**John Edward Mack, M.D. 1929 – 2004**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack>

   

   

**John Edward Mack, M.D.** (October 4, 1929–September 27, 2004) was an American [psychiatrist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychiatrist), writer, and professor at [Harvard Medical School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Medical_School). He was a [Pulitzer Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize)-winning biographer, and a leading authority on the spiritual or transformational effects of alleged [alien abduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_abduction) experiences.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-0)

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**Biography**

**Early career**

Born in [New York City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City), Mack received his medical degree from [Harvard Medical School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Medical_School) (Cum Laude, 1955) after undergraduate study at [Oberlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oberlin_College) ([Phi Beta Kappa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phi_Beta_Kappa), 1951). He was a graduate of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute and was certified in child and adult [psychoanalysis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoanalysis).

The dominant theme of his life's work has been the exploration of how one's perceptions of the world affect one's relationships. He addressed this issue of "[world view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_view)" on the individual level in his early clinical explorations of dreams, nightmares and teen suicide, and in *A Prince of Our Disorder*, his biographical study of the life of British officer [T. E. Lawrence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._E._Lawrence), for which he received the [Pulitzer Prize for Biography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize_for_Biography_or_Autobiography) in 1977.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-1)

**Alien abduction phenomenon**

This theme was taken to a controversial extreme in the early 1990s when Mack commenced his decade-plus study of 200 men and women who reported recurrent [alien encounter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_abduction) experiences. Such encounters had been reported since at least the 1950s (the account of [Antonio Villas Boas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Villas_Boas)), and had seen some limited attention from [academic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic) figures (Dr. [R. Leo Sprinkle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._Leo_Sprinkle) perhaps being the earliest, in the 1960s). Mack, however, remains probably the most esteemed academic to have studied the subject.

He initially suspected that such persons were suffering from [mental illness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_illness), but when no obvious pathologies were present in the persons he interviewed, his interest was piqued. Following encouragement from longtime friend [Thomas Kuhn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Kuhn), who predicted that the subject might be controversial, but urged Mack to collect data and ignore prevailing materialist, dualist and "either/or" analysis, Mack began concerted study and interviews. Many of those he interviewed reported that their encounters had affected the way they regarded the world, including producing a heightened sense of [spirituality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality) and environmental concern.

Mack was somewhat more guarded in his investigations and interpretations of the abduction phenomenon than were earlier researchers. Literature professor Terry Matheson writes that "On balance, Mack does present as fair-minded an account as has been encountered to date, at least as these abduction narratives go."[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-2) In a 1994 interview, Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove stated that Mack seemed "inclined to take these [abduction] reports at face value". Mack replied by saying "Face value I wouldn't say. I take them seriously. I don't have a way to account for them."[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-3) Similarly, the BBC quoted Mack as saying, "I would never say, yes, there are aliens taking people. [But] I would say there is a compelling powerful phenomenon here that I can't account for in any other way, that's mysterious. Yet I can't know what it is but it seems to me that it invites a deeper, further inquiry."[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-4)

Mack noted that there was a worldwide history of visionary experiences, especially in pre-[industrial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrialisation) societies. One example is the [vision quest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vision_quest_%28mysticism%29) common to some [Native American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_peoples_of_the_Americas) cultures. Only fairly recently in [Western culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture), notes Mack, have such visionary events been interpreted as aberrations or as [mental illness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_illness). Mack suggested that abduction accounts might best be considered as part of this larger tradition of visionary encounters.

His interest in the spiritual or transformational aspects of people's alien encounters, and his suggestion that the experience of alien contact itself may be more transcendent than physical in nature—yet nonetheless real—set him apart from many of his contemporaries, such as [Budd Hopkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budd_Hopkins), who advocated the physical reality of aliens.

His later research broadened into the general consideration of the merits of an expanded notion of reality, one which allows for experiences that may not fit the Western materialist paradigm, yet deeply affect people's lives. His second (and final) book on the alien encounter experience, *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* (1999), was as much a philosophical treatise connecting the themes of spirituality and modern worldviews as it was the culmination of his work with the "experiencers" of alien encounters, to whom the book is dedicated.

**Investigation**

In May 1994, the Dean of Harvard Medical School, Daniel C. Tosteson, appointed a committee of peers to confidentially review Mack's clinical care and clinical investigation of the people who had shared their alien encounters with him (some of their cases were written of in Mack's 1994 book *Abduction*). In the same BBC article cited above, Angela Hind wrote, "It was the first time in Harvard's history that a tenured professor was subjected to such an investigation." Mack described the investigation as "[Kafkaesque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Kafka)": he never quite knew the status of the ongoing investigation, and the nature of his critics' complaints were not revealed to Mack until the committee had prepared a draft report eight months into the process. Because the committee was not a disciplinary committee, it was not governed by any established rules of procedure; the presentation of a defense was therefore difficult and costly for Mack.

Upon the public revelation of the existence of the committee (inadvertently revealed during the solicitation of witnesses for Mack's defense, ten months into the process), questions arose from the academic community (including Harvard Professor of Law [Alan Dershowitz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Dershowitz)) regarding the validity of an investigation of a tenured professor who was not suspected of ethics violations or professional misconduct. Concluding the fourteen-month investigation, Harvard then issued a statement stating that the Dean had "reaffirmed Dr. Mack's academic freedom to study what he wishes and to state his opinions without impediment," concluding "Dr. Mack remains a member in good standing of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine." (Mack was [censured](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censure) in the committee's report for what they believed were methodological errors, but Dean Tosteson took no action based on the committee's assessment.) He had received legal help from Roderick MacLeish and Daniel P. Sheehan,[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-5) (of the [Pentagon Papers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times_Co._v._United_States) case)[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-6) and the support of [Laurance Rockefeller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurance_Rockefeller), who also funded Mack's non-profit organization for four consecutive years at $250,000 per year.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-7)

**Works**

He wrote the following books:

* *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* (1999)
* *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (1994)
* *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T.E. Lawrence* (1976)
* *Nightmares and Human Conflict* (1970)

Collaborations:

* *The Alchemy of Survival: One Woman's Journey* (1988)
* *Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent School Girl* (1977)

He was editor or co-editor of:

* *Mind Before Matter: Vision of a New Science of Consciousness* (2007; replaced by [Paul Devereux](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Devereux))
* *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference Held at M.I.T. Cambridge, MA* (1995)
* *Human Feelings: Explorations in Affect Development and Meaning* (1993)
* *Development and Sustenance of Self-Esteem in Childhood* (1984)
* *Borderline States in Psychiatry - Seminars in Psychiatry* (1975)

Unpublished:

* *When Worldviews Collide: A Paradigmatic Passion Play*, a manuscript about the Harvard inquiry, was largely complete at the time of his death.

He also wrote the foreword to *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (1993), the introductions to *The PK Man: A True Story of Mind Over Matter* (2000) by [Jeffrey Mishlove](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jeffrey_Mishlove&action=edit&redlink=1) and *Secret Life* (1992) by [David Jacobs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Michael_Jacobs), and he contributed chapters to several books including *The Long Darkness: Psychological and Moral Perspectives on Nuclear Winter* (1986), *The Psychology of Terrorism Vol. 1: A Public Understanding* (2002), and *The Psychospiritual Clinician's Handbook* (2005).

**Death**

On Monday, September 27, 2004 while in London to lecture at a T. E. Lawrence Society-sponsored conference, Mack was killed by a drunken driver heading west on Totteridge Lane. He was walking home alone, after a dinner with friends, when he was struck at 11:25 p.m. near the junction of Totteridge Lane and Longland Drive. He lost consciousness at the scene of the accident and was pronounced dead shortly thereafter. The driver was arrested at the scene, and later entered a plea of guilty by careless driving whilst under the influence of alcohol. Mack's family requested leniency for the suspect in a letter to the Wood Green Crown Court. "Although this was a tragic event for our family," the letter reads, "we feel [the accused's] behavior was neither malicious nor intentional, and we have no ill will toward him since we learned of the circumstances of the collision."[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-8)

**Popular culture**

* He was illustrated by cartoonist [Roz Chast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roz_Chast) in a four-page color strip, *Aliens, Ahoy!*, published in [Duke University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_University)'s DoubleTake magazine, Winter 1999 issue.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-MackInTheArts-9)
* He appears as a character in [William Baer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Baer)'s book of poetry, *The Unfortunates* (1997).[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-MackInTheArts-9)
* He was interviewed for the documentary film about the Dalai Lama, [*Dalai Lama Renaissance*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalai_Lama_Renaissance),[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-10) where he spoke about his conversations with the Dalai Lama about aliens,[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-11) but the interview was not included in the final edit of the film.
* Life Story Rights secured in 2011 by MakeMagic Productions, for feature film development.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_note-12)

**References**

**Notes**

* 1. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-0) Feeney, Mark (September 29, 2004). "Pulitzer Winner is Killed in Accident". *The Boston Globe*.
	2. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-1) Mack 1976
	3. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-2) Matheson 1998, p. 251.
	4. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-3) ["Human Encounters with Aliens - Part 1: Abductions and the Western Paradigm"](http://www.intuition.org/txt/mack1.htm). *Intuition Network*. <http://www.intuition.org/txt/mack1.htm>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.
	5. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-4) ["Alien thinking"](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4071124.stm). *BBC News*. June 8, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4071124.stm>. Retrieved May 6, 2010.
	6. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-5) [danielpsheehan.com](http://danielpsheehan.com)
	7. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-6) ["Daniel P Sheehan, Legal Strategist and Constitutional Attorney"](http://www.danielpsheehan.com). *www.danielpsheehan.net*. <http://www.danielpsheehan.com>. Retrieved September 2011.
	8. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-7) Thompson, Paul B. (1996). ["The Rockefeller UFO Report, or, How a Millionaire and a Socialite New Ager are Trying to Influence World Leaders about UFOs"](http://www.parascope.com/nb/rockyufo.htm). *www.parascope.com*. ParaScope, Inc.. <http://www.parascope.com/nb/rockyufo.htm>. Retrieved September 2011.
	9. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-8) Bueche, Will (October 7, 2005). ["Driver In Dr John Mack Accident Sentenced"](http://ufoupdateslist.com/2005/oct/m08-012.shtml). *UFO Updates*. <http://ufoupdateslist.com/2005/oct/m08-012.shtml>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.
	10. ^ [***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-MackInTheArts_9-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-MackInTheArts_9-1) ["Dr John Mack in the Arts"](http://johnemackinstitute.org/1999/12/dr-john-mack-in-the-arts/). *John E. Mack Institute*. 2011. <http://johnemackinstitute.org/1999/12/dr-john-mack-in-the-arts/>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.
	11. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-10) ["Dalai Lama Renaissance: documentary film"](http://www.dalailamafilm.com). *Dalai Lama Renaissance*. Wakan Films and Khashyar Darvich. 2011. <http://www.dalailamafilm.com>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.
	12. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-11) ["Dalai Lama Renaissance: John E. Mack - Biography"](http://dalailamafilm.com/cast-john-e-mack/john-e-mack-biography-ufo-ufos-aliens-alien-abduction.html). *Dalai Lama Renaissance*. Wakan Films and Khashyar Darvich. 2011. <http://dalailamafilm.com/cast-john-e-mack/john-e-mack-biography-ufo-ufos-aliens-alien-abduction.html>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.
	13. [**^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Mack#cite_ref-12) ["The John Mack Project: A True Story"](http://makemagicproductions.com/johnmack/). *MakeMagic Productions*. 2011. <http://makemagicproductions.com/johnmack/>. Retrieved September 27, 2011.

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* Mack, John E. (1970). *Nightmares and Human Conflict*. Boston: Little, Brown. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-700-00188-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-700-00188-3).
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* Mack, John E. (1976). *A Prince of Our Disorder: the life of T. E. Lawrence*. Boston: Little, Brown. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-316-54232-6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-316-54232-6).
* Matheson, Terry (1998). *Alien Abduction: Creating A Modern Phenomenon*. Prometheus Books. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [1-57392-244-7](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/1-57392-244-7).

**External links**

* [The John E. Mack Institute](http://www.johnemackinstitute.org), an organization in [Cambridge, MA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge%2C_MA)
* [Obituaries and media reports of Mack's death](http://johnemackinstitute.org/category/obits-and-remembrances/)
* [Video of John Mack with the Dalai Lama](http://dalailamafilm.com/cast-john-e-mack/john-e-mack-biography-ufo-ufos-aliens-alien-abduction.html) during filming of the documentary "Dalai Lama Renaissance"
* [PBS/Nova episode featuring Mack](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/aliens/johnmack.html)
* [John Mack biography](http://www.ufopsi.com/articles/johnmack.html) from [Ufopsi](http://www.ufopsi.com), a website promoting UFO/paranormal topics in Pedrinate, [Switzerland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland)
* [Touched](http://www.blinddogfilms.com/touched/), from [Blinddog Films](http://www.blinddogfilms.com)
* [BBC Radio 4 documentary about Mack](http://johnemackinstitute.org/2005/06/alien-thinking/)
* [experiencers.com](http://www.experiencers.com/), official author website originally created for John Mack's final book, **Passport to the Cosmos** *– Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* (1999).

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