

A THREAT TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM?

# Book on Alien Abductions Sparks Investigation

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Harvard University's investigation of a tenured psychiatry professor who wrote about alleged alien abductions raises questions about academic freedom, according to an attorney representing the professor.

"No one should quarrel with the right of a tenured faculty member to write unconventional books," said Boston attorney Roderick MacLeish Jr. "The purpose of these is to protect against retaliation in these areas."

It's been widely reported in the media that the university is investigating the work of psychiatrist Dr. John E. Mack, author of "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens" (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994).

The best-selling book includes accounts of 13 of Dr. Mack's patients who, he wrote, remember "being taken by alien beings into a strange craft." These

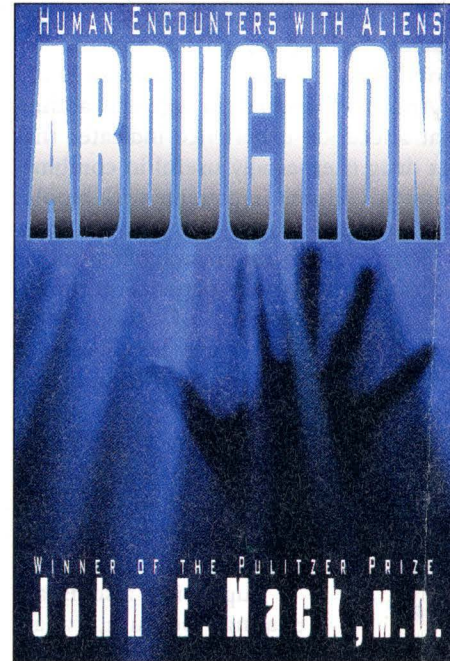
accounts were elicited through conscious recall or recall with the help of hypnosis.

Keren McGinty, a spokeswoman for the medical school, declined to comment on the matter, citing university policy "to neither confirm nor deny information relating to personnel matters."

According to media reports, the dean of Harvard Medical School established a committee a year ago to examine whether Dr. Mack had conducted his research in accordance with Harvard's standards of scholarly investigation and whether he was exploiting his patients or subjecting them to harm. The committee reportedly has drafted a report summarizing its findings, which it will present to the dean.

"No patient has come before the committee to complain about Dr. Mack's treatment," said Mr. MacLeish. He added that 30 of Dr. Mack's patients and some of their therapists had written statements supporting the psychiatrist.

Some in the psychiatric community,



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In the book, patients recount 'being taken by alien beings into a strange craft.'

like Dr. Paul McHugh, of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, believe that the university's investigation of Dr. Mack is justified.

"He's practicing at a clinic on the basis of patients having been abducted by aliens," said Dr. McHugh, director of the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences. "If you fail to see the true psychiatric conditions behind [their problems], you will harm patients. Therefore, you should be investigated."

The patients, who frequently were referred to Dr. Mack by other therapists, generally participated in two or three sessions with him, either at his home or at the Cambridge (Mass.) Hospital, a Harvard teaching hospital, Mr. MacLeish said.

Dr. Mack evaluated more than 100 people, 76 of whom fulfilled his criteria for alien abduction, according to the book. Patients who did not meet these criteria were referred for psychotherapy as appropriate, Mr. MacLeish said. ■