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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: ETH &c

From: clark@mn.frontiercomm.net [Jerome Clark]
Date: Sun, 09 Nov 1997 12:59:22 PST
Fwd Date: Sun, 09 Nov 1997 15:24:01 -0500
Subject: Re: ETH &c

> From: Boroimhe@aol.com [Jeff King]
> Date: Sat, 8 Nov 1997 20:23:21 -0500 (EST)
> To: updates@globalserve.net
> Subject: Re: ETH &c

> Salutations to the list, and a response to:

> >From: clark@mn.frontiercomm.net [Jerome Clark]
> >Date: Fri, 07 Nov 1997 11:00:28 PST
> >Fwd Date: Fri, 07 Nov 1997 22:36:54 -0500
> >Subject: Re: ETH &c

> I realize that interjecting myself into this cat fight is
> probably a pointless exercise, but since Mr. Clark comments
> (badly) on a passage that I allowed His Grace to quote, I do feel
> obliged to do so. (Also, since this is my first attempt at
> posting to the list, I apologize in advance for any formatting,
> or other errors I may commit).

> >What a load of crapola here. When have I ever said
> >Roswell is one of "the best cases"? Roswell is difficult,
> >complicated, and ambiguous and depends, in the absence
> > of more conclusive evidence, whom one chooses to believe.

> Yes, you do now describe Roswell as "lost in confusion," but
> let's not forget these quotes from yesteryear:

> "In short order (in mid-June, to be specific) Kevin Randle and
> Donald Schmitt's long-awaited 'UFO Crash at Roswell' will be
> out. It records the most thoroughly investigated, the most
> completely documented event in the history of ufology. The
> Roswell incident is, of course, also the most important case of
> all. As its secrets are unraveled (and investigation continues),
> ufology's big questions, the ones that brought our field into
> being in the first place, are being answered: What are UFOs?
> Who pilots them? What does officialdom know, and when did it
> know it? Those whose interpretation of the UFO phenomenon
> is based on empirical evidence will rejoice as the heretofore
> unkillable canard, that UFO research has made no progress in
> four decades, is disposed of once and for all."
> Jerome Clark
> International UFO Reporter, March-April 1991.

I still think Roswell is an extraordinarily important case,
potentially the most important of all. It is not, however, the
best case. I think critics have considerably over-stated their
argument, but I do think they have succeeded in highlighting

weaknesses and ambiguities which ensure that as things stand Roswell is far from the "best case." (Literate readers will know the difference, Jeff, even if the distinction escapes you.) I have followed the debate, listened seriously to all sides, and adjusted my thoughts accordingly. I would like to think you'd do the same, Jeff, but maybe you think a view once lodged in your mind can never be removed or even modified. Personally, I harbor a sentimental preference for an always open mind.

The core of the problem is that the serious investigation did not begin until 30 years after the fact. The reconstruction of any historical event, and particularly one that was quickly covered up and forgotten (in this latter instance even by ufologists), is extraordinarily difficult, even when done by trained historians -- not one of whom, I might add here as a lifelong student of history, participated in the research. As Mike Swords points out in his recent IUR article, the debate is further confused by "clashing visions of the possible" and also by the absence of a single relevant document on whose authenticity and/or relevance everyone agrees. (I urge open-minded readers to Swords' piece as the most lucid exposition yet of the opposing camps' a priori assumptions. The article appears on pages 11-13,33-35 of the Fall 1997 issue.)

My mistake was in having and expressing excessive optimism about what we could learn about something that occurred long ago and under circumstances that would have rendered truth-determination difficult even had a (civilian) investigation been launched immediately.

> "The Roswell incident is the most important known UFO
> event in history. By the time this investigation is over it
> will shape our future understanding of the UFO phenomenon.
> This investigation gets to the very core of all issues."
> Jerome Clark
> Oddysey Newsletter (unfortunately, the copy sent to me
> does not include the date of the issue, but it is apparently
> from 1989 or 1990)

All true, should it be determined, conclusively, that the Roswell object was a UFO. For the difficulties of making a determination, see above. I have never heard of the Oddysey Newsletter, by the way.

> I will grant the possibility that you believe there is a
> substantive difference between the "most important case of
> all" and a "best case." I, however, believe most "literate
> readers" think otherwise. Perhaps you could explain the
> difference to the rest of us or, better still, explain what in
> the last six years caused Roswell, in your estimate, to fall
> from "the most important case" to being lost in confusion.

Literate readers, as I've said, will understand the difference.

> > Budd Hopkins does not "make the same errors" as Mack,
> >and it amuses me to see abductionphobes speaking of them
> >in the same breath, despite enormous differences in outlook
> >and approach.

> Yes, Hopkins does make the same fundamental error as Mack- his
> beliefs clearly influence how he reports and studies abduction
> accounts, to the point of leading his subjects. But don't take
> my word for it, read Bullard's The Sympathetic Ear, pages 66-67,
> where he clearly describes Hopkins' status as the Typhoid Mary of
> the hybrid baby motif. Even one of Bullard's respondents
> recognized this fact. While Bullard concludes Hopkins' obvious
> influence on such an important element in the abduction narrative
> is relatively unimportant in evaluating the source of abduction
> claims, I think reasonable people can disagree. (Note the
> citation to a relevant work and a brief summation of why I think
> readers will find it relevant to my point.)

In fact, phantom pregnancies were noted in the UFO literature, but ignored and forgotten soon after, in John Keel's 1970 book The Mothman Prophecies. I made an interesting discovery while doing research on early CE3s for my Emergence of a Phenomenon (1992): the extra-ordinary numbers of CE3s in which witnesses have reported human or near-human entities. The possible implications, in light of the later abduction hybrid claims, are intriguing to speculate about, though of course impossible to prove.

In any event, Jeff misses the larger, more important point: that unlike most abduction-related claims, phantom pregnancies are falsifiable. As I have had occasion to say before, it is arguably Hopkins' major failing to bring forth no medical documentation proving or disproving abductees' claims that they experienced anomalously terminated pregnancies. About Hopkins' general methodology much can be, and has been, said for and against (the former usually by those who've observed it up close, the latter usually by those farthest from such observation); in any event, that argument can go on forever, inconclusively, to inflict onlookers with terminal cases of MEGO. In this one area, however, it seems to me that reasonably conclusive answers are possible and not that hard to obtain.

> >And I did not discuss Appelle in the context of the
> >ETH; I mentioned him in the context of his careful explication of
> >the problems of counterexplanations.

> You discussed Appelle as a counter to several non-ETH
> explanations for abduction accounts, without making it clear that
> Appelle is as (or if you saw him on the recent Discovery Channel
> special-more) critical of the ETH explanation as any other. This
> left a clear impression that Appelle's article supported the ETH,
> if in no other way than by the process of elimination. You may
> not have intended it that way, but since several members of this
> list, only a few of whom responded, read your citation of Appelle
> the same way I did, you may want to consider that the problem
> lies in a lack of clarity on your part.

That's possible. We're not churning out deathless prose here. We're writing ephemeral stuff, and we're writing it fast, and it's not going to stand in print to get quoted back to us years (or, in my case, sometimes decades) later. My impression of Appelle, whom I know slightly (as a fellow CUFOS board member), is that he's open-minded about the ETH, sensitive to the difficulties of proving it, and focused more sharply on ufology's more immediate, pragmatic, methodological concerns -- rather like me. Meantime, again allow me to urge readers to turn to Appelle's splendid piece. It's in JUFOS 6 (n.s., 1995/1996), is titled "The Abduction Experience: A Critical Evaluation of Theory of Evidence," and appears on pages 29-78. it's available through either Bob Girard or the CUFOS office. If the general level of ufological discourse were on this level, or even close to it, we'd all be better off.

Thanks, Jeff, for a chance to comment on the above and to clarify my views. Good luck in your own inquiries.

Cheers,

Jerry Clark

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