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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: IFOs

From: **Jerome Clark** <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
Date: Wed, 28 Jul 99 19:56:47 PDT
Fwd Date: Thu, 29 Jul 1999 09:16:19 -0400
Subject: Re: IFOs

>Date: Tue, 27 Jul 1999 21:31:16 +0100
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: John Rimmer <jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk>
>Subject: Re: IFOs

>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>>Subject: Re: IFOs
>>Date: Mon, 26 Jul 99 12:22:14 PDT

>>>From: Jenny Randles <nufon@currantbun.com>
>>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>>Subject: Re: IFOs
>>>Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 13:24:50 +0100

Hi, John,

>>Oh, those US ufologists -- the root of all evil in the world.
>>Seriously, I detect a lot of provincialism (and, dare I say it,
>>a whiff of anti-Americanism - I am not referring to you, Jenny)
>>in non-US ufologists, too. In truth, we all could learn from
>>each other. Instead, we are dowsed with gallons of rhetorical
>>dishwater in which "US ufology" becomes a synonym for "wrong
>>ufology." Sorry -- I don't buy it, and beyond that, I'm getting
>>bored with it.

>It does seem to be a fact though, that there is a very
>fundamental divide between ufological attitudes on each side of
>the Atlantic, and it is something that might bear looking into,
>rather than dismissal as "anti-Americanism". By and large
>British and European ufologists are more sceptical than their
>American coevals. One of the most significant differences is
>that most British and European ufological "sceptics" have come
>to their scepticism after a great deal of study,
>investigation, reading and writing about UFOs. Most American
>"skeptics" seem to have come to the subject from the outside.

If skepticism has anything to do with the questioning of
received wisdom, American ufologists are by far more
iconoclastic, and thus more skeptical. The European neoskeptics
-- pelicanists, I call them in my uncharitable moments (though I
could never be uncharitable to you, John) -- seem much more
believing of conventional opinion, far more obsessed with
holding safe and unheretical views which will keep the ridicule
of the washed at bay.

For someone who champions the psychosocial approach to ufology,
I'm surprised that you would so easily dismiss cultural
attitudes -- such as anti-Americanism, even if unconscious -- in
the shaping of views regarding UFOs on your side of the pond.

Believe me, if you were on my side and reading much of the rhetoric from yours (which is uniquely obsessed with the particular national identity of the dissenters from European wisdom), you would be forced to agree that my characterization is hardly a casual one. I recall an especially amusing bit of goofiness from no less than the esteemed Magonia, where one authority on all things American (Peter Rogerson, if memory serves, as it may not; forgive me, Peter, if I'm suffering from what we Yanks call old-timer's disease) held that we're in the grips of abduction delusions owing to our fear of Hispanics.

To turnvery briefly serious: all of us, Brits, Americans, and other earthlings, are prisoners of culture, in ways that sometimes -- I didn't say always -- only those outside our specific cultures can see. On the other hand, don't get me started on the subject of American characters in British movies, or for that matter American ufologists in British UFO journals.... I'm just joking. Sort of.

>Someone like Jenny Randles is hardly considered as a sceptic in
>Britain, and I have criticised her as much as anyone when I
>think she has made unjustified assumptions which I felt had been
>based more on wishful thinking than hard evidence. However, in
>the end she has always allowed the evidence to get the upper
>hand. In American terms however, she seems to be rapidly gaining
>the status of lovable old Phil Klass as a hard line sceptic.

Not as far as I can see. Is there a little wishful thinking going on here, John -- just more proof of the foolishness of Americans? Though I disagree with Jenny as often as I agree with her, I like and respect her for what she is: one of ufology's few truly nuanced thinkers. Sometimes she (or, more accurately, an opinion of hers) irritates the hell out of me, but she is always interesting and thought-provoking, and ufology is lucky to have her. Few people have contributed as much to this field as she has.

>Most serious British and Euro researchers are aware, if no more,
>of the various psycho-social aspects of ufology and of the
>vagaries of witness testimony. Most serious American witnesses
>seem more willing to take eyewitness testimony at face value --
>see for instance the debate about Kenneth Arnold's golden geese
>elsewhere on this list -- and discount the possibility of
>radical misperceptions.

Amusingly, the first full-length book to champion an early version of ufology's psychosocial hypothesis was *The Unidentified*, published in 1975. Jerome Clark, lifelong resident of the United States, was coauthor and has been trying to live it down ever since.

Witness perception and misperception, your (I'm sure unintentionally) self-congratulatory observations notwithstanding, has been discussed at length -- sometimes book's length (e.g., by Dick Haines and Allan Hendry) -- this side of the water.

IUR, which I edit, has also published some illuminating pieces on that subject. What you object to, I gather, is that we have looked at the same data and found your conclusions concerning same largely unwarranted and uncomfortably like ... oh, jeez, you'll have to forgive me; I just can't help myself ... the ruminations of English majors and librarians.

Cordially,

Jerry Clark

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