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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Friedman vs. Krauss Debate

From: Joe Murgia <Ufojoel@aol.com>
Date: Sun, 28 Mar 1999 23:53:15 EST
Fwd Date: Thu, 01 Apr 1999 15:41:17 -0500
Subject: Friedman vs. Krauss Debate

On Tuesday March 30th at 10:00pm EST, Sightings on the Radio and Jeff Rense will be hosting a debate between Stanton Friedman and Lawrence Krauss. Stanton needs no introduction but many of you may not be aware of who Krauss is.

Lawrence Krauss is the chair of the physics department at Case Western University. He is also the author of the opinion editorial piece that ran in the New York Times regarding NBC's Confirmation special. Mr. Krauss was very hard on the special and especially on Whitley Strieber. Krauss is a skeptic when it comes to UFOs and ETs visiting our planet.

I wrote to Krauss and expressed my feelings on the subject of Ufology and on what I thought were unfair attacks on the special and on Strieber. He didn't back down. This is some of what he sent to me. He said it was okay to share. First his editorial. Don't miss this show. Jeff Rense as usual is covering the most important topics and has the most entertaining shows. Thank god for him! I originally suggested to Krauss that he go on Art Bell's program. Bell ignored my emails to him on this. I have seen the light and its name is Rense!

Make sure you read where Krauss talks about how the Times scoured the web for information that would give the article color. They used the web as a source? This is the New York Times? Last week I asked Whitley if there was anything on his site that said he was injected with chemicals in his brain by aliens. He said no and that the Times was lying. Here's the Op Ed piece, then my response to Krauss and finally his response to me. Some interesting stuff...

Try to listen and call in some good questions for Krauss.

Joe Murgia
Tampa, Florida

Krauss wrote:

"I view the fact that Strieber was an ex-horror story writer as a factor which makes me more dubious, not less, of his writing. In any case, the statement about injection with chemicals was obtained from my new York Times researchers, who went to his web site and others for a description of his abduction experience. (for what it is worth, this is something the NYT wanted to add for color, so they scoured the web for this information..)."

New York Times Opinion Editorial Section

February 22, 1999

Stop the Flying Saucer, I Want to Get Off

By LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS

There was a great deal of concern expressed during the Monica Lewinsky scandal that the distinction between mainstream journalism and the tabloids had all but vanished. But the public, bombarded day and night with salacious and irrelevant revelations, managed to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Is it too much to hope that this innate good sense will apply to the tabloid fare that television is peddling now, during the ratings sweeps? No longer able to rely on Washington to provide a steady supply of sensationalism, at least one network has started looking to outer space. I am talking, of course, about alien abductions.

Last Wednesday night, while channel-surfing toward the PBS end of the spectrum, I was stopped by the title shots of a program called "Confirmation: The Hard Evidence of Aliens Among Us?" Grainy images of flying saucers, aliens' faces and an eerie-looking operating table filled the screen. It must be a Fox TV promo for "The X-Files," I thought.

Then I noticed the NBC peacock in the corner. The two-hour special, produced by the network's entertainment division, purported to explore reports of alien visitation, from mind-altering implants to abductions.

Chief among the purveyors of "hard evidence" was the author Whitley Strieber, whose big-eyed alien abductors snatched him from his home one night, injected chemicals into his brain and helped him get onto the best-seller lists. NBC presented Mr. Strieber as both an "expert" source and a journalistic interviewer. I learned later that he was also an executive producer of the show. Is it unfair to suspect that his personal stake in the alien abduction phenomenon biased the presentation?

I watched what was touted as "the first on-camera removal of an alleged alien implant" from the hand of a purported abductee. The operating physician noted that there was nothing necessarily extraterrestrial about a small fragment of metal lodged under someone's skin. But once the blackened spur was extracted, an abductee "expert" on the scene told us excitedly that this was the most remarkable piece of metal he had ever seen removed from a person. (It looked to me like a small watermelon seed, but alas I am not an expert on alien implants.)

The fragment was then sent, for reasons unexplained, to be analyzed by a geologist. It was magnified by a scanning electron microscope, and we learned -- to our amazement! -- that it appeared to be a bit of iron. We were then informed that -- even more mysteriously -- although it did indeed contain iron, the geologist "couldn't classify it."

What we were not told was why a geologist should be able to "classify" an object removed from someone's finger, or what particular aspect was unclassifiable. Moreover, we were not told why -- if this supposed evidence was so important -- NBC did not have the resources to have it analyzed by another laboratory. But, of course, if the fragment had turned out to be part of the edge of a car door, or a shard from a metal fence post, it might have been somewhat harder to justify its alien origin.

So we were left to conclude that, yes, extraterrestrials must have planted a mysterious device in some guy's hand. Technically, I suppose, the iron chip is hard evidence. But it depends on what the meaning of "is" is.

This minor bit of yellow journalism and the press coverage of President Clinton's problems are related, and in a way I find unnerving.

After years of watching displays of righteous indignation from

politicians, the public has become largely immune to them. In fact, it has been comforting to see how the moderating effect of popular opinion can silence zealots on both the right and the left. When it comes to scientific zealots, however, it's a different story.

When a big network strips away the pretense of journalistic integrity to promote alien abduction claims by interested parties, where is the moderating influence? The excuse that NBC's special came from its entertainment division rather than its news division is a feeble one, because the distinction is lost on most viewers.

Mountains of statistics suggest that the public is far more susceptible to scientific nonsense than political nonsense. More than half of Americans are unaware that the earth orbits the sun and takes a year to do it. Many people simply do not have the tools to distinguish charlatans from honest researchers.

Still, people crave more information about the scientific breakthroughs that are changing our world, and television is an important source of that knowledge. But if "science" on network television consists mostly of either programs hyping alien visitation or news segments detailing diet breakthroughs, is it any wonder that the border between sense and nonsense becomes blurred?

The late Carl Sagan called science a "candle in the dark," a method of inquiry that illuminates the true nature of myths and superstitions. He also proved that science -- even televised science -- could be both accurate and entertaining.

If NBC's executives had devoted those two hours to any of the actual mysteries being faced in medicine, biology, chemistry, astronomy or physics, they might have discovered something that everyone who has honestly explored the physical universe knows: yes, truth often is stranger than fiction.

As for me, after getting my fill of NBC's alien "investigation," I tuned in to the more compelling science fiction of "Star Trek."

Lawrence M. Krauss, chairman of the physics department at Case Western Reserve University, is the author of "The Physics of Star Trek" and the forthcoming "Genesis: The Lives of an Atom."

*****My letter to Krauss*****

Hi Mr. Krauss,

I wanted to make some comments regarding your editorial on the Confirmation special on NBC. I'll take each part one at a time. I'll only deal with the parts that refer specifically to the special and/or UFOs.

>Stop the Flying Saucer, I Want to Get Off

>By LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS

>Then I noticed the NBC peacock in the corner. The two-hour special, produced by the network's entertainment division, purported to explore reports of alien visitation, from mind-altering implants to abductions.

Was there anything that said "mind altering" implants? Maybe I missed that. It did explore alleged alien visitation and alleged abduction.

>Chief among the purveyors of "hard evidence" was the author >Whitley Strieber, whose big-eyed alien abductors snatched him >from his home one night, injected chemicals into his brain and >helped him get onto the best-seller lists.

Strieber was a very successful author before writing Communion. He had two of his horror novels, Wolfen and The Hunger made into successful films. For what it's worth, he has allegedly had numerous experiences with non-human beings, not just one experience. Where did you find information that Strieber claimed

"they" injected chemicals into his brain? This is a sensationalized statement. The same kind of sensationalization that you complain about.

>NBC presented Mr. Strieber as both an "expert" source and a >journalistic interviewer. I learned later that he was also an >executive producer of the show. Is it unfair to suspect that >his personal >stake in the alien abduction phenomenon biased the >presentation?

Not unfair at all. To tell you the truth, Strieber is not a very good interviewer and he shouldn't have been put in that position. There was another executive producer also I believe. It would have been nice to have a hard hitting journalist take a look at this subject in depth but they're so afraid of being labeled a nut and losing their job. Can you blame them? Just reading your editorial is enough to scare off any serious journalist who might want to examine this topic.

>I watched what was touted as "the first on-camera removal of an >alleged alien implant" from the hand of a purported abductee. >The operating physician noted that there was nothing necessarily >extraterrestrial about a small fragment of metal lodged under >someone's skin. But once the blackened spur was extracted, an >abductee "expert" on the scene told us excitedly that this was >the most remarkable piece of metal he had ever seen removed from >a person. (It looked to me like a small watermelon seed, but >alas I am not an expert on alien implants.)

Nobody says that they are alien implants. The objects are inside of people and these people don't know how they got there. Plus, these people have some type of memories of a non-human intelligence interacting with them.

>The fragment was then sent, for reasons unexplained, to be >analyzed by a geologist. It was magnified by a scanning electron >microscope, and we learned -- to our amazement! -- that it >appeared to be a bit of iron. We were then informed that -- >even more mysteriously -- although it did indeed contain iron, >the geologist "couldn't classify it."

What we were not told was why a geologist should be able to "classify" an object removed from someone's finger, or what particular aspect was unclassifiable. Moreover, we were not told why -- if this supposed evidence was so important -- NBC did not have the resources to have it analyzed by another laboratory. But, of course, if the fragment had turned out to be part of the edge of a car door, or a shard from a metal fence post, it might have been somewhat harder to justify its alien origin.>

There was more testing done but there's only so much you can do in two hours. If I were producing the special, I would have had two or three labs do the testing. Problem is, this can be expensive. I doubt NBC gave them unlimited funds. In the book, Confirmation, Strieber goes into more detail regarding this testing. The guy said that of the 65,000 materials in their database, they could not match this object to any of them. I too would have like to see another lab on camera, say the same thing. Aren't you at least curious about this? If you know labs that would do the testing for free, I'm sure Mr. Strieber would accept. his email is whitley@strieber.com

>
>So we were left to conclude that, yes, extraterrestrials must >have planted a mysterious device in some guy's hand. >Technically, I suppose, the iron chip is hard evidence. But it >depends on what the meaning of "is" is.

I did not have sexual relations with that alien, Ms. Liw-alien-ski.

No, we're left to conclude that that is one possibility. Maybe somebody is doing testing on humans. It has happened before and it's documented by our own gov't. The gov't fed plutonium to babies. What else would our gov't do? Or maybe, it's just an innocent object found in the person. I don't know, but more science is needed and it would be nice if people like yourself could look at this evidence in an objective way. We need more mainstream scientists to get involved!

>When a big network strips away the pretense of journalistic
>integrity to promote alien abduction claims by interested
>parties, where is the moderating influence? The excuse that
>NBC's special came from its entertainment division rather than
>its news division is a feeble one, because the distinction is
>lost on most viewers.

I agree. I would love to see 60 minutes or Dateline do just one show on this topic. Investigate the hell out of it and see if there is enough data to support any of the claims. If not, then drop it. Problem is, they won't do it! They're too scared to be ridiculed by science and by sponsors. So, we take what we can get and deal with Confirmation. Not a perfect show, I realize this.

>Mountains of statistics suggest that the public is far more
>susceptible to scientific nonsense than political nonsense. More
>than half of Americans are unaware that the earth orbits the sun
>and takes a year to do it. Many people simply do not have the
>tools to distinguish charlatans from honest researchers.

If you lived in the days when people thought the Earth was flat, would you have called the round earth theory scientific nonsense? No, you probably would have said that in order to test that hypothesis, we need to collect data. If the data points to a round Earth, then so be it. If not, then watch out for that edge, it's a doozy! Who are you calling a charlatan? Have you ever met or talked with any of the people in the special?

Is pulitzer prize winning author Dr. John Mack, who has researched abductions, a charalatan? Harvard tried to get his tenure removed but he fougnt and won. You think his research into abductions had anything to do with that push to get him out? That's why people shut their mouths and don't talk about this subject. Fear of ridicule.

>Still, people crave more information about the scientific
>breakthroughs that are changing our world, and television is an
>important source of that knowledge. But if "science" on network
>television consists mostly of either programs hyping alien
>visitation or news segments detailing diet breakthroughs, is it
>any wonder that the border between sense and nonsense becomes
>blurred?

Have you done any serious research on UFOs at all? Have you read Project Blue Book? Are you open to the possibility of a propulsion system that manipulates gravity in a way that makes faster than light travel possible?

>The late Carl Sagan called science a "candle in the dark," a
>method of inquiry that illuminates the true nature of myths and
>superstitions. He also proved that science -- even televised
>science -- could be both accurate and entertaining.

Myths and superstitions? Is that what UFOs are to you? Once again, what reasearch have you conducted?

>If NBC's executives had devoted those two hours to any of the
>actual mysteries being faced in medicine, biology, chemistry,
>astronomy or physics, they might have discovered something that
>everyone who has honestly explored the physical universe knows:
>yes, truth often is stranger than fiction.

UFOs have direct links to studying physics. If there is a propulsion system that UFOs use and we're not familar with, think of how that would change our world if we gained use of such a thing. Paul Hill, a Chief Scientist-Manager at NASA's Langley Research Center compiled data over decades of research. He acted as an informal clearing- house for UFO-related data and wrote Unconventional Flying Objects. He argued that UFOs don't break the laws of physics. Unfortunately this book is over my head and more on your level so I can't comment on it.

Mr. Krauss, I realize you hated the special but are your feelings towards the subject matter the same or are you willing to look at the data? Would you be willing to go on a national talk show and debate the topic? I'm sure Art Bell would love to have you on. Could your reputation handle being linked to such a topic and/or show? He examines UFOs and other "strange" topics.

As far as humans getting abducted or not, I don't know. But you really need to talk to these people face to face before you judge their truthfulness. I know some of these people and they are so afraid to talk about what might have happened to them. They fear being ridiculed and labeled kooks. Can you blame them? What would you do if something like that happened to you? Just take that into consideration.

I don't what UFOs are or who, if anybody, is piloting them, but I know that they are physical objects. I believe the evidence is overwhelming and compelling that this is so.

*****Krauss Responds*****

Dear Mr. Mrugia:

Thank you for your letter, which was in no way mean-spirited or rude. I do not have time go into all things you discussed in detail, but let me just comment on the main things one by one, to let you know where I am coming from on this.

1. In the segment I referred to in the article, the person from who the alleged implant was removed, was interviewed afterwards, and he said he had an "empty feeling". I took that to mean that the implant was purported to have had some mind altering effect.

2. I view the fact that Strieber was an ex-horror story writer as a factor which makes me more dubious, not less, of his writing. In any case, the statement about injection with chemicals was obtained from my new York Times researchers, who went to his web site and others for a description of his abduction experience. (for what it is worth, this is something the NYT wanted to add for color, so they scoured the web for this information..).

3. For a two hour prime-time special NBC's resources could cover 100 lab analyses...

4. I have read the statements for Dr. Mack and I believe he is a charlatan, in the sense that he is not scientific. The statement that if all these people believe something happened to them then it must have happened is just plain silly. Alas, tenure is such that once you have it, you have the freedom to be silly. Dr. Mack is enjoying that freedom.

5. Indeed, if you read my books, the Physics of STar Trek, and Beyond Star Trek, you will see that I have thought a great deal about the physics of space travel--- in particular I have discussed the issues of gravity and faster than light travel there, and with NASA.

This last point gets to the heart of the matter. The general issue of alien visitation is so a prior ludicrous, on the basis of any sound physical reasoning, that any claim that it has actually happened would have to meet the strongest skepticism and scrutiny. There are many strange things in the world, but as the physicist Richard Feynman used to point out, scientists only have a finite amount of time to work on projects. So they choose exciting projects, but more important they work on things which are likely to have some possibility of being right. The reason that most people, such as myself, don't spend time investigating each detailed claim is that the a priori probability that it is true is almost zero.... Thus, I cannot prove that the claims are false, I can just say that I expect that they are... and each time I see something like the purported hard evidence, I find it isn't. The point is that any explanation, no matter how implausible, of the claims, is more plausible than ascribing them to alien visitation. Thus, as long as there is any other explanation which remains equally, or more plausible, why should I, or anyone jump to the conclusion that aliens are involved.

I hope this addresses your questions, and in the spirit of your email, that it is not rude or mean-spirited. I am certainly open to discussing this issues on national TV or radio with or without Mr. Strieber. I do so often, in fact.

Best regards

Lawrence Krauss

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