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PROJECT BLUE BOOK

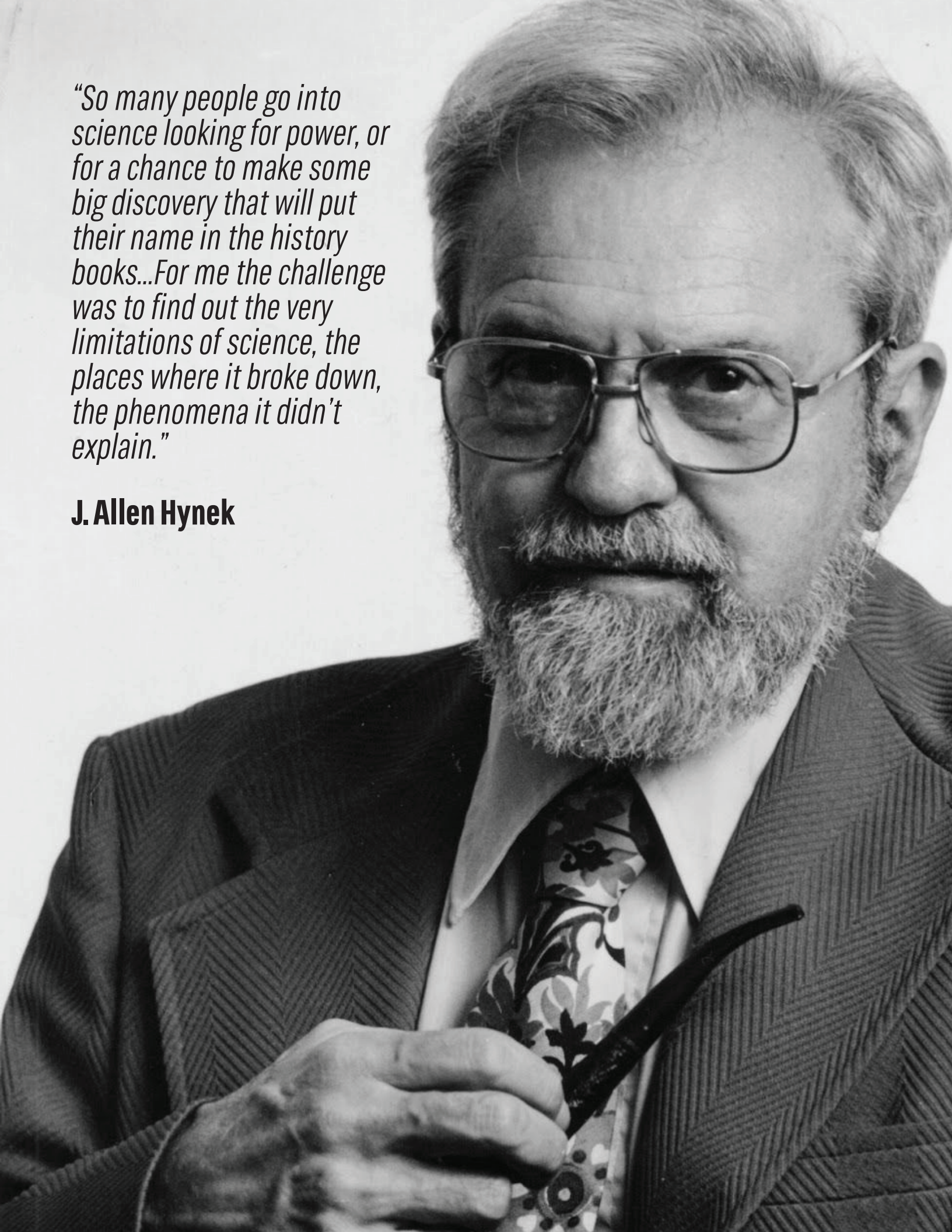
BASED ON TRUE EVENTS

Education and Discussion Guide



"So many people go into science looking for power, or for a chance to make some big discovery that will put their name in the history books...For me the challenge was to find out the very limitations of science, the places where it broke down, the phenomena it didn't explain."

J. Allen Hynek





HISTORY's new drama series *Project Blue Book* is based on the true, top-secret investigations into Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) and related phenomena conducted by the United States Air Force in the 1950s and 1960s. Dr. J. Allen Hynek (Aidan Gillen), a brilliant yet underappreciated astrophysicist and college professor, is recruited by the Air Force to spearhead a clandestine operation called Project Blue Book. Along with his partner, Air Force Captain Michael Quinn (Michael Malarkey), he is summoned to investigate UFO sightings around the country and use science to discover what really happened.

Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, each episode draws from actual Project Blue Book case files. By watching this series, students can gain insights into the procedures used to analyze UFO sightings and learn about the scientific methods used to determine the truth. Although it is historical fiction, the series provides opportunities for students to learn more about explorations into the history of the unknown, the development of the space program, and the post-World War II era.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Project Blue Book connects with many topics and themes explored in History, Science and Technology, Politics, Physics and Current Events courses. It is appropriate for advanced high school students, college students and general adult audiences. This guide offers ideas and activities for viewers to learn more about the themes and topics explored in the series. Educators can adapt activities to meet grade and learning levels .

Learn More and Watch Clips:

Visit <https://www.history.com/shows/project-blue-book> to learn more about the series and watch related short videos.

Join the Conversation:

<https://twitter.com/HistoryBlueBook>

<https://www.facebook.com/HistoryBlueBook/>

<https://www.instagram.com/historybluebook/>

Terms to Define:

As they are watching, students can keep a list of terms to define, such as: classified, nuclear fission, radioactive, etc.

New Related Book



QUESTIONS

These questions can prompt group discussions, essays or special projects related to the topics covered in Project Blue Book.

1. Why do you think the Air Force launched Project Blue Book?
2. Other than eyewitness reports, what kinds of evidence do you think UFO investigators consider when they are analyzing cases like those explored in Project Blue Book?
3. Why do you think there was an increase in UFO sightings in the late 1940s and early 1950s?
4. Project Blue Book had two main goals: 1) to determine if UFOs were a threat to national security and 2) to scientifically analyze UFO-related data. Why do you think these goals were important? In what ways do you think UFOs could have been considered a threat to national security in the 1950s?
5. Why was the “space race” important in terms of American security and geopolitical standing?
6. What were some of the explanations for UFO sightings once they were investigated by experts like Allen Hynek?
7. What are some of the roles scientists played during the Cold War?
8. Why do you think the U.S. government kept much of the information they collected about UFOs classified during the Cold War era?
9. Why do you think Air Force pilots and other military personnel often reported UFO sightings? Were there reasons they were more likely to experience unidentified phenomena?
10. Why do you think the U.S. government was worried that UFO sightings would spark mass hysteria?
11. Project Blue Book officially ended in 1969, though other inquiries into UFOs continued. Do you think it is important to investigate UFO sightings today?

PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY

Project Blue Book was a special U.S. Air Force project to investigate and analyze UFO sightings. In late December 1952, the project directors filed a status report with an update on the project. Included in the report was a copy of the form given to those who said they had seen UFOs. The team used the information collected on these forms to help with their assessment. Below is a section of the form with discussion questions for analysis. (The full report can be viewed here, with much more information for analysis:

[Project Blue Book Report](#)



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U. S. AIR FORCE TECHNICAL INFORMATION SHEET

This questionnaire has been prepared so that you can give the U. S. Air Force as much information as possible concerning the unidentified aerial phenomenon that you have observed. Please try to answer as many questions as you possibly can. The information that you give will be used for research purposes, and will be regarded as confidential material. Your name will not be used in connection with any statements, conclusions, or publications without your permission. We request this personal information so that, if it is deemed necessary, we may contact you for further details.

1. When did you see the object?

____ Day ____ Month ____ Year

2. Time of day: ____ Hour ____ Minutes

(Circle One): A.M. or P.M.

3. Time zone:

(Circle One): a. Eastern

b. Central

c. Mountain

d. Pacific

e. Other _____

(Circle One): a. Daylight Saving

b. Standard

4. Where were you when you saw the object?

____ Nearest Postal Address ____ City or Town ____ State or Country

Additional remarks: _____

5. Estimate how long you saw the object. ____ Hours ____ Minutes ____ Seconds

5.1 Circle one of the following to indicate how certain you are of your answer to Question 5.

a. Certain

b. Fairly certain

c. Not very sure

d. Just a guess

6. What was the condition of the sky?

(Circle One): a. Bright daylight

b. Dull daylight

c. Bright twilight

d. Just a trace of daylight

e. No trace of daylight

f. Don't remember

7. IF you saw the object during DAYLIGHT, TWILIGHT, or DAWN, where was the SUN located as you looked at the object?

(Circle One): a. In front of you

b. In back of you

c. To your right

d. To your left

e. Overhead

f. Don't remember

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8. IF you saw the object at NIGHT, TWILIGHT, or DAWN, what did you notice concerning the STARS and MOON?

8.1 STARS (Circle One):

- a. None
- b. A few
- c. Many
- d. Don't remember

8.2 MOON (Circle One):

- a. Bright moonlight
- b. Dull moonlight
- c. No moonlight — pitch dark
- d. Don't remember

9. Was the object brighter than the background of the sky?

(Circle One):

a. Yes

b. No

c. Don't remember

10. IF it was BRIGHTER THAN the sky background, was the brightness like that of an automobile headlight?:

(Circle One) a. A mile or more away (a distant car)?

b. Several blocks away?

c. A block away?

d. Several yards away?

e. Other _____

11. Did the object:

(Circle One for each question)

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----|------------|
| a. Appear to stand still at any time? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| b. Suddenly speed up and rush away at any time? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| c. Break up into parts or explode? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| d. Give off smoke? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| e. Change brightness? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| f. Change shape? | Yes | No | Don't Know |
| g. Flicker, throb, or pulsate? | Yes | No | Don't Know |

12. Did the object move behind something at anytime, particularly a cloud?

(Circle One):

Yes

No

Don't Know.

IF you answered YES, then tell what

it moved behind: _____

13. Did the object move in front of something at anytime, particularly a cloud?

(Circle One):

Yes

No

Don't Know.

IF you answered YES, then tell what

it moved in front of: _____

14. Did the object appear: (Circle One):

a. Solid?

b. Transparent?

c. Don't Know.

15. Did you observe the object through any of the following?

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|----|----------------|-----|----|
| a. Eyeglasses | Yes | No | e. Binoculars | Yes | No |
| b. Sun glasses | Yes | No | f. Telescope | Yes | No |
| c. Windshield | Yes | No | g. Theodolite | Yes | No |
| d. Window glass | Yes | No | h. Other _____ | | |

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16. Tell in a few words the following things about the object.

a. Sound _____

b. Color _____

17. Draw a picture that will show the shape of the object or objects. Label and include in your sketch any details of the object that you saw such as wings, protrusions, etc., and especially exhaust trails or vapor trails. Place an arrow beside the drawing to show the direction the object was moving.

18. The edges of the object were:

(Circle One): a. Fuzzy or blurred
b. Like a bright star
c. Sharply outlined
d. Don't remember

e. Other _____

19. IF there was MORE THAN ONE object, then how many were there? _____
Draw a picture of how they were arranged, and put an arrow to show the direction that they were traveling.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think this form was given out by Project Blue Book?
2. Why do you think the information gathered was classified?
3. Why do you think the form included questions about the stars and moon?
4. What information on the form do you think would have been most useful to investigators?



ADDITIONAL SOURCE ACTIVITY

The Project Blue Book records were declassified and turned over to the National Archives. When the files were declassified, the Air Force distributed a fact sheet with a summary of the project. Students can read this fact sheet in the section entitled “U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet Concerning UFOs and Project BLUE BOOK” here:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force/ufo.html#usafac>.

1. How many total sightings did Project Blue Book investigate?
2. How many of the sightings remain “unidentified”? What do you think that means?
3. What are the conclusions of the fact sheet?
4. Do you think UFO investigations should continue? If so, how do you think they should be funded?

Bonus: Students can read the Project Blue Book FBI File here:

<https://vault.fbi.gov/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20part%201%20of%201/view>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Project Blue Book offers many avenues to explore post-World War II history.

1. **J. Allen Hynek and Project Blue Book.** Students can read the following article to learn more about Hynek's work: <https://www.history.com/news/j-allen-hynek-ufos-project-blue-book>. Students can choose one related topic to explore further in an essay or a short paper. Topics might include: What was Project Blue Book?, What kinds of evidence do UFO investigators use?, Hynek's UFO classification system, the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* or other aspects of Hynek's research.
2. **Change Over Time.** How have UFO encounters evolved throughout the past century and how do they change based on technological advances? View this article to learn more: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-ufo-reports-change-with-technology-times-180968011>
3. **Washington, D.C. "Flap."** One of the most famous cases of UFO sightings in the U.S. took place in July, 1952, known today as "the Big Flap." Students can read an article about these events at History.com: <https://www.history.com/news/ufos-washington-white-house-air-force-coverup> and answer the following questions: 1) What happened during the summer of 1952 regarding UFOs? 2) How did the government respond to the sightings? 3) What was the official explanation and government conclusion?
4. **Sightings Map.** View this UFO sightings map to learn more about some of the most famous cases in U.S. history: <https://www.history.com/shows/project-blue-book/pages/ufo-sightings-location-map>. Students can choose one of these cases and create a short presentation to share with the larger class or group. What are some of the explanations for the sighting? What kinds of evidence exist?
5. **Operation Paperclip.** This series covers many key events in Post-World War II history, including Operation Paperclip. Students can learn more about this program here: <https://www.history.com/news/what-was-operation-paperclip>. After reading the article and pursuing their own research, students can write short papers or create presentations about Operation Paperclip and its importance.
6. **Further Explorations.** *Project Blue Book* can jumpstart student interest in other investigations, writings and official inquiries regarding UFOs. Students may want to choose one of the following topics for further research and exploration: Donald Keyhoe's *The Flying Saucers are Real*, the Robertson Panel, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomenon, or the Condon Committee.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

AFTER PROJECT BLUE BOOK

In December 2017, *The New York Times* reported on the existence of a secretive U.S. Department of Defense program created in 2007 called AATIP, or the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program. Headed by a military intelligence officer, the program investigated reports--many made by military personnel--of unidentified flying objects, including interviews, written descriptions and audio and video evidence. According to the Times, AATIP researched, among other reports, "sightings of aircraft that seemed to move at very high velocities with no visible signs of propulsion, or that hovered with no apparent means of lift."

One of these encounters occurred off the coast of San Diego in 2004. Witnesses described "a whitish oval object, about the size of a commercial plane" that was "chased by two Navy F/A-18F fighter jets from the aircraft carrier Nimitz." AATIP also investigated physical materials, including metal alloys, that AATIP personnel said were found near the scenes of mysterious aerial activity. Between 2008 and 2011, AATIP was funded with \$22 million from a budget for classified defense projects. Although the funding was halted in 2012, former defense personnel claim that the program continues. Scientists caution that just because some aerial phenomena are unexplained doesn't mean they have "alien" or otherworldly origins, though many advocate more research should be done to try to identify the objects and their sources.

Article: *The New York Times* on the existence of AATIP

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html>

Article: *The New York Times*: "2 Navy Airmen and an Object that 'Accelerated Like Nothing I've Ever Seen'"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/unidentified-flying-object-navy.html>

Video: U.S. Navy Jet Encounters UFO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdE5Psqh57I>

DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

1. After reading the *Times* article about the creation of AATIP, why do you think members of Congress would support investigations into UFOs?
2. The *Times* article includes this quote from M.I.T. astrophysicist Sara Seager: “When people claim to observe truly unusual phenomena, sometimes it’s worth investigating seriously...what people sometimes don’t get about science is that we often have phenomena that remain unexplained.” What do you think Seager means by this? What do you think Americans think of when they hear the word “UFO” and how might this affect investigations into UFOs?
3. After reading the *Times* article about the Navy airmen’s UFO sighting and watching the video, do you feel the work of a group like AATIP is important? Should U.S. taxpayers continue to fund it? Why do you think such a program would fall under the Department of Defense?

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Up for Debate. Should the work and findings of AATIP be classified, or should this information be available to the general public? Ask students to write a persuasive essay arguing for one side or the other. Then hold a debate or class discussion, in which students choose or are assigned to one side of this argument.

Serious Business? In the *Times* article, billionaire entrepreneur Robert Bigelow claims that the United States is falling behind other countries in research into UFOs because American scientists fear the “stigma” associated with UFOs in the United States. Ask students to discuss whether UFO research should be taken seriously and the possible benefits to studying UFOs, as well as the risks of not studying them. Then, brainstorm a list of other national priorities (e.g. education, infrastructure, defense) and discuss where students think such research fits into the list.

RELATED

Related Websites:

Project Blue Book series website:

<https://www.history.com/shows/project-blue-book>

U.S. National Archives site:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force/ufos.html#bluebk>

Project Blue Book documents and related files:

<http://www.theblackvault.com/documentarchive/project-blue-book/>

Center for UFO studies:

<http://www.cufos.org/>

SETI Institute:

<https://www.seti.org/>

MUFON (The Mutual UFO Network)

www.mufon.com

Related Books:

Hynek, J. Allen. *The Hynek UFO Report*. (Dell, 1977).

Hynek, J. Allen. *The UFO Experience*. (Ballantine, 1977).

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (Basic Books, 2008).

O'Connell, Mark. *The Close Encounters Man: How One Man Made the World Believe in UFOs*. (HarperCollins, 2017).

Steiger, Brad. *Project Blue Book: The Top Secret UFO Files That Revealed a Government Cover-Up*. (Red Wheel, 2019).

