

Scrutinizing the outer limits of scholarly research. JTK

# Space aliens invade Harvard's protocol

PHLEWR 5-5-95  
By Anne Thompson  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Before he started talking about space aliens, John Mack was a well-respected professor at Harvard Medical School. He founded the psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital, one of Harvard's teaching facilities. He won a 1977 Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Lawrence of Arabia.

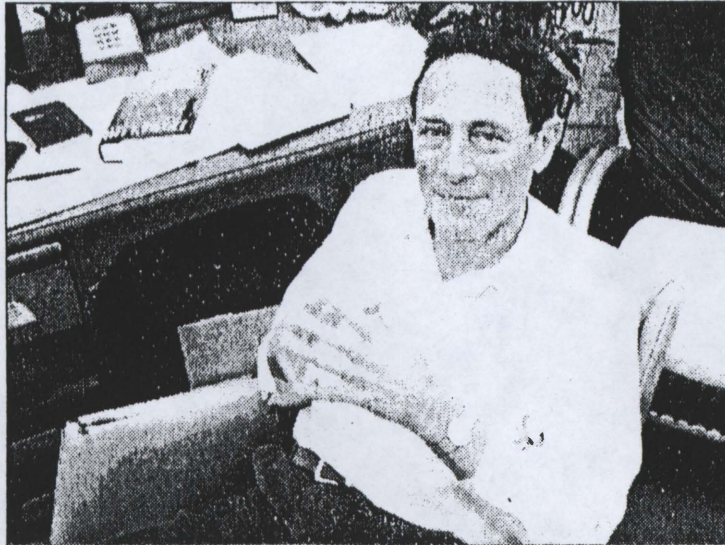
Then he wrote a bestseller about people who say that little gray space creatures kidnapped them and took them away in flying saucers for sexual experiments.

Now, his colleagues are investigating whether Mack's alien-abduction research meets Harvard's standards for scholarship.

The Harvard Medical Committee expects to complete its report within two months. Based on it, the dean, Dr. Daniel Tosteson, will make a decision that could range from trying to oust Mack to applauding his perseverance in doing work that his colleagues might call quackery.

Attorney Roderick MacLeish, representing Mack during the review, said Harvard's action violates the principle of the tenure system, which gives professors jobs for life so they can feel free to pursue radical or unpopular research.

"History has not been kind to those who have unorthodox ideas," MacLeish said yesterday. "That's the whole point of having a free and open academic community. That's the whole purpose of tenure."



Associated Press / SUSAN WALSH

**Professor John Mack at Harvard.** His research on people who contend they had contact with space aliens is being probed.

Mack's book, *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens*, discusses his treatment of patients who say they had sex with aliens.

The book's 13 case studies include Ed, who remembers an alien woman taking a sperm sample from him when he was in high school; Jerry, who says she gave birth to a human-alien hybrid; and Peter, who tells Mack he had an "alien wife" in a "parallel universe."

After the book was published in April 1994, Mack promoted it on *Oprah*, *Larry King Live*, and other talk shows.

Publicity may be what inspired the medical school to investigate

Mack's scholarship, said a source close to the case who spoke on condition of anonymity. The source also said that the down-to-earth medical school professors felt threatened by Mack's otherworldly research.

"If Dr. Mack is right, it undercuts so much of the work of people over there," the source said. "These people don't think anything is true unless they've got a controlled study with rats."

Leading the committee is Dr. Arnold Relman, a kidney specialist, emeritus medical school professor and a former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Relman would not com-

ment on the content of the review.

"We are now in the process of preparing a report, and what, if anything, happens after that is out of our hands," Relman said.

Other Harvard faculty members would not comment about Mack's research or the review.

However, Dr. Paul R. McHugh, director of the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins Medical School, said Harvard's investigation into Mack was justified and "long overdue."

"I've known John since the 1950s. He's a brilliant fellow who occasionally loses it, and this time he's lost it big time," McHugh said. "He is saying there are people who have been abducted by aliens and need treatment for it, and that is just outrageous."

Mack, 65, did not return telephone calls. Last year, he said he did not necessarily believe in space aliens. Mack said he did believe his patients were not mentally ill or experiencing the effects of incest, rape or other abuse. His patients experienced trauma, he said, and trauma is the response to something outside the body, not inside the mind.

As for his debunkers, Mack said then that he understood why they might find his work troubling.

"We don't have room in our culture for this," he said. "It's the elite people, my colleagues, who decide what we're supposed to believe, and to them this isn't supposed to be."