



Extraterrestrial Iconography

In a manner similar to the evolution of Jesus's features in art (Nickell 1988, 41-48), or of the popular likeness of Santa Claus (Flynn 1993), the concept of what alien creatures look like has undergone change over time. In the course of graduate work I did in folklore in 1982 and subsequently published (Nickell 1984), I noted (citing Stringfield 1980) that the descriptions of UFO occupants were tending to become standardized, a process that continues at present.

Consider, for example, the development beginning with the origin of the modern UFO era in 1947. (Although many alien encounters were reported prior to 1947, most of the reports were not made public until after that year, typically with great lapses in time between the alleged date of the encounter and the date of reporting [Vallee 1969, 179-90]. Therefore, there is reason to distrust the accuracy of such reports.) Several sources show the great variety of aliens described in the post-1947 era (Clark 1993; Cohen 1982; Hendry 1979; Huyghe 1996; Lorenzen and Lorenzen 1977; Mack 1994; McCampbell 1976; Sachs 1980; Stringfield 1977, 1980; Story 1980; Vallee 1969).

One notes the "little green men" reported in Italy in 1947 (Cohen 1982, 203-205); the beautiful, humanlike beings who appeared to the "contactees" of the 1950s (Story 1980, 89); the hairy dwarfs common in 1954 (Clark 1993, 177); and the many other varieties of

alien beings reported in encounters down to the present. The accompanying illustration depicts a selection of such beings reportedly encountered from 1947 to the present. (Science fiction examples have not been included.) Prepared for a Discovery channel documentary on alien abductions (forthcoming as of this writing), it also appeared April 4, 1997, on ABC's 20/20 in a documentary on the "Alien Autopsy" hoax. There I used it to demonstrate that the aliens that were allegedly retrieved from the 1947 Roswell, New Mexico, UFO crash (actually the crash of an array of Project Mogul balloons carrying radar reflectors and instruments) were of a type not popularly imagined until many years later.

That type begins to appear in 1961, the date of the first widely reported alien abduction—the Betty and Barney Hill case. It is the little, big-headed humanoid with large, wraparound eyes. The mythological implication of this type seems to be that the aliens are "time travelers"—in effect *us* as it is assumed we *will be* in our distant evolutionary future (Nickell 1984). Therefore, they have dwindling bodies (because of inactivity) and large brains (due to increased intelligence). However, some critics are skeptical of all such human/humanoid models. States one early commentator: "While it seems incredible that life does not exist elsewhere in the universe, it is equally incredible that it should resemble man" (Palmer 1951, 64).

Nevertheless, due to media influ-

ence, this is the type that eventually became standardized. It is the alien image now seen everywhere—on caps, T-shirts, ties, necklaces, posters, and books, even the coffee mug on my desk.

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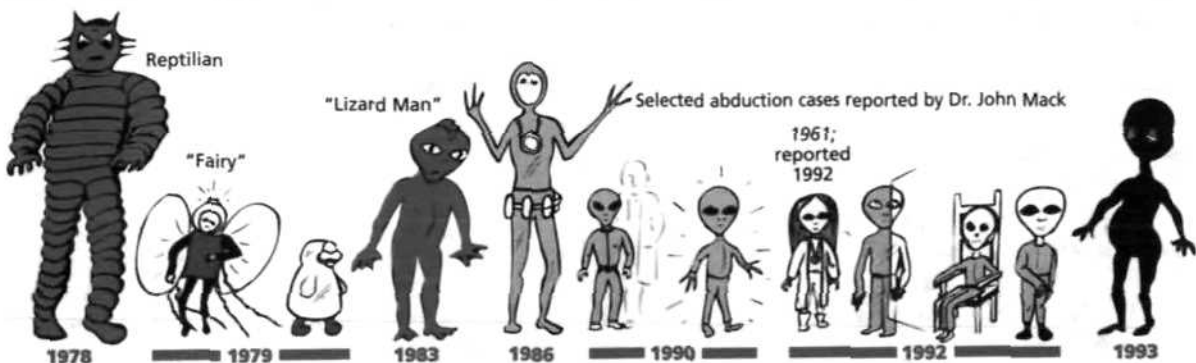
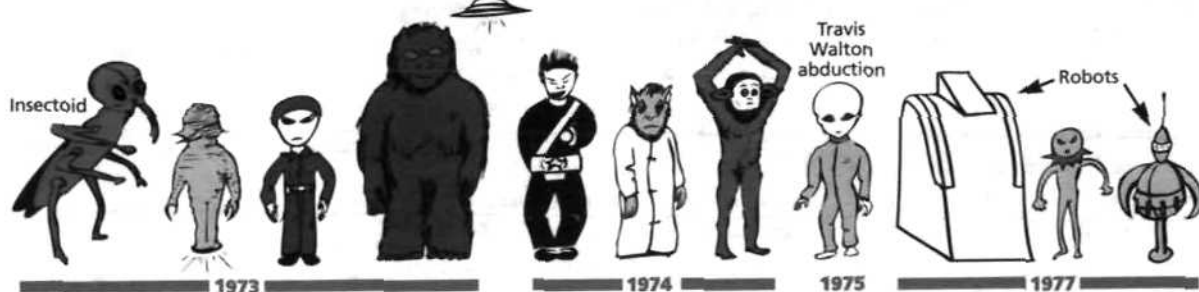
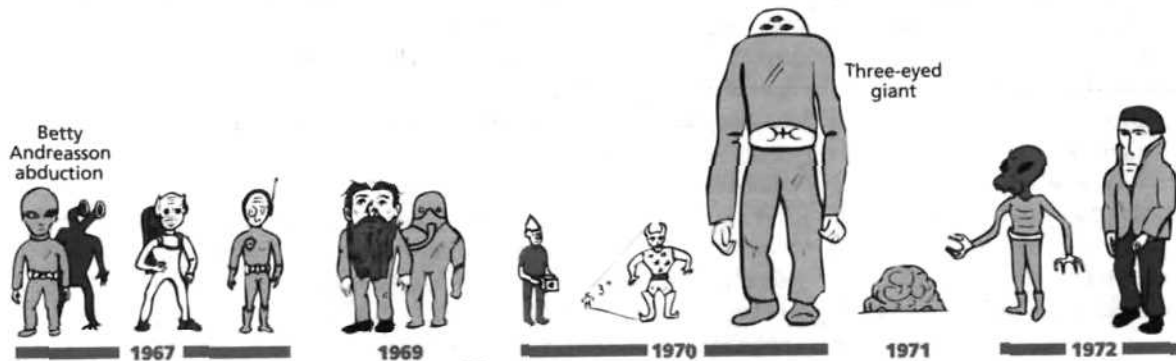
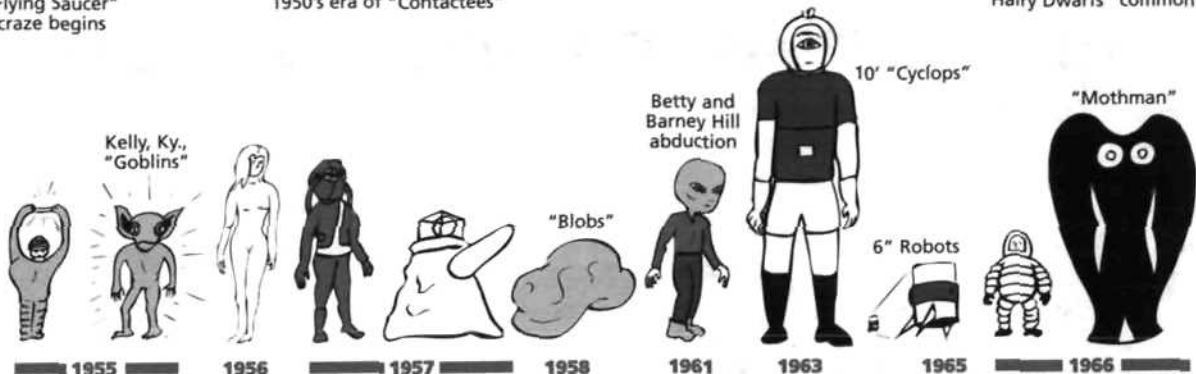
Acknowledgments

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Otherworldly beings bathed in light
Flatwoods Monster

ALIEN TIME LINE



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