

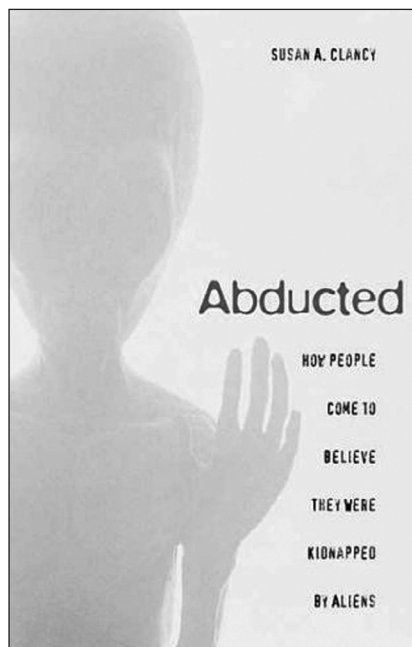
Alien Abduction Analysis

TERENCE M. HINES

Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens. By Susan A. Clancy. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005. ISBN 0-674-01879-6. 179 pp. Hardcover, \$22.95.

The one question that my students always ask when I introduce the topic of alien abductions is how could anyone possibly really believe that such a thing had happened to them if they weren't just plain barking mad. It takes a fair amount of background in memory and related subjects to understand the psychology of the alien-abduction experience. In *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens*, Susan Clancy has masterfully combined this background information with her own important research on alien-abduction claimants. She writes with the skill of an experienced novelist telling an exciting story. Consider the opening paragraph: "Will Andrews is an articulate, handsome forty-two-year-old. He's a successful chiropractor, lives in a wealthy American suburb, has a strikingly attractive wife and twin boys, age eight. The only glitch in this picture of domestic bliss is that his children are not his wife's—they are the product of an earlier infidelity. To complicate matters further, the biological mother is an extraterrestrial."

Following that opening, it took me only a very pleasant fall afternoon to read this book from cover to cover. The title of each chapter is a question, and the first chapter is titled, "How do you wind up studying aliens?" Here, Clancy gives a very open and personal account of how she became interested in the topic of alien abductions. The next five



chapters cover the most important questions that people ask about abductions and that abductees ask themselves. Chapter 2, "How do people come to believe they were abducted by aliens?", and chapter 3, "Why do I have memories if it didn't happen?", cover the various factors that go into the creation of an alien-abduction belief. Clancy makes it clear that no one wakes up in the morning with a full-blown abduction experience. Sometimes, the experience is created and molded from the starting point of a dream or hypnogogic/hypnopompic hallucination experienced during sleep paralysis. Other times, it

starts with just a vague feeling that *something* had happened that needs to be explained.

According to Clancy, all of the abductees she studied "had sought out books, movies, researchers, and hypnotists in an effort to understand the things that were troubling them" (143). Since sleep paralysis and its related hallucinations are almost unknown to the general public, the real explanation is not available. Thus, when someone who has had such an experience reads one of the books touting the reality of alien abductions or hears such claims on television or elsewhere, it seems the only explanation available. If they then fall in with some alien-abduction guru and support group, techniques such as hypnosis and guided imagery are used to reinforce the seeming reality of the event while adding much more detail. As Clancy notes, "Belief precedes memories because developing detailed, personal memories . . . requires intervention on the part of some kind of therapist" (63). Clancy does a marvelous job of describing sleep paralysis, the changeable nature of memory, and how hypnosis and other techniques are used to create false memories that become very real for the abductee.

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A common claim in alien-abduction circles is that the abduction stories are highly consistent and thus must reflect real events. In chapter 4, Clancy shows quite clearly that the stories, while having overall similar themes, vary greatly.

In chapter 5, “Who gets abducted?”, she reports the results of her own research on dozens of abductees, whom she interviewed and gave psychological tests. In general, these people are quite normal. They are certainly, with an exception or two, not “crazy,” as so many first suspect upon hearing their tales. They are, however, more imaginative, creative, and fantasy-prone than the general population. They also score higher on a trait called *schizotypy*. This does *not* mean that they are schizophrenic, but “they’re generally a bit odd. They tend to look and think eccentrically and are prone to ‘magical’ thinking and odd beliefs” (129). When one combines this type of personality with a strange nighttime experience and then adds in the efforts of UFO-abduction “experts,” the memory of an experience that never actually happened is almost inevitable.

In the final chapter, “Why would I

want to believe it?” Clancy discusses why some abductees prize their abduction experience, even though it was terrifying. When she asked, “If you could do it all over again, would you choose *not* [emphasis in original] to be abducted?” No one ever said yes. Despite the shock and terror that accompanied their experiences, the abductees were glad to have had them. Their lives improved. They were less lonely, more hopeful about the future, felt they were better people. They chose abduction” (149).

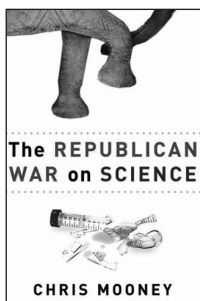
Throughout the book, Clancy maintains a respectful tone toward the abductees. She clearly found almost all of them to be pleasant and interesting people. There are vignettes of about half a dozen of her subjects in the book. These illuminate the diversity of abductee experiences and personalities. The book is aimed at the proverbial intelligent lay person but it is well referenced with fourteen pages of notes at the end. Clancy has reported her research findings more formally in the scientific literature, and citations to her published research reports are usefully included in the notes. Clancy has produced a real masterpiece.

due to raw politics. The conservatives who dominate the Republican party have relied heavily on two key constituencies, both of which have an overriding interest in the results of scientific research in certain areas. These constituencies are industry and the religious Right. Companies often invoke “science” to challenge federal regulation and to protect profits. Religious conservatives attempt to use science to advance their moralistic objectives. And in order to win elections, the Bush White House and members of Congress have bent over backward for both groups.

But what about the antiscience views and often abysmal ignorance of science among aging New Ager and postmodernists? They do not get a free pass from Mooney. He points out that those on the political Left have also abused science in the past, for example in the case of genetically modified foods, research involving animals, and sources of mercury pollution. But these misuses of science are minimal compared to the practices of the Right.

The book’s focus is “on the most controversial area where science interacts with politics: providing input into decision-making” (16). Mooney quotes physicist Robert Frosch, a former NASA administrator, to the effect that what politicians often want to hear from scientists is that science says that they must do what they wanted to do anyway. But just what does it mean to “politicize science”? Mooney defines the term as any attempt to inappropriately undermine, alter, or otherwise interfere with the scientific process, or scientific conclusions, for political or ideological reasons. To count as inappropriate, such incursions must undermine the integrity of science by turning it into just another tool of political advocacy.

This is followed by a catalogue of abuses during the George W. Bush administration. The list includes: undermining science itself, suppression of scientific reports, targeting individual scientists, rigging the process (e.g., by packing scientific advisory committees



The Rampant Politicization of Science

PETER LAMAL

The Republican War on Science. By Chris Mooney. Basic Books, New York, 2005. ISBN 0-465-04675-4. 342 pp. Hardcover, \$24.95.

“**T**he modern Right . . . has ceded any right to govern a technologically advanced and sophisticated nation” (255). An unfair assertion? Purely political? How does *The Republican War on Science*

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author Chris Mooney dare to come to such a conclusion? He does so based on the numerous examples of the pernicious politicization of science by the administration of George W. Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress. The misuse of scientific information by the Right has led to bad policy in a number of areas. But, says Mooney, conservative philosophy alone is not sufficient to explain what has been happening. The current state of affairs is also