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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: SETI Scientists Petition White House

From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
Date: Sun, 29 Nov 98 12:18:36 PST
Fwd Date: Sun, 29 Nov 1998 13:14:33 -0500
Subject: Re: SETI Scientists Petition White House

>From: Roger Evans <moviestuff@cyberjunkie.com>
>Date: Sat, 28 Nov 1998 13:32:48 +0000
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>Subject: SETI Scientists Petition White House

>>From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>>Date: Fri, 27 Nov 98 16:43:23 PST
>>Fwd Date: Sat, 28 Nov 1998 00:54:17 -0500
>>Subject: Re: SETI Scientists Petition White House

>>>Previously Larry Hatch offered:

>>>>For the life of me, I cannot understand some of the anti-SETI
>>>>messages recently.

>>>Serge's rather rude response was:

>>>>Then I suggest you read the posts more carefully and try to
>>>>understand the situation.

>>>>Any 30 years \$100-million flopped project supported by
>>>>mainstream science on the hypothesis of extra-terrestrial life
>>>>must be questioned by people involved in a 50 years \$0.00
>>>>research who came up with evidence - people who are still
>>>>laughed at by the same SOBs who support the fore-mentioned
>>>>project.

>My response was:

>>>Time out, Serge.

>>>>You make a pretty strong accusation. Please give us names of any
>>>>SETI supporters that laugh at terrestrial based UFO research. My
>>>>money is on the bet that you can't. In fact, I'd go so far as to
>>>>say that everyone I know that supports SETI also supports the
>>>>investigation of UFO sightings and encounters. True, SETI has
>>>>received the lion's share of the funding, but \$100 million is
>>>>squat for 30 years work. No one, including SETI members, is
>>>>saying that terrestrial based UFO research doesn't deserve
>>>>funding, also. The fact that UFO researchers don't get it is not
>>>>SETI's fault. Your grudge is with the wrong people. Grow up.

>Jerry responded:

>>Wow. I am at a loss to understand any of the above paragraph.
>>I've read a reasonable amount of the SETI literature, and
>>overwhelmingly, the attitude toward UFOs and UFO research is (a)

>>ignorant and (b) hostile. A rare exception is the British
>>popular science writer Edward Ashpole, who has done books on
>>SETI and one (sympathetic to the ETH) on the UFO phenomenon.
>>There is, in fairness, astronomer/SETI historian Steven Dick,
>>who while more or less skeptical is not notably hostile toward
>>ufology, and he does know the subject. Far more typical,
>>however, is Jill Tartar's boast of close-mindedness where UFO
>>reports are concerned, or Carl Sagan's many and tiresome
>>fulminations.

>First, I doubt very seriously if you had any trouble
>understanding what I said in the above paragraph. But, I'll
>admit, it is much easier if you read it in context with Serge's
>_very_ rude comments. When I speak of "SETI supporters", I don't
>mean high profile individuals or organizations with their own
>agendas. I'm talking about average folk. Both SETI and Ufology
>have their share of nut-niks that like to stir up trouble. But
>they are hardly the majority in either group, and I think you
>know that.

If you don't mean "high profile individuals or organizations
with their own agendas", you should have made that clear.
It is the high profile individuals or organizations with their
own agendas that get the attention, publication, and funding;
if there is, at the ground level of SETI support, a feeling that
UFO research is both worthwhile and neglected, it (a) seems
not to have found its voice and (b) doesn't matter, since the
Tartars, Drakes, and Sagans have traditionally dominated
the field and defined it.

>Why do I think you know that?

>While you included Serge's comments that supported your point of
>view, you left out Serge's petty desire that SETI fail to make
>contact with extraterrestrial life. It's a pretty lame-ass wish,
>don't you think, for someone supposedly concerned with making
>contact as soon as possible. Are you afraid that people reading
>this will think him typical of all Ufologists? Think about it.

SETI's failure to make contact with ETs is raised continually by
its critics, even as its partisans periodically made grand
pronouncements about its imminent success. If memory serves,
it was Frank Drake who was saying just a few years ago that
contact would occur before the turn of the century. Who among us
is holding his or her breath waiting for that prophecy to be
fulfilled?

>>SETI has many critics within mainstream science, though
>>you'd not know that from the breathlessly uncritical accounts
>>you'll find in popular media treatments of the subject.

>Let me get this straight. When someone, such as Ed Stewart, is
>critical of you and your research, you often point out the
>complementary writings and reviews of your books; your defense
>is dependent on taking said articles at face value. On the other
>hand, articles that don't reflect your view of SETI or its
>critics are considered suspect and should not be taken at face
>value? Why?

I don't follow the reasoning here. Maybe I didn't make myself
clear. So let me try again:

Within science, SETI is treated with more skepticism than it is
in mainstream media. I don't think anybody -- SETIphile or
-phobe -- will dispute that, at least if he or she has been
following the controversy in astronomical and other journals. I
was not expressing an opinion on whether SETI is worthwhile or
not (I do have an opinion, but that's neither here nor there
where the present discussion is concerned). By pointing out
SETI's tenuous position within mainstream science, I was trying
to point to one reason for the insecurity of its advocates --
the sort of insecurity that would cause them to seek
respectability by trashing ufology.

>If said articles don't criticize SETI or point out SETI critics,
>then why are they popular and abundant in mainstream media?
>Could it be because the majority of average readers and UFO
>enthusiasts support both the SETI efforts and the efforts of
>UFology? And as you pointed out above, there are some higher
>profile people such as Ashpole and Dick that don't dog SETI and

>exhibit a more justifiable "wait and see" attitude. Why focus on
>fringe idiots and zealots of SETI. These people are no more
>typical of SETI supporters than Ed Stewart or Robert Todd are as
>representatives for Ufology (or Serge, I hope).

Jill Tartar, Frank Drake, Carl Sagan, Karl S. Guthke, Philip Morrison, et al., are hardly "fringe idiots and zealots of SETI." They would, in fact, characterize SETI supporters who think UFO reports possibly related to ETI as "fringe idiots and zealots." I mention the pro-UFO Ashpole and the open-mindedly skeptical Dick as two rare exceptions in the discussion. They are hardly typical.

>It's obvious to me the only dissing going on is some bitter
>members of ufology trying to blame SETI for the lack of funding
>and respect ufology rightly deserves within the scientific
>community. As I pointed out in another post, SETI could
>dissappear tomorrow and ufology will still have all the problems
>it has always endured.

Obvious to you, perhaps, but not to me. I don't know anybody who holds the simplistic view that SETI is responsible "for the lacking of funding and respect ufology rightly deserves within the scientific community." Ufologists do rightly complain, however, that the money spent on SETI, or even a fraction of it, could usefully be applied to UFO investigation. Another reason, of course, that SETIans should trash ufology: they're trying to preserve their share of the funding pie. Understandable, of course, albeit regrettable.

In my opinion, it is entirely reasonable for us, whether ufologists or UFOphobic SETIans, to debate the crucial question of what resources and money should be applied to the search for ETI, and where those would be most productively employed.

Jerry Clark

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