

# Over the Hill on UFO Abductions

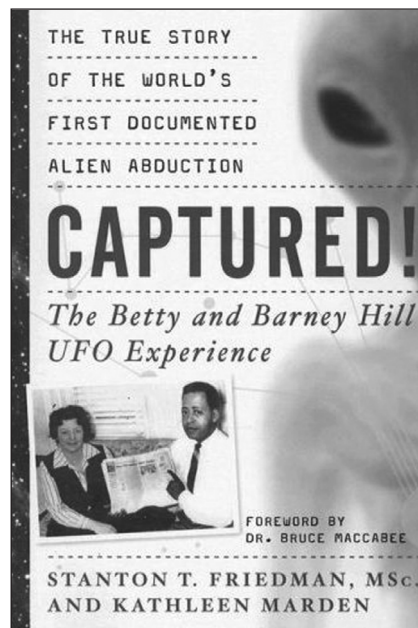
ROBERT SHEAFFER

*Captured! The Betty and Barney Hill UFO Experience.* By Stanton T. Friedman and Kathleen Marden. Franklin Lakes, New Jersey: New Page Books, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-1564149718. 319 pp. Softcover, \$16.99.

The story of the alleged UFO abduction of Betty and Barney Hill in New Hampshire in 1961 is well known to the public. It was an alleged close encounter followed by amnesia, “missing time,” and frightening dreams. Later, the “missing memories” were recovered by a psychiatrist using hypnosis. Under hypnosis, both Hills told a harrowing tale of abduction and medical examination on board an extraterrestrial craft.

*Captured!* is the second major book published about the Hill case this year, which itself is rather surprising. The first volume was *Encounters at Indian Head*, the proceedings of a once-secret symposium held in 2000, in which I participated (see my report, *SI*, September/October 2007). Kathy Marden is Betty Hill’s niece and now the executor of her estate. What is more surprising is that Stanton Friedman, known throughout the UFO community for his querulous bombast and immense ego is, despite being given top billing on the cover, in fact the junior author. The book’s Library of Congress entry lists Marden as the primary author. Friedman writes in the preface, “I was especially pleased that Kathy Marden invited me to help out some on this book.” That is no doubt

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the reason the book is of relatively temperate tone (except for the chapter on skeptics, which carries Friedman’s fingerprints). Marden at least attempts to deal with the arguments of skeptics and other critics, even if many of the answers she gives do not convince. She admits to the existence of certain inconsistencies and difficulties in the story, issues that never seem to have troubled Friedman.

The book’s primary strength is the wealth of new details about Betty and Barney Hill from several sources: Betty’s previously unpublished diary and correspondence, additional quotes from the tapes of the Hills under hypnosis by Dr. Benjamin Simon, plus interviews giving her friends’ and family’s memories of

what transpired, including Kathy’s own. Because of this, we see a much richer picture of the Hills than previously available. Our knowledge of Barney especially is fleshed out. We learn that prior to undergoing hypnosis, while Barney was recounting his alleged alien encounter, his face “kept twitching spasmodically to one side.” The picture of Barney that emerges is that of a man under enormous pressure: “The long daily commute to his job in Boston, the necessity of sleeping during daylight hours, his physical separation from his sons,” not to mention the social stigma of a black man in an almost all-white state married to a white woman. All of this took a toll on his health. Is this information relevant to an analysis of Barney’s claimed extraterrestrial experiences? Absolutely, but what exactly does it enable us to conclude? If only the laws governing human behavior were as predictable as those of chemistry or physics!

One major problem in telling the story of the Hills’ adventure is that Marden freely mingles the Hills’ original account with details later supposedly “recovered” by hypnosis. This makes the case sound far stronger than it actually was. For a more careful recounting of the Hill story in its proper sequence, see Dennis Stacy’s paper in the *Encounters* volume.

One surprise disclosed in the book is “The Dress Analysis.” In a chapter that brings to mind the Bill Clinton investigations, Marden reveals that Betty, upon

returning home after her alleged abduction experience, hung up the dress she had been wearing in a closet and left it there, undisturbed, for many years. The lining and zipper are torn, supposedly confirming her account of the aliens forcibly removing it from her, although a number of earthly explanations also come to mind. After a hypnosis session in 1964, she retrieved the dress from the closet and found it covered with a pink, powdery substance. The substance blew away, but “the dress was badly stained.” Samples from the dress were sent to various labs for testing. Several tests unsuccessfully attempted were made to try to replicate the stain using various chemicals, which is supposed to convince us that the discoloration is extraterrestrial in origin, although acid produced a similar stain of a different color. Also detected were “substances with detergent-type properties (not soap).” The most interesting analyses were conducted by the Pinelandia Biophysics Laboratory of Michigan, which specializes in the analysis of crop circles. They found that the stained portions of Betty’s dress would “induce a higher degree of energy in the water” than the unstained ones. No mention is made of just what kind of “energy” is being talked about. Marden concludes that the results “seem to point to the presence of an anomalous biological substance that has permanently altered the substance of Betty’s dress.” I would expect that an item of clothing left undisturbed in a closet for forty years would pick up all manner of interesting biological substances from insects, spiders, mites, mold, bacteria, etc.

Once again, the “star map” Betty Hill allegedly saw on board the UFO is trotted out as “proof” of the story. Selecting sun-like stars from the latest catalog of nearby stars, Marjorie Fish spent many long hours looking for a pattern that matches the sketch Betty Hill drew by posthypnotic suggestion, supposedly replicating a map she had seen aboard the saucer. After much effort, she believed she had found one. The controversy over the star map is so complex

that it is impossible to cover in detail here. The detailed counter-argument is in my paper in the *Encounters* volume, arguments routinely ignored by Friedman, Marden, and all other pro-star-map writers. In brief, it is necessary to “fudge” the data to make the Fish map come out the way it does. One “favorable” star needs to be excluded, and two “almost favorable” stars selectively included, for Fish’s purpose. My conclusion was, “The apparent validity of the Fish map is due to selective inclusion of data and by misdrawing the map to make it appear to match Betty Hill’s sketch.” Perhaps the simplest and most telling argument against the Fish map was made by astronomers Steven Soter and Carl Sagan back in 1975, who pointed out that the apparent resemblance between the two patterns exists almost entirely because of the way the lines are drawn connecting the dots. View the two patterns as unconnected dots, and they appear as different as two patterns can be.

Another problem for the star map believers, for the most part ignored, is that the supposed “match” of Marjorie Fish is not unique. To date, there have been at least four other supposed identifications of the pattern. One is by Betty Hill herself, depicting the constellation Pegasus. A second is by Charles Atterberg depicting nearby stars, but different ones than Fish uses. A third is by two German UFOlogists, who attempt to match it up with our solar system’s major and minor planets. A fourth is by Yari Danjo, who finds the aliens’ home star system to be Alpha Centauri. Marden dismisses Betty’s Pegasus map as “only a coincidence” and dismisses Atterberg’s work as lacking “the solid basis found by Fish.” Actually, Atterberg’s pattern is much closer to Betty’s sketch than the Fish pattern, and accounts for a greater number of stars. The lesson of the star map? Given an almost unlimited number of degrees of freedom in selecting what you will include in your search, what scale you will use, and what vantage point you

will take, it is to be expected that quite a number of apparent matches to Betty’s pattern can be found if one is willing to expend enough effort to do so.

The most contentious chapter of the book is titled “Disbelievers and Disinformants.” UFOlogists are convinced that anyone questioning their claims is likely paid to spread disinformation. We are told that the late astronomer and skeptic Donald H. Menzel of Harvard was “probably a member of the Majestic 12 Group controlling classified UFO research” (a supposed group whose existence is “revealed” in some documents of unknown origin that are almost certainly hoaxes). We are informed that “the Hill case in general, and the star map work in particular, have been attacked, sometimes viciously and almost always irrationally, by the small group of nasty, noisy, negativists making up the UFO debunker community.” This sort of rhetoric is commonplace within the UFO community (in addition to being Betty Hill’s niece, Marden is a longtime MUFON official)—those promoting that the claims of extraterrestrial contact and abduction are “scientific” while those trying to refute them are “irrational.” She accuses skeptics of resisting the UFO evidence for the same reason that the Church resisted Copernicus: it would upset their rigid, preconceived worldview. Objections based on the impossibility of faster-than-light travel are refuted by pointing out that if you are traveling at 99.99 percent of the speed of light, you could reach Zeta Reticuli in just six months of elapsed time on a craft. No mention is made of the enormous amount of fuel needed to accelerate to, and decelerate from, these speeds (or of the fact that you must also accelerate to 99.99 percent of the speed of light all the fuel needed for deceleration, unless you want a one-way ticket out of the galaxy!).

Barney Hill did not live long enough to become a widely known personality in the UFO subculture. He died suddenly of a stroke in 1969 at the age of only forty-six. Thus, it is difficult to make an

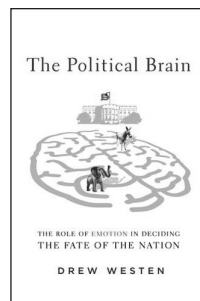
independent assessment of his credibility. Betty Hill, however, lived to a ripe old age and became one of the best-known figures in the UFO community, a constant fixture on TV shows, at UFO conferences, etc. Whatever credibility she may have once had soon perished by her own hand. I was present at the National UFO Conference in New York City in 1980, at which Betty presented some of the UFO photos she had taken. She showed what must have been well over two hundred slides, mostly of blips, blurs, and blobs against a dark background. These were supposed to be UFOs coming in close, chasing her car, landing, etc. Marden includes several of these photos in the book. After her talk had exceeded about twice its allotted time, Betty was literally jeered off the stage by what had been at first a very sympathetic audience. This incident, witnessed by many of UFOlogy's leaders and top activists, removed any lingering doubts about Betty's credibility—she had none. In the oft-repeated words of one UFOlogist who accompanied Betty on a UFO vigil in 1977, she was “unable to distinguish between a landed UFO and a streetlight.” In 1995, Betty Hill wrote a self-published book, *A Common Sense Approach to UFOs*. It is filled with obviously delusional stories, such as seeing entire squadrons of UFOs in flight and a truck levitating above the freeway.

Marden attempts to deal with the credibility problem in her final chapter, “Betty Hill's Fall From Grace.” She explains, “After Barney's death, [Betty] turned away from careful, objective evaluation, and with subjective enthusiasm began to identify any lights in the sky as UFOs.” However, the newly published material in *Captured!* suffices to refute this excuse. Betty Hill wrote in a letter dated April 4, 1966: “Barney and I go out frequently at night for one reason or another. Since last October, we have seen our ‘friends’ on the average of eight or nine times out of every ten trips, outside of Portsmouth. . . . Last Saturday Barney and I decided to retrace our trip in the White Mountains, as of September 1961,

but this time my parents were with us. As we were returning through the Franconia Notch in the general area of the tramway and Cannon Mountain, one [UFO] moved around the mountain about fifty feet from the ground, in front of us. Its lights dimmed out and we could see the row of windows before it became invisible.” This latter sighting, which would have been April 2, 1966, sounds very much like the reported pre-abduction close encounter of 1961: a UFO with lights and a row of windows flying at low altitude in front of their car and going behind the White Mountains. The believers in the Hills' account must somehow argue that Betty and Barney's reported multiple UFO encounters in

1965 and 1966 are delusional and should be quietly dismissed, while the first one in 1961 must be taken with deadly seriousness. Occam's razor would have us conclude that all of Betty Hill's reported UFO encounters, with or without Barney present, are equally delusional.

One factor to keep in mind is that we know today far better than we did in the 1960s, that supposed “repressed memories” recovered via hypnosis are extremely unreliable. In the absence of any real physical evidence, the case for believing the Hill abduction story ultimately rests on the credibility of the witnesses, and on the credibility of the hypnosis-recovered memories. Neither inspires confidence.



## Governed By Emotion

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*The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation.* By Drew Westen. Public Affairs, New York, 2007. ISBN 13: 978-1-58648-425-5. 424 pages. Softcover, \$26.95.

For those of us who have long believed that our voting and our political attitudes are primarily emotionally driven, Drew Westen, a professor of psychology and psychiatry and lead investigator of a team of neuroscientists, provides strong support in *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. His central thesis is that the predominant view of the mind since the eighteenth century, that it is dispassionate and “makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusions” (p. ix), is false. When facing political questions, issues, and candidates, our emo-

tions rule. Furthermore, these emotional processes are the result of neurological processes of which we are unaware; they are inaccessible to consciousness.

Part 1 is devoted to a brief description of the relevant structures and functions of the brain when engaged with political matters. Part 2 describes ways in which our emotional brains determine how we respond when dealing with particular political issues.

Throughout, Westen provides examples of campaign practices that have been effective or ineffective because they were or were not congruent with our emotion-driven political behavior. For the last three decades, with the exception of the Clinton era, Democratic presidential candidates have been unsuccessful because they and their strategists have believed in a view of the mind as being dispassionate and, therefore, that

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