

## Harvard Clears UFO Author

### Case Raised Concern on Academic Freedom

By Christopher B. Daly  
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CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Aug. 3—After more than a year of closed-door hearings, Harvard officials disclosed today they will not discipline psychiatrist John Mack, who has gained notoriety for taking seriously people who say they have been abducted by space aliens.

Instead, the dean of the Harvard Medical School, Daniel Tosteson, met with Mack and reminded him of the standards expected of a Harvard professor. At the same time, however, the dean reaffirmed Mack's right to study

whatever he wishes. The outcome was a relief to Mack, his lawyer said, but it hardly made up for the stress, lost time and \$100,000 in legal expenses the psychiatrist incurred in defending his right to investigate controversial subjects—which, in the case of Mack's latest book, include UFOs, little gray aliens and reports of insemination of humans by space creatures.

The question of academic freedom raised by the Mack case made the dean's investigation a hotly debated issue, on the Harvard campus and beyond. Ironically, the affair provided additional publicity for Mack, who made

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## Harvard Clears Best-Selling UFO Author

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the talk-show circuit last year to discuss his book "Abduction," which is about alien encounters with humans.

In an unsigned statement, the medical school announced that its review by a three-member panel had been completed. It said Tosteson had met with Mack and "urged Dr. Mack . . . not, in any way, to violate the high standards for the conduct of clinical practice and clinical investigation that have been the hallmarks of this faculty." The dean also "reaffirmed Dr. Mack's academic freedom" and noted he remains a "member in good standing" of the faculty. "No further comment will be made," the statement concluded. Mack and his supporters said they welcomed the outcome.

"This proceeding never should have taken place," said Eric MacLeish, the attorney representing Mack, who is vacationing. "It has been an extraordinary experience for someone who has done nothing wrong." The lawyer emphasized the issue was never medical malpractice. In fact, MacLeish said, Mack presented the Harvard committee with witnesses and affidavits testifying to his clinical success in treating patients who claim they were abducted by aliens.

Until last year, Mack was a respected senior psychiatrist with a number of impressive accomplishments who was known for his enthusiasm for such unorthodox movements as Erhard Seminar Training (est), a motivational therapy popular in the 1970s.

Author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T.E. Lawrence (popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia), Mack was also the founder of the psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital. In the early 1990s, he became interested in alien abduction. Soon, dozens of alleged victims were flocking to him for treatment. Mack wrote that he gradually became convinced they were not mentally ill and had symptoms similar to those of trauma victims. Eventually, he published his findings in a book that became a bestseller.

At some points in the book, Mack is careful to hedge. He wrote, for example, "We do not know if any of [these] phenomena exist literally on the purely material plane of reality." But at other points, Mack seemed to accept existence of aliens.

The medical school's investigation of Mack's research was initiated by Tosteson in May 1994, who has refused to speak with reporters about the matter. He never indicated what possible penalties Mack faced.

At issue was the soundness of Mack's research methods, according to the chairman of the ad hoc investigating committee, Arnold Relman, a professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School and editor emeritus of the New England Journal of Medicine. Relman said the dean had received "many, many complaints" about Mack.

He said the review was prompted by Mack's "astounding" claims about the reality of alien abduction, which were not backed by evidence submitted to scholarly journals for scrutiny by colleagues.

The investigation "was a critical review of his scholarly methods by his faculty peers set up by the many, many questions raised about the way he was doing what he was doing," Relman said. "We were not a disciplinary committee." Critics faulted the process for its secrecy and possible "chilling effect" on other researchers.

Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz, who is critical of Mack's methods but defends his right to choose his research topics, said that while he applauded the outcome, the investigation had been a mistake.

"In the end, having to hire a law firm to defend your research will chill controversy," Dershowitz said.

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