

More UFO Nonsense

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Recently, 14-year-old rapper Jayden Smith, son of entertainers Jada Pinkett-Smith and Will Smith, made a startling revelation. He reportedly said that President Obama informed him that extraterrestrial aliens are real. In actuality, however, the President simply said that he could neither confirm nor deny the existence of said aliens. In Smith's mind, though, this "means they're real." Smith went on to contend that human beings could not be the only intelligent beings in the universe.

Right on the heels of this nonsense, the *Guardian* (UK) reported on UFO conspiracy hearings held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. (See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/29/ufo-conspiracy-hearing-congressmen-senators>) Five former U.S. congressmen and a former senator were paid \$20,000 each to draw attention to this media circus. They called upon the government to make available information on UFOs from decades past.

Expert witnesses were sworn in and about 100 people from all over the world were in attendance. Translations from the hearings were made available in several languages. Even Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam (NOI) made an appearance, accompanied by 12 of his Fruit of Islam (FOI) bodyguards.

First, we can forgive young Jayden for desperately wanting to believe in extraterrestrial visitations. After all, his father starred in the "Men in Black" movies, "Independence Day" and other films with fantastic themes. However, to say that the inability or lack of desire to confirm or deny the existence of such creatures means that they must exist reflects lazy, careless and wishful thinking. It would be similar to saying that an honest agnostic must believe in God.

Throughout history there have been many supposed eyewitnesses claiming to have seen spaceships from other planets, to have been abducted by aliens, etc. Some of the eyewitnesses to UFOs have been airplane pilots, astronauts and others supposedly in the know.

It should be noted that UFO simply stands for Unidentified Flying Object. Just because the observer cannot identify it does not mean that no one can, or that the object must have come from outer space. In almost every case, the object has been identified at some point. Objects formerly believed to have been rocket ships from outer space, flying saucers, etc. include weather balloons, satellites, etc. People have seen lights from neighboring air force bases, the effects of lightning, etc.

Back in the 1990s, the since-deceased skeptical UFO investigator Philip J. Klass appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show and demonstrated many ways in which people have mistakenly identified flying objects. He even revealed UFO hoaxes, including one in which a man simply tossed the lid to a garbage can in the air and photographed it. It looked exactly like a flying saucer.

Let us now return to the case of Screwy Louie Farrakhan. The sinister minister has long insisted that his former leader, the Nation's Elijah Muhammad, is alive and well on "a wheel that you call a

UFO.” This wheel is also called the Mother Plane and comes fully equipped with “baby planes.” According to Farrakhan, who was especially close to the late Libyan strongman Muammar Al-Qaddafi, the Mother Plane once ran off U.S. military planes as they were about to attack Libya. (Amazingly - or not - this incident never made it into the media, mainstream or alternative.) Farrakhan says that skeptics could dig up Elijah Muhammad’s grave to see that his body is not there. That must mean he is alive and well and aboard the Mother Plane! (And you thought 14-year-olds could be irrational!)

Why should anyone in her right mind take Farrakhan seriously? Religious fanatics have always made extraordinary claims with no strong evidence whatsoever to support them. If we accepted all such claims it would be extremely difficult to accumulate any reliable knowledge.

However, what about respectable eyewitnesses such as pilots and astronauts? The fact of the matter is that pilots and astronauts can also be mistaken, and have often been mistaken. They have often mistaken weather-related phenomena, etc. for extraterrestrial spacecraft. Even among pilots and astronauts, eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable.

It is also important to recognize that three percent of the population is fantasy prone. Some people sincerely believe they see flying saucers, or that they have been abducted by aliens, etc. However, their minds are playing tricks on them. Others are confused by their own waking dreams. Certainly many people want to believe and hate any rational alternatives to their supposed paranormal experiences. However, there is nothing stupid or immoral about examining these kinds of extraordinary claims.

Many - if not most - astrophysicists believe that it is highly probable that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. However, there is no strong evidence whatsoever that the Earth has ever been visited by extraterrestrial aliens.

In the December 2011/January 2012 issue of the journal I edit, *The Human Prospect*, I interviewed astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. He had this to say:

Is there another planet out there we could live on? I suppose so. We’d have to travel pretty far to get there, because there’s none in our own solar system. The nearest star system to us, using our fastest spaceship, it would take us 70,000 years to get there. That exceeds the life expectancy of the experimenter, so that’s never a good situation to be in.

This is what we’re confronted with. I’m hopeful that we find life we can communicate with, maybe by radio waves, or so. That way we wouldn’t have to travel the 70,000 spacecraft miles - you’d let the speed of light do that. But *still*, the universe is vast. It takes 100,000 years for light to cross the galaxy. We’re all long dead before that. You can’t expect to carry on witty repartee with an alien on another planet. That’s because the light-travel time is years to get there and then years to come back. That’s in the *closest among the star systems, as well. So, it looks pretty hopeless to me. I don’t expect that we’re going to be kicking back having a beer with any aliens any time soon.* (p. 20)

I am only quoting one scientist. However, many others also believe that it is unlikely that we will ever have face-to-face contact with aliens. Most importantly, it seems certain that we have had no

such contact to date. That is why it is important to stop the madness. Government officials in the U.S. have to contend with the possibility that chemical weapons have been used in Syria, terrorist attacks in the U.S., natural catastrophes, etc. and we're pressing them to release information on aliens from outer space? Come on!