

MEMO

PHILIP J. KLASS

Nov. 24, 1969

PLASMARIANS ARISE:

This carefully stacked AAAS UFO symposium shall not go unchallenged--despite the PhDs of Sagan and Page.

Roberts apparently called Page to tell of my call and Page decided I had "offered to speak at Boston" (which I specifically did not.)

Page quickly staged a committee meeting in a couple hours (presumably by calling Sagan, if that) and decided that it was too late since the program has already been printed! This is what he wrote in his letter of Nov. 18, to which the attached is a response, really intended for other eyes more than his.

I'm rushing to catch a plane for 10-day trip so there is not time to make individual copy for each of you. Please send along the route (02-03-04). You can make own copy if you wish.

Note also the interesting chart from Markowitz.



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Bob: Please return to Phil.
Thank you. Love

PHILIP J. KLASS
560 "N" STREET, S. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20024

November 22, 1969


 Dr. Thornton Page
NASA Manned Spacecraft Center
Houston, Texas 77059

Dear Thornton:

Your letter of Nov. 18 increases my apprehension that it is no accident that your AAAS-sponsored symposium on Unidentified Flying Objects in Boston will feature so many experienced proponents of the extraterrestrial explanation for UFOs and that there will be only one experienced critic--Donald Menzel.

My letter of Oct. 11 to Walter Orr Roberts was motivated by my concern that AAAS officials and perhaps even some of your symposium co-sponsors might be unaware of what was taking place. Roberts' reply of Nov. 10 increased my fears when he expressed hope for a "balanced" program but added that "It has been difficult to get people on the 'critic' side to speak."

Of the handful of available "critics" of the extraterrestrial (E-T) hypothesis who have extensive first-hand experience in the UFO field, there was one who would have accepted, but he had never been invited. This I knew because it was myself.

Your panel now includes at least six (6) persons who can be classed as moderate to strong proponents of the E-T hypothesis. Five of them also appeared at the carefully "arranged" UFO symposium held in July, 1968, by former Congressman Roush (who is now a member of the NICAP board of directors.) At that time Carl Sagan himself said of the views of these panelists that they do not "strongly disbelieve in the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs." These panelists are: Allen Hynek, James McDonald, Robert Hall, Robert M.L. Baker and Sagan (who is one of your symposium co-sponsors.) I would include your name based on the UFO talk you gave in Washington, our subsequent discussion and the fact that you were the first to establish a college-credit course in flying saucers at Wesleyan University several years ago. 

Now, if you truly hoped to achieve a "balanced" symposium it seems to me that you needed to try to get a comparable number of E-T critics with extensive first-hand experience in the UFO field. You knew this would be a problem because the total number of persons with these qualifications is very small and you had had great difficulty in recruiting any of them for your originally planned 1968 UFO symposium in Dallas. Surely you knew that Ed Condon and William Markowitz have repeatedly refused to engage in public debate on the UFO question. And since the U.S. Air Force has not yet made a public comment on the Colorado Report, its Project Blue Book director, Lt. Col. Hector Quintanilla could not accept. Menzel had refused to participate in 1968 but perhaps he would reconsider--as he subsequently did under pressure from Roberts.

Facing this extreme unbalance of 6:1 in the ratio of experienced E-T proponents to experienced critics, one might have expected you to explore all possible men with the needed qualifications. My own include a published book on UFOs and national recognition by professional society invitations to speak on the subject as well as invitations from universities, including Wesleyan. Yet, somehow, my name did not occur either to you or to Sagan.

Your Nov. 18 letter offers the following explanation for this oversight: "As I recall, you wrote me last year that you too would not attend the symposium." I did indeed write on Sept. 22, 1968, after you had advised me that the Dallas UFO symposium had been scrubbed and that you hoped to stage it in 1969 at Boston. My letter summed up my attitude as follows: "I am eager to debate with McDonald, Hynek et al, at any time and place, providing (1) that I am given equal time and (2) that the program format is thoughtfully designed to produce a direct confrontation of the different views."

You acknowledged this letter with a postcard dated Nov. 30, 1968, which said that my request for "equal time is fair enough, but one hour each [which I had suggested] is a bit long. Also, lots of people want the extraterrestrial life bit." [Emphasis added.]

May I also refresh your memory as to why the equal time issue had come up. Sagan had approached me informally at the Roush symposium to ask if I would speak at the Dallas symposium. When I asked how much time would be allotted, he replied: "5-10 minutes." I told Sagan that I would be interested only if I were given the 45-50 minutes which had been allotted to Hynek, McDonald and others, but he made no such offer. Subsequently, you wrote to increase the figure to "10-12 minutes," but I rejected this for the same reason.

This is a curious thing. Hynek and McDonald investigate UFO cases and announce that they cannot be explained, or are explainable only as spaceships from other worlds. My own on-the-spot investigations, say at Socorro, N.M. and South Hill, Va., show these cases to be hoaxes. Hynek and McDonald are offered 45-50 minutes at your Dallas symposium and I am offered 10 minutes.

If my Sept. 22 letter somehow failed to make clear my interest in participating in the Boston symposium, there were more recent expressions. For example, this past summer I dropped a brief note to Sagan asking about the status of the Boston meeting and expressing an interest in participating. (I did not make a carbon so the exact date is not known.) When I failed to hear from Sagan, I wrote you on Sept. 7 of this year to inquire about the Boston symposium. I have never received a reply.


Your failure to respond to my Sept. 7 letter was especially surprising because it told of an important finding in a key UFO photo case which I was sure would arouse the interest of someone like yourself who follows the subject so closely. You will recall, I'm sure, from your careful study of the Colorado report that there was one pair of UFO photos, showing a craft-like object, which William Hartmann had not been able to expose as a hoax. The pictures had been taken in May, 1950, by Paul Trent, near McMinnville, Ore. If these pictures were authentic, one could forget the thousands of verbal UFO reports for the E-T hypothesis was clearly confirmed.

In the Colorado report, Hartmann [another one of your panelists] had written: "This is one of the few UFO reports in which all factors investigated, geometric, psychological and physical appear to be consistent with the assertion that an extraordinary flying object, silvery, metallic, disk-shaped, tens of meters in diameter, and evidently artificial, flew within sight of two witnesses."

McDonald also has investigated this case and when he spoke in Washington on

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June 10, 1969, he said: "My impression is that here we have, probably, a genuine photo of an unidentified (flying) object."

My letter of Sept. 7 said I had been conducting an investigation of the Trent photos and that "I've already uncovered enough discrepancies to indicate a much more prosaic explanation." (The pictures are a hoax and the Trents even lied about the time of day the pictures were taken!) 

I had thought this would surely spark a request for more details from an experienced UFOlogist like yourself. But I never received a reply.

Your Nov. 18 letter, referring to my telephone conversation with Roberts, refers to "your offer to speak at the Symposium on UFOs in Boston." I made no such offer, nor was that the purpose of my call. When Roberts had written that "It has been difficult to get people on the 'critic' side to speak," it was clear that he had not received the full story. The purpose of my call was to try to correct that situation.

Later in our conversation, when Roberts expressed some regret that my name had not been considered for the Boston symposium, I replied that it was much too late to revise the program and that was not the purpose of my call. I added that I already had made plans to go skiing in Vermont during the week between Christmas and New Years, if snow conditions permit. [If they do not, I might accept your generous offer to ask questions or make comments from the floor during the discussion period in case "aspects of the UFO problem (have been) neglected by the speakers!"]

Lest there be any misunderstanding, the purpose of this letter is not to ask you to reconsider your original decision or your most recent review of the matter. Rather, my intent is to be sure that all members of your symposium panel as well as other interested parties and AAAS officials are fully apprised of the background to the upcoming UFO symposium so they can be prepared for the reaction that it is likely to precipitate.

I have no doubt that the AAAS and its prestige will readily survive the UFO symposium. But as I wrote Roberts on Oct 11: "...it pains me to find that AAAS will lend its prestige to pumping new life into this pseudo-scientific fantasy." I would only add now that your efforts will not save the patient--but merely give it a few months of added life.

Very truly yours,


Philip J. Klass

cc: Dr. Athelstan Spilhaus
Dr. Walter Orr Roberts
Dr. Philip Morrison
Dr. Carl Sagan
Dr. Donald Menzel
Dr. Ed Condon
Dr. William Markowitz
Lt. Col. Hector Quintanilla

