will join their compatriots in death.

A celestial omen, the Hale-Bopp comet, provoked their departure. Cult followers thought that it carried with it a UFO spacecraft— an event already proclaimed on the nationally syndicated Art Bell radio show when Whitley Strieber and Courtney Brown maintained that a space ship "extraterrestrial in origin" and under "intelligent control" was tracking the comet. According to astronomer Alan Hale, what they probably saw was a star behind the comet. Interestingly, the 19 men and 21 women, ranging in ages from 21 to 72, seemed like a cross-section of American citizens, and sought to convey their bizarre UFO-theology on the Internet. Were these people crazy, a fringe group, overcome by paranoia? Or was there a deeper cause at work in their behavior?

The followers of Heaven's Gate lived under a siege mentality; they were super-secretive, attempting to hide their personal identities. They were like nomads wandering in the wilderness, seeking the truths of a Higher Revelation from extraterrestrial semi-divine beings. What has puzzled so many commentators is the depth of their conviction that space aliens were sending envoys to the planet earth and abducting humans.

This form of irrational behavior came as no surprise to the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and skeptics across the globe. It is the mass media that deserve a large share of blame for this UFO mythology. Book publishers, TV and movie producers have fed the public a steady diet of science fiction fantasy, packaged and sold as real.

Alien abductions and autopsies, nightly visitations, spirit channeling, interdimensional travel and psychic ability are just a few of the fringe claims that permeate our media.

The effect is to feed the "transcendental temptation," the tendency of many human beings to leap beyond the earth to other dimensions, impervious to the tests of evidence and the standards of logical coherence, the temptation to engage in magical thinking and fantasizing. UFO-mythology is similar to the message of the classical religions where God sends his Angels as emissaries who are able to offer salvation to those who accept the faith and obey his Prophets. Today, the chariots of the gods are UFOs. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Kenneth Arnold's alleged sighting of the first flying saucers, and what we have witnessed over the past half century is the spawning of a New Age religion.

Creators of science fiction and fantasy like the *X-Files*, *Independence Day* and *Alien Autopsy* claim that their product is harmless and not taken seriously. However, the public, with few exceptions, has not been exposed to the careful, critical investigations of such UFO claims, which invariably find them without scientific foundation. TV is a powerful medium and when it enters the home with high drama and the stamp of authenticity, it is difficult for ordinary persons to ferret out purely imaginative fantasies from reality. Many people have blamed the Internet, but it is the media conglomerates

who sell their ideas as products that should be criticized, not the Internet. We are surely not calling for censorship, only that some measure of responsibility be exercised by editors and producers.

Given the steady stream of irresponsible programming spewing forth, we need some balance in the presentation of science. It is increasingly difficult for large sectors of the public to distinguish between science and pseudoscience, particularly since there is a heavy dose of "quasi-documentary" films that distort the truth. If the United States is to continue to provide leadership and compete in the global economy, we need to raise the level of scientific literacy and understanding of the general public, otherwise there may be more Heaven's Gate-type of behavior.