

Speculative Realms

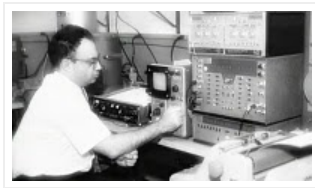
SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 2010

The Flying Saucer Chautauqua: Stan & The Art of Saucer Maintenance

Stanton T. Friedman IS Real! A film by Paul Kimball

Review by Gary Haden

It is hard to be critical and affectionate at the same time. There aren't many these days who can manage it. Maybe you have to be related to your subject to achieve it.



Paul Kimball's *Stanton T. Friedman IS REAL!* pulls this balancing act off. It is simultaneously an intimate portrait and a subtle critique of the Master "UFO Evangelist," Stanton T. Friedman. I'm sure Kimball's relationship to Friedman doesn't hurt, but Kimball, as a filmmaker, should not be dismissed on that ground. This work is well-shot and deliberate and deftly provides a biographical snapshot of the man who is primarily responsible for the continued existence of UFO Research.

When the mainstream media gets a hankering to do a show on UFOs, Stanton Friedman is the man they go to. The Nuclear Physicist, who was once a classmate of Carl Sagan's, had his interest in UFOs piqued when he was trying to find a book to complete his mail order obligations to receive free shipping on a book order and discovered *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* by Edward Ruppelt. The world can thank that mail order deal for the many wonderful hours Mr. Friedman has spent entertaining, edifying, engaging, and challenging us about the world of UFOs.



In a sense, Stan Friedman's career popularizing UFO Research paralleled Carl Sagan's efforts at popularizing science. Friedman is quite elegantly positioned for the task: He is a ham, whose taste for the

stage was wetted while acting in two plays Senior Year in high school and was treated to a full-course meal in a public speaking career that took full advantage of his stagecraft. Sagan was every inch the ham Stan Friedman is and it is due, in no small measure, to the stagecraft of these two hams that there is any enthusiasm at all for the topics they championed.

They both loved human curiosity and sought to encourage it. Unfortunately, their colleagues today, skeptics and believers alike, detest human curiosity and seek to discourage it. This is partly to humiliate the competition. Partly, it is to discourage others from pursuing a career path they themselves are deeply disgruntled about. They envy Friedman's and Sagan's showmanship because they have no flare for it themselves. They disgustingly ruin the quests of their students at University, conduct relentlessly tedious classrooms, and contribute to the demoralization of human inquiry.

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"What is in mind," wrote Robert M. Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, "is a sort of Chautauqua—that's the only name I can think of for it—like the traveling tent-show Chautauquas that used to move across America, this America, the one that we are now in, an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer."

This is Friedman's project—a Flying Saucer Chautauqua, something that ostensibly many of the conferences on UFOs are intended to be. Many end up devolving into the Chautauqua's wicked stepsister, the sideshow. Kimball frames Friedman's Flying Saucer Chautauqua as a tent-show revival, adopting Barry Downing's notion of Friedman as a UFO Evangelist, and Kimball sets Friedman's tour of America to jazzed-up church organ music.

Make no mistake. Friedman is not just a showman. He is a champion debater and a rigorous scholar. You may challenge his results, but you can't accuse him of arriving at his conclusions lazily. His stagecraft simply is the icing on a well-baked cake. It honors his craft as a scholar. The one complements and does not refute the other. Those who call for UFO scholarship without showmanship are dooming the whole enterprise.



Friedman has set the bar: You have to be both showman and scholar. Many showmen in the UFO field are embarrassed by their scholarship. Many scholars in the field are embarrassed by their showmanship. Friedman, excellent at both, leaves no apparent successor in his wake. Consequently, many rightly

prognosticate the end of UFOlogy. Oh, there might be scholarly books written by horrible public speakers or charismatic quacks who evince accomplished stagecraft, but with no one outside of Stanton Friedman skilled at both stagecraft and research anywhere apparent, UFOlogy has no popular champion.

Perhaps that is why Kimball's film seems so mournful. You can't shake the sense of grief about the photography. It is out of sync with reality. Friedman, after all, is still alive. At the end of the film, Director of Photography Findlay Muir, who does outstanding work here, shoots Friedman striding up a long lonely road, eventually dissolving into the horizon.

He is all alone. That rightly calls to mind the uniqueness of Stanton Friedman. But there are no followers. There is no one behind him.



Paul Kimball mourns UFOlogy even as its champion, successorless, disappears into the sunset.

All images taken from Paul Kimball's *Stanton T. Friedman IS Real!*
[Paul Kimball's Website](#)

Posted by Gary Haden at 6:30 AM 
Labels: [Ham and Egger Review](#)

1 comments:

Paul Kimball said...

Thanks for the nice review Gary. You "got" what I was going for, and you nailed it. :-)

June 13, 2010 6:32 AM

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- Hyperbolic Chamber (2)
- Hypnosis (7)
- hypnotic regression fraud (4)
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- Jeff Ritzman (1)
- Jeremy Vaeni (1)
- Jungian Compensation Theory (2)
- Karl Marx (1)
- Madonna Complex (1)
- Mary Magdalene (1)
- mass hypnosis (1)
- Matt Graeber (10)
- MLABs (1)
- Miracle Man (2)
- MMORPG (1)
- Moderation policy (1)
- monkey trial (1)
- moon anomalies (1)
- MPD (3)
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- Nazi Super Race Fantasy (1)
- New Normal (1)
- Night Terror (2)
- Nora D'Amico (1)
- Paracast (3)
- Paranoid Pomo (1)
- Paratopia (2)
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