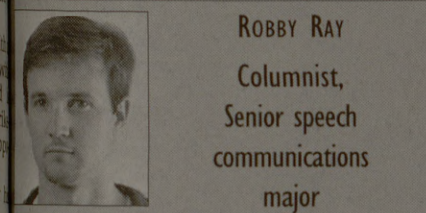


Roswell: The truth is out there

Americans speculate on New Mexico 'UFO crash,' government involvement



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Roswell. This word brings to mind thoughts of aliens, conspiracies and cover ups. But people want to know what the truth is and what really happened out there.

The United States Air Force has recently issued a report which it hopes will be the last word on the subject. These hopes are probably in vain, however, because a growing number of people refuse to believe anything the government says. These people not only understand not only the faith and patriotism of their fellow countrymen, but also their search for the facts about the Roswell incident.

The facts, such as they are, are these: On June 14, 1947, a ranch hand named W. (Mac) Brazel discovered some strange debris while doing his rounds on the J.B. Foster sheep ranch near Roswell, New Mexico.

The debris consisted of rubber strips, foil, Scotch tape, other tape with a floral design and what Brazel described as a rather tough paper. On July 7, he turned the debris over to the Air Force after hearing rumors of a reward offered for any proof of extraterrestrial travelers.

The responding Air Force officer got excited and reported to his commanding officer that he had discovered the wreckage of a "flying disk." The commander released a press report saying the same, then retracted it the next day after further investigation concluded that the wreckage was of a then-secret balloon project.

Since that time, there have been numerous investigations, rumors and reports supporting and refuting these facts. According to various sources, the Air Force recovered alien bodies,

alien prisoners, working alien spacecraft, wreckage of an alien spacecraft or the remains of a secret government aircraft. Those individuals holding these beliefs are as devout as any religious faithful, sometimes believing on less evidence.

In the last few years, the U. S. government has released several reports stating that the events of July 1947 happened exactly as outlined above. Many Americans, however, refuse to believe this.

In a recent Time/Yankelovich poll, 34 percent of Americans believe aliens have visited the earth. Of those, 65 percent believe a UFO crashed at Roswell, and 80 percent think the government knows more than it is admitting.

It may not be too surprising, though, in this post-Watergate era, that citizens don't believe the government.

With recent revelations of the Tuskegee experiments, radiation testing during WW II and the Gulf War syndrome, some people wonder if the government ever tells the truth. But absolute secrecy is incredibly difficult to maintain.

The SR-71 Blackbird and F-117 Stealth Fighter were both developed and tested in secrecy, but these projects lasted less than 15 years before they were declassified.

If there were aliens at Roswell, it would be a much juicier story than just another new plane, and it has now been 50 years. It seems implausible that no one has leaked anything, or some retired officer seeking to clear his conscience on his deathbed has not broken the whole story.

Questions arise on why, with all the evidence to the contrary, people still choose to believe the alien story?

According to Benson Saler and Charles A. Ziegler, anthropology professors at Brandeis University, belief in the UFO incident has to do with creating a purpose or meaning in life.

The Roswell story is "an effort to put enchantment back into nature," Saler said. It serves as an anti-government

narrative, and by using a nearly omnipotent government conspiracy as an enemy, it eliminates counter-arguments.

Any contrary evidence can be said to have been produced by the government, while the very lack of supporting evi-

dence can be portrayed as proof that the event happened because the government would, of course, destroy it all.

The bottom line is UFO advocates have created a new religion whose followers only need to believe that they

can't trust their government.

The problem is that if Americans cannot trust the government about things that happened a half-century ago, they cannot trust it about things which are happening now.



AP Photo: The Roswell Daily Record headlined the 'UFO incident,' which occurred in Roswell, New Mexico in July 1947.

ROSWELL

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Mayor Thomas E. Jennings of Roswell, New Mexico, said government officials have a responsibility to the public to release records on this incident.

"I ran a platform of open government and I believe that all government records should be open and available to the community, with the exception of maybe something to do with law enforcement," Jennings said.

Speculation over what truly happened at Roswell has confused and intrigued multitudes of people these days. Although he is a citizen of Roswell, even Jennings doesn't have a clear hold on the events that took place.

"I'm not sure, I wish I knew," he said. "I guess that's why everybody is here and everybody wants to know."

But even with the recent report released by the Air Force which intends to close all questions about the incident, Jennings said more than just a weather balloon must have crashed landed to the ground.

"Something must have happened, because there's so many reports of it," he said. "It may have been a weather balloon, it may have been a classified U.S. Air Force vehicle or something, or it may have been a UFO. It's hard to tell."

Jennings also said there are many reasons which could easily explain the occurrence.

"In New Mexico, there's a number of government research installations: White Sands Missile Range ... Sandia National Labs where they develop atomic weapons, and then at White Sands, missile systems," he said. "It certainly could have been possible that this was something related to those."

What can be said is that the American government waited an eon to finally attempt to seal all government-conspiracy cover up ties. A time lapse of 50 years is certainly enough time for the government to conjure up a story to deliver to the public. The problem arises when people begin to question whether what the government has disclosed is actually the truth or simply a bunch of thrown-together facts and fictions to quiet public scrutiny.

"For them [government officials] to come out at this time ... I don't know what their thought process was," Jennings said. "It's hard to speculate what the government's doing because I think their parachuting dummy theory is really ... it supposedly happened after the event in the '50s."

Whether there actually was a UFO landing or a crashed weather balloon, the people of Roswell and the rest of the country need to know what happened. Jennings said the whole situation surrounding Roswell has to come to some sort of conclusion where everyone can finally understand the incident.

"I hope we have some resolution — that's our whole intent," he said. "If we can get the government to release information, hopefully we'll understand better what really happened."

Furthermore, Jennings said whether it was a UFO or not, he and the citizens of Roswell need to know. "Prove it or disprove it," he said, "and help us do that."

One thing that can be proven is that America

has certainly become more interested in aliens because of the speculated occurrences in Roswell.

Over the past 50 years, the film and television mediums have depicted alien life forms ranging from the cute Marvin the Martian to the evil destroyers in *Independence Day*. Jennings said one factor contributing to this surge in these depictions is the ever-growing array of new informational systems coming into view.

"As we live in the information age, I think we're learning more and more about what has gone on in the past," Jennings said. "Now that this is really the first space-age generation, I think there's more and more interest in the potential for E.T.'s and UFOs."

As far as alien creations in movies, Jennings said none of the past or present creations can be trusted.

"I think those are figments of the imagination," he said. "I don't think anybody really knows what the forms are."

Portrayals of aliens in film have reached the far spectrum of the imagination, but no one person can say he or she truly knows what lies beyond the clouds and stars above. Jennings said he carries his own thoughts on what could be out there.

"I think that if there really is an E.T. out there, it would be inquisitive," he said. "They're explorers of the universe as I think mankind as we know it also wants to explore the universe."

But in a philosophical frame of mind, Jennings said people simply have an inquisitive nature.

"I don't think we're out there to dominate," he said. "We're out there to explore and satisfy our curiosity."

Although the occurrence at Roswell serves as a beacon of interest and historical value, it also acts as a means to help the community's welfare.

In this small desert community of about 50,000 people, the citizens have found a way to sustain a fluid economy. From alien dolls to T-shirts to bumper stickers, Jennings said Roswell has prospered from the incident's history.

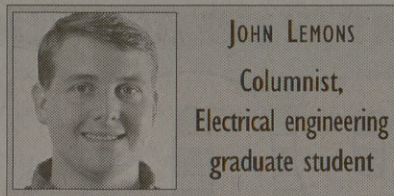
"This is certainly not an O.J. Simpson event, but people are capitalizing on it and it's a business," he said. "Some people may consider it a lemon or something and we've turned that lemon into lemonade; we've made something very memorable through marketing and merchandising."

For all of the scrutiny the town has endured these past 50 years, every citizen deserves a piece of the incident's popularity.

"We've received worldwide publicity and recognition," Jennings said. "I think it's a very positive impact on our community, because before, when somebody said 'Roswell,' nobody knew where it was. Today, the whole world knows where we are and I think the whole world is watching to see what happens."

But as the world continues to question the historic events that took place in Roswell, people deserve the right to know what the government is obviously concealing. Even if there was no true UFO landing, history can be made by the government disclosing the facts behind the incident. So keep the eyes to the sky and maybe one day there will be an explanation for Roswell. Maybe one day there will be an answer to the question of whether we're alone and how to deal with the situation if we find out that we're not.

Americans fall under spell of alien reports, blurred reality



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The ancient Greeks had Olympus. It was the center of their mythology — a place where the gods roamed and occasionally deigned to interact with man. Modern Americans have Roswell, New Mexico. It is the center of the new mythology — a place where aliens occasionally crash, only to be swiftly covered up and hidden away by the Air Force.

It has been 50 years since "something" happened in Roswell. Throughout the majority of those 50 years, Roswell has lived in relative anonymity. But the last decade has seen Roswell become increasingly entrenched in the American mind as stories of UFOs, aliens and conspiracies become mainstream. With this progression, Americans are losing their ability to distinguish reality from fantasy.

UFOs and their impinging conspiracy theories represent the mythology of the '90s. While their ancestors feared vampires, werewolves and sea monsters, Americans fear pale-skinned, bug-eyed aliens who abduct victims for gruesome medical examinations. Now that man has explored every nook and cranny of this world, maps no longer are marked with warnings which claim "monsters abide here." For the time being, the monsters have relocated to places like outer space and Area 51.

America's entertainment reflects this obsession with aliens. The No. 1 movie in the country this week is Men In Black, a film about secret government agents who monitor and hide extraterrestrial activity. The X-Files has captivated audiences for the past four years with its intriguing search for the truth about aliens and the government, that always

seems to be just beyond Agents Mulder and Scully's grasp.

The problem with this alien obsession is that it is beginning to affect American behavior. Fantasy is dictating people's lives and actions. This weekend, thousands of people visited Roswell to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the "UFO crash." CNN had hourly reports from the festival and speakers spoke on how the government is hoarding recovered alien technology and back-engineering it for use in military weapons.

In 1994, as the publicity surrounding the Roswell incident grew, New Mexico Rep. Steven Schiff pressured the General Accounting Office into doing a search for any government documents relating to the incident — the GAO found none. The Air Force then launched its own six-month investigation which claimed the crash involved a balloon carrying devices which listened for Soviet nuclear tests. This explanation, however, did not satisfy the true believers, nor did it explain the stories of alien bodies, so the Air Force launched a final investigation.

Two weeks ago, the Air Force released its report, "The Roswell Report: Case Closed." This report offers a logical explanation for the lore surrounding UFOs and their relation to Roswell. The Air Force said the stories of recovered alien bodies, which did not surface until the 1980s, originated from the testing of parachute systems on dummies in Roswell during the 1950s. During a press conference on the Air Force report, Col John Haynes said the reports of bodies also could come from the recovery of 11 Air Force personnel in a 1957 crash of a KC-97 aircraft and a 1959 crash of a manned balloon, both of which happened at Roswell.

Despite these plausible explanations and a dearth of physical evidence, rumors persist. A recent CNN/Time poll reported that 80 percent of Americans believe the government is hiding knowledge on the existence of extraterrestrial life forms. The real mystery sur-

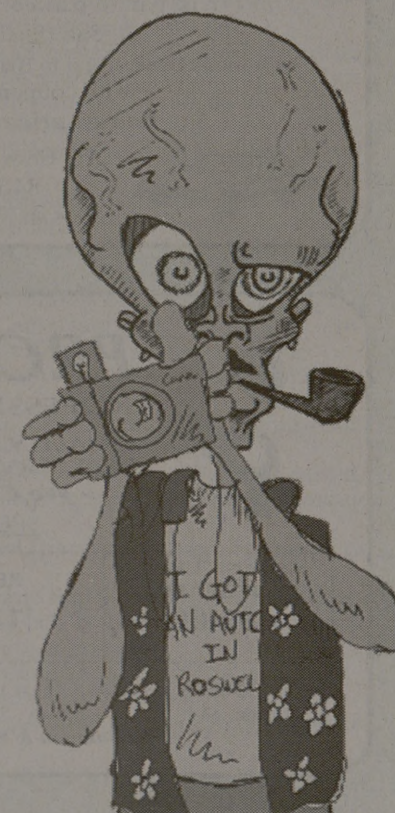
rounding UFOs is how the public has bought into the hoopla.

Perhaps the public believes if it wishes hard enough, this fantasy will come true. Unfortunately, pursuing fantasy as if it were a reality only causes waste. It was a terrible waste for the Air Force to spend three years searching for Chewbacca in the desert. The suicides committed by the members of the Heaven's Gate cult in order to join their alien gods was a tragic waste.

It is even worse to dishonor the lives of service men who died protecting their country by claiming their bodies were the recovered remains of aliens.

Perhaps someday Americans will get to live out the Star Trek existence they desire. For now, a certain percentage of them will continue to imagine that there are alien bogeymen and government conspiracies around every corner.

Beam me up to reality, Scotty.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber