Race, Citizenship, and the Politics of Alien Abduction; Or, Why Aliens do not Abduct Asian Americans

LUCAS TROMLY

Alien abduction is an inherently American experience. The vast majority of people who report abduction by aliens are American, a fact that is somewhat surprising given that, if contemplated practically, nation as a legal, social, or political structure should have no relevance to the business of abduction.[1] What could be of less significance to aliens intent on capturing humans for study or breeding than national borders that can be flown over effortlessly and with a speed that makes detection all but impossible? Wai Chee Dimock's argument about the political implications of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina also applies to alien abduction: both phenomena reduce the United States, or any nation, to "simply the spot where catastrophe hits, the place on the map where large-scale forces, unleashed elsewhere, come home to roost" (2). And yet, the topocentrism of alien abduction remains persistent, and although recent criticism has explored its politically overdetermined nature, this counterintuitive primacy of nation to abduction narratives has yet to be accounted for.[2]

The fringe discourse of alien abduction offers a surprisingly conservative formulation of American national identity. Abduction, as a conceptual frame, provides a way of talking about a body of people who stand to be abducted. In the sorting and selection that implicitly takes place through abduction, the intervention of a radical otherness in the figure of the extraterrestrial establishes uniformity among abductees that affirms the unity of the American citizenry. However,

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the community delineated by narratives of abduction is problematic when examined in terms of who is chosen for abduction, and who is passed over. A closer look reveals a racially exclusionary dimension to abduction, an experience that is said to include people regardless of their color. The curious absence of the figure of the minority abductee within the testimonies and critical speculations that anchor abduction culture betrays an assumption that, as a pool of potential abductees, America is homogeneously white. The racial blind spots of abduction discourse emerge through the difficulty with which Asian Americans, whose conflation of racial and national identities cannot easily be gathered into a fantasy of national sameness, occupy the role of abductee.

Multiple critics argue that the very presence of the extraterrestrial alien consolidates or produces some manner of human collectivity.[3] The oppositionally constitutive aspect of alien contact is most pronounced in narratives of invasion that, given their emphasis on mass response, collective fear and anger, and historical upheaval, position individuals as part of a larger human body. When confronted by aliens—particularly those that threaten colonization or global destruction—a human collective unites on the basis of a common interest that transcends pre-existing social or political divisions. As Edward James puts it, in the face of the alien, "the human race is seen as one and united, and the problem is what attitude to take to the aliens beyond" (27), and Jodi Dean describes the human unity produced by aliens as "species-consciousness" (167). However, critics of recent texts of alien invasion suggest that the unity aliens produce is not so much a result of terrestrial divisions being transcended but, in fact, being writ larger. For example, in the film *Independence Day* (dir. Roland Emmerich, 1996), alien invasion seems to move Earth toward a state of postnationalism; when the American president gives a rousing speech to fighter pilots who are about to lead a globally coordinated assault on the alien mothership, he urges that the petty differences between nations be overcome. Nevertheless, in the film, the rhetoric of postnationalism works to affirm American exceptionalism, both because America instructs the rest of the world in how to repel their invaders and because a racially mixed group of Americans model how people of different backgrounds can work together. An alien presence provokes a subtly imperialistic national exceptionalism because it produces a situation in which, as Adam Roberts puts it,

"everybody in the world, whatever their actual identity, [is] a 'sort-of American'" (49).

Independence Day reveals that the "species-consciousness" provoked by aliens can gild deeper entrenchments of nation. To argue that abduction narratives do the same is counter-intuitive, because unlike invasion, abduction is not an obviously collective experience. Abduction is characterized not by the making of history but by the "missing time" of which the abductee has no recollection; the states of terror or bewilderment abductees experience linger and prevent easy participation in mainstream society. The after-effects of being abducted seem to efface the significance of being American even further—whether they describe their experiences as traumatic or enlightening, many abductees report a shift in their sense of rootedness in a socio-political framework as an indirect consequence of being taken. The implicit undoing of the national identity of the abductee is one of the few commonalities of the two dominant interpretive paradigms of alien abduction. The first, associated with the work of Budd Hopkins, emphasizes the suddenness and violence of abduction, the powerlessness and violation of those taken, and the selfish or malevolent intentions of aliens. According to this paradigm, abductees are traumatized to the point that nationality becomes irrelevant. Describing the trauma of his own abduction in his bestselling book *Communion*, Whitley Strieber writes, "I was reduced to raw biological response. It was as if my forebrain had been separated from the rest of my system, and all that remained was a primitive creature, in effect the ape out of which we evolved long ago" (18). The second strain of abduction-thought, associated with psychiatrist John E. Mack, emphasizes the transcendent, mind-expanding consequences of alien contact. Many of the abductees Mack profiles report a spiritual quality to their experience that leaves them humble and sensitive to issues of environmental damage, and Mack suggests that the widened perspective that follows abduction undoes the power politics of national competition: "The more global, even cosmically, interconnected identity that is implicit in the UFO abduction phenomenon, might, at least, offer a distraction from our interminable struggles for ownership and dominance of the earth" (409–10).

Although advocates of abduction agree that the experience of being abducted troubles pre-existing political identities, a critical reading of the discourse suggests that abduction narratives actually

shore up a restrictive American identity. They do so not so much in what happens during the event of abduction but through who is chosen for it. Central to the discourse of abduction is the conviction that there is no demographic pattern to abduction. Strieber claims that abductees "formed a cross section of American society" (3), and Mack concurs:

> [Abductees] seem to come, as if at random, from all parts of society. . . . My own sample includes students, homemakers, secretaries, writers, business people, computer industry professionals, musicians, psychologists, a nightclub receptionist, a prison guard, an acupuncturist, a social worker, and a gas station attendant. At first I thought that working class people dominated, but that appears to be an artifact related to the fact that those with less of an economic and social stake in the society seem less reluctant to come forward. (4)

Immediately after presenting this summary of data, Mack cites a number of other authorities on abduction, including Hopkins and David M. Jacobs, who make similar observations. Mack's claim for the universality of abduction is intended to counter the charge that abductees are a self-selecting group and legitimize the abduction phenomenon as one that extends past a fringe minority of New Age enthusiasts and the emotionally disturbed. Beyond this obvious intention, Mack's presentation of the demographics of abduction takes on two political implications, both of which reflect American ideals of political membership. First, Mack's avowal that that no one is more or less desirable for, or vulnerable to, alien abduction constructs a human community that is fundamentally egalitarian. Whatever differences may exist among its members, a community formed by a nondiscriminatory phenomenon like abduction is necessarily composed of equals. Second, Mack constructs a population that, because of a common experience, is diverse but without significant internal difference.

Although most obviously characterized by conspiracy thinking, the politics of alien abduction are essentially idealistic affirmations of the relationship of American citizens to each other, and by extension to the United States.[4] As such, abduction provides an opportunity to examine the distance between American ideals of inclusivity and the lived experience of individual Americans. Assumptions about the equality and sameness of abductees reveal the discourse of abduction

to be congruent with the concept of abstract citizenship, which according to Lisa Lowe conceptualizes a nation's citizens as being "formally equivalent, one to the other" (2). Lowe argues that this ideal of political membership comes at the cost of specific individuation: "In being represented as citizen within the political sphere... the subject is 'split off' from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship" (2). These inadmissible "particularities" include "race, national origin, locality, and embodiment [that] remain largely invisible within the political sphere" (2). It is useful to revisit Mack's presentation of the abduction community in light of Lowe's observations, because his catalogue of abductees is typical of the discourse in that it defines abductees solely in terms of class and profession—in effect, Mack's example of the diversity of abductees is underwritten by an assumption of sameness. Because he fails to mention other types of difference on the assumption that they are irrelevant, Mack excludes these differences and, ironically, his demonstration of the diversity of the abductee community becomes subtly exclusionary.

Of the lived realities that might differentiate abductees from each other, race offers the most powerful challenge to Mack's assumptions about the inclusivity of alien abduction. The claim that aliens plague all segments of American society does not withstand scrutiny because, put bluntly, alien abduction is racially exclusive. The vast majority of Americans who claim to have been abducted are white. In fact, the whiteness of abductees is axiomatic to the extent that even critics who analyze abduction culture instead of advocating for it obscure the racial imbalance of abductees with claims that the community of abductees accurately reflects the demographics of America.[5] What makes this racially homogenous community significant as an expression of abstract citizenship are its repeated claims to be representative of a large and racially diverse nation. In the discourse of alien abduction, the apparent irrelevance of race amounts to an exclusion of race as a meaningful category. This exclusion is only possible if people who problematize claims for the sameness of abductees are excluded. As a result, there is a scarcity of minority experience of alien abduction. In its claim of rising from the experiences of a cross-section of America the discourse of abduction certainly allows a space for the minority abductee, but this space is rarely occupied, and little critical work has been done on this lacuna.

We can begin to understand the absence of the minority abductee by turning to the generic roots of the abduction narrative. Perhaps unwittingly, abductees revert to a long-standing American genre, the captivity narrative, for a template for their experiences. The language of many alien abduction narratives signals their roots in the genre of the "Indian" captivity narrative of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Michael Sturma notes that the language of the frontier informs abductees' descriptions of themselves as "pioneers," and of spacecraft as "scouts" (333). Reading abduction narratives in the context of the captivity narrative also helps us contend with the fantastic or unverifiable claims abductees make. Critics have learned to analyze captivity narratives although their authors cannot corroborate their experiences, and this practice can be productively applied to narratives of alien abduction. Most importantly, analyses of race in captivity narratives model a critical approach to alien abduction. In the classic captivity narrative difference *within* a captive's home community is contained and neutralized by stark differences between native and white communities. Christopher Castiglia argues that in the classic captivity narrative, in which a white woman is taken captive by a racial other,

> Capture implies freedom as its constitutive opposite; by calling white women's experience of crossing cultures "captivity," then, one defines return to and life in white, Anglo-America "freedom." To be free is to be American (a citizen of the "Land of the Free"), and vice versa, while both states require the subject's acquiescence to discourses that normalize the values of white, Anglo-American males.
>
> (10)

Castiglia finds captivity narratives provocative because of the way captives destabilize the equation of race, freedom, and citizenship upon their return. He says less about the way these narratives strain to accommodate figures in the position of captive who, from the outset, are neither "free" citizens of white America nor racially different captors. It is useful to keep Castiglia's structural equation of freedom and belonging in white America in view, for doing so forces us to examine the way the logic of the captivity narrative precludes the presence of the minority American who cannot automatically acquiesce to a normalization of "the values of white, Anglo-American males." If freedom is defined against captivity, its "constitutive

opposite," it stands to reason that being taken captive defines one as a free American, and thus as a citizen. To follow Castiglia's logic in reverse, if one is not a potential captive, then one cannot have been really free, and therefore cannot have been fully American, since to be American is to feel free within America. Thus, if approached in terms of the logic of genre, to be abducted by aliens is to have one's citizenship as an American confirmed.

According to Castiglia, captivity narratives speak to a female readership because of "the connections they offer between the plight of the literal captive and less tangible forms of victimization and restriction" (4). Likewise, despite its ostensible distance from earthly politics, the alien abduction narrative provides a scenario for minority writers (who are not necessarily believers in abduction) to explore the difficulty with which national identity makes room for racial difference. The Asian American writer Peter Ho Davies does this in "The Hull Case," a short story that revisits an ur-text for modern abduction narratives: the story of Barney and Betty Hill (who Davies renames "Henry and Helen Hull"), an interracial couple who reported being abducted in New Hampshire in 1961. Mack summarizes the circumstances of the Hills' abduction:

> The Hills, a stable, respectable interracial couple living in New Hampshire, had suffered from disturbing symptoms for more than two years when they reluctantly consulted Boston psychiatrist Benjamin Simon. . . . Both were so persistently anxious that it became intolerable for them to continue their lives without looking into disturbing repercussions of the September night in which they could not account for two hours during the return journey from a holiday in Montreal.
>
> (446)

Mack also stresses that the Hills were of one mind about their ambiguous experience:

> Despite Dr. Simon's belief that the Hills had experienced some sort of shared dream or fantasy, a kind of folie à deux, they persisted in their conviction that these events really happened, and that they had not communicated the corroborating details to each other during the investigation of their symptoms.
>
> (447)

Dean notes that accounts of the Hills' experiences tend to de-emphasize the significance of race (165), a trend that makes itself felt through Mack's assurances that the Hills were "stable" and "respectable." Davies's "The Hull Case" resists the occlusion of race by foregrounding the degree to which the meaning of abduction is determined by race. "The Hull Case" does not deal with the event of the Hulls' abduction but with its emotional and social consequences. In doing so, Davies calls into visibility two tensions that the discourse of abduction frequently obscures: first, that the threat of abduction is indexed to one's relationship with America as a nation, and second, that race can preclude the possibility of being abducted altogether.

"The Hull Case" opens during a meeting Henry and Helen Hull have set up with an air force colonel in the days following their abduction. The two take turns offering their versions of events and provide very different accounts of the evening in question: Helen provides a vivid description of their abduction, including the extensive gynecological procedures she underwent on the spaceship, while Henry has no memory of being abducted, although he remembers the rest of the evening well. The differences in their memories hinge on race, and the contested event of abduction reflects and exacerbates the racial tensions in their marriage. When the two began dating in a military hospital during the Korean War, Helen assured Henry that "The race matter doesn't matter to me. . .. And it shouldn't matter to you" (94). However, Helen is unaware of the hostility they elicit as an interracial couple or the effect it has on her husband. For example, she does not detect racism as a cause when they are turned away from a number of motels and seems oblivious to the fact that their marriage has caused Henry to become estranged from his family. Davies creates a parallel between Helen's insistence that they have been abducted, which Henry does not believe, and Henry's insistence on the reality of racism in the United States, to which Helen's matter-of-fact liberalism blinds her. Indeed, Henry expresses his alienation as a black American in New Hampshire through the language of abduction, wondering, "Why had he been the one singled out, plucked up by life and set down here?" (96). When he first saw a strange blue light on the highway, which Helen claims was made by a UFO, Henry "thought the lights were a cop" (94), thus blurring alien abduction with racial profiling by police. Although they do not openly

acknowledge that they are doing so, Henry and Helen try to force each other into their own narratives—hers of aliens, his of alienation.

Davies places the racial tension in the Hull's marriage in a national context. The colonel to whom Henry and Helen offer their accounts is an embodiment of nation, and their status as citizens mediates their interviews with him. Helen's memories of abduction reflect her preoccupation with reproduction and her inability to carry a pregnancy to term. On a deeper level, she is moved to share her experience as an abductee by the mandate of participatory citizenship. She enthusiastically informs the military about their experience, although her husband urges her not to. When Henry resists her desire to disclose her story to the authorities, she demands, "What if it's a matter of national security?" and says repeatedly that it is her "duty" to make her experience public (98). By volunteering her statement to the colonel, she maps her personal experience onto national experience and thus performs her citizenship through her belief that what has happened to her is relevant to all those with whom she identifies on the basis of nation.

Significantly, Henry does not feel any imperative to share his experiences, in part because his race prevents his version of events from being interpolated into the national context that receives Helen's. The colonel's reaction to Henry's narrative is telling: he takes notes on Helen's account but he does not write down what Henry says (97). Henry's experience is of no national consequence because he is not sufficiently interchangeable with other Americans for it to be. Henry is unable to occupy the ideological structure of the captivity narrative, in which release from captivity means a return to freedom in white America. He has no obvious single captor; Barbeito's observation that "the moment of telling itself. . . [is] a type of abduction" (213) resonates in "The Hull Case," because during his interview with the colonel Henry feels simultaneously interrogated and ignored.

Davies breaks with Mack's assertion that Betty and Barney Hill were of one mind about their experience and suggests that the contested memory of abduction widens the wedge between the Hulls. Henry's inability to enter the narrative of alien abduction puts a strain on their marriage; at one point Helen cries and asks, "How can you not remember?" (98). Eventually, Henry capitulates, accepts his wife's narrative and, after a year of therapy, retrieves memories of being inside the spaceship. But even after capitulating to his wife's pressure to endorse her account of their experience, his captivity is

dual. The story ends with Henry experiencing two visions of abduction, one coerced (it comes to him while under hypnosis) and the other that he has in a dream. First, Henry "remembers" being abducted, but his memories are marked by his racial alienation:

> Under hypnosis, Henry will remember pale figures stopping their car. He'll recall the ship—a blinding wall of light—and being led to it, as if on an invisible rope, dragged and stumbling, his hands somehow tied behind him. . .. It'll all come back to him: running through the woods, the breeze creaking in the branches, tripping and staring up at the moonlit trees. "Like great white sails," he'll hear himself say.
>
> (107)

For Henry, racial difference is irreducible, even in the presence of the alien other. Images of whiteness pervade his memory, and abduction echoes the history of racial exploitation and violence in America. The events he recalls evoke the flight of a fugitive slave ("running through the woods"), capture by a lynch mob ("being led to it. . . dragged and stumbling, his hands somehow tied behind him. . . the breeze creaking in the branches"), before ending with arguably the most devastating instance of African-American abduction: the Middle Passage ("great white sails").[6] If Helen's memories revolve around her anxieties about reproduction, Henry's echo historical trauma with which Helen is unconcerned.

Not only is the meaning of the captivity Henry and Helen endure different but the text opens the possibility that Henry has been passed over for abduction because of his race. The coerced memory of abduction is put into contrast by a dream he has that reflects his alienation from his wife:

> Tonight, in his dream, Henry wakes with a violent shudder. . .. He's lying in bed with Helen, he tells himself. . . he feels the strange sensation of the mattress stiffening, the springs releasing. He opens his eyes and sees his wife rising above the bed, inch by inexorable inch, in a thin blue light.
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> (107)

Henry is apparently left behind. This has nothing to do with Helen's superior value as an abductee because of her gender. Instead,

the dream of being left behind by the aliens who take his wife confirms Henry's suspicion that he and his wife do not share captors. His separate experience of abduction reveals his insecurity in white America. He feels that he is already a captive in his waking life, and because he does not experience "freedom" in white America, the logic of captivity renders Henry immune to abduction.

Although they both resist Helen's racially blind version of the events that may or may not have befallen them, Henry's two visions of alien abduction pull against each other, and it is useful to follow the political trajectory of each. The memory of abduction he discloses under hypnosis is notable because it is saturated with America's racial history. Its most important generic precursor is not the "Indian" captivity narrative but the American slave narrative. Adam Roberts emphasizes slavery's relevance to alien abduction, arguing that such narratives "retell the story of the African slave trade by relocating it to a contemporary SF context" (106). Roberts understands abduction as a return of repressed history, in which the "typical abductee," a "white, moderately affluent thirty-something American," is forced to endure the experience of black slaves whose suffering was "intimately complicit with the history and indeed the success of America" (106). In "The Hull Case," abduction is a reminder of the historical origins of contemporary inequality suffered by Henry and other black characters in the text.[7]

In the context of this essay, Hank's dream of being excluded from abduction is even more provocative than his memory of being taken. In depicting Hank's experience of being passed over by the aliens who take his wife, Davies demonstrates the extent to which alien abduction is underwritten by one's legal status in and affective identification with America. That Davies, an Asian American writer, chooses to explore minority abduction through a black abductee is notable and must be contextualized by the fact that there is no equivalent Asian American story of abduction. Although it is impossible to make a responsible claim for an absolute absence, it is not an exaggeration to say that in contemporary abduction narratives, aliens do not seem interested in abducting Asian Americans. This absence is not co-incidental and can be illuminated by Lowe's argument that the "historical exclusion along racial and citizenship lines has explicitly distanced Asians, even as enfranchised Asian Americans, from the terrain of national culture" (30).[8] For Asian Americans, the apparent blessing of being free from the threat of alien abduction amounts to

an exclusion from a community that is human enough—and, by implication, American enough—to warrant abduction.

The significance of the Asian American abductee's absence is shaped, in part, by how abduction in general is understood. Accepting accounts of abduction as true accounts of events that have taken place would require hypothesizing about why aliens might be more interested in some ethnicities than others. To understand accounts of abduction as imagined stories that emerge from anxiety, hysteria, or trauma might suggest that these narratives are not a useful avenue for the expression of the concerns of Asian Americans. However, the suggestion that Asian Americans are free from anxieties that plague other Americans risks a return to the stereotype of the dispassionate model minority and reifies their alienation. Of course, linguistic barriers may be a reason that a certain segment of the Asian American community cannot participate in the textual spread of the abduction phenomenon. (Many abductees recall repressed memories of abduction after reading texts by Hopkins or Strieber.) However, a more compelling reason for their exclusion is that Asian Americans, or the associations they typically bear in popular discourse, disrupt the logic of the abduction narrative.

There are two reasons an Asian American presence is untenable in the discourse of alien abduction, one that hinges on characteristics attributed to Asian Americans and another that emerges from suspicions about the coherence of the very idea of an Asian American. First, the radical difference in appearance, culture, and language frequently ascribed to Asian Americans puts the figure of the Asian American abductee in an intermediate position between alien captor and human captive. In other words, Asian American identity seems to blur the species difference central to the abduction narrative. Neil Badmington argues that in accounts of abduction in which humans and aliens breed,

> the human subject finds itself reassured, marked out as authentic and absolutely different from the inhuman. . . . An individual who has been chosen to participate in the hybrid project cannot already by a hybrid being; he or she must, on the contrary, be a fine specimen of the purely human.
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> (81)

Because of projected differences from the rest of the American populace, Asian Americans have not always met this prerequisite of "pure

humanity." Tellingly, Asianness is sometimes used to mark the otherness of extraterrestrial aliens—Strieber, for example, describes the otherworldly features of an alien with whom he comes in contact through a comparison with "Asian" features: "its eyes are slanted, more than an Oriental's eyes" (60).[9] However, rather than focusing on the possible racial connotations of physical descriptions of aliens, it is more productive to examine the similarities between descriptions of alien characteristics and long-standing Asian-American stereotypes. Whether they are conceptualized as a threat to humanity or an advanced and enlightened race, aliens that abduct are almost always described as being deliberate, dispassionate, and, needless to say, technologically adept. As such, they overlap with two prevalent Asian American stereotypes: the Asian American as the "Yellow Peril," who overwhelms America because of an implacable determination to exhaust its resources, and the Asian American as America's "model minority," a politically neutral community that excels through technological sophistication, emotionless drive, and the capacity to be "inhumanly productive" (Eng and Han 345).[10] Both stereotypes cast Asian Americans as having qualities that make them uncannily similar to aliens, and this representational overlap makes them inadmissible to the abduction narrative.[11] Ironically, in the national fantasy of abduction, those most associated with the qualities of aliens are left behind in America.

Just as an alien presence is made significant by a backdrop of unequivocal humanity, the dislocation of abduction must be preceded by unequivocal location. As Badmington puts it, the "entire logic of abduction. . . affirms the predetermined and proper space from which the human being is taken. You have to be abducted from somewhere, after all" (82). Although he is referring to the conceptual "space" of humanism, Badmington's comment serves for national space as well. The power of abduction is generated, in part, by removal from familiar ground into the unfamiliar space of an alien ship. The power of this dislocation is compromised if an abductee was not entirely at home in the place he or she occupied before abduction. Historically, the requisite embeddedness in nation has been denied to Asian Americans, a community whose members were, as Arif Dirlik puts it, considered "permanent foreigners, culturally and even genetically incapable of becoming 'real' Americans" for much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (32). Although the reasons for these suspicions are socially and politically overdetermined, suffice it to say

that traditionally, Asian Americans have been understood as a diasporic population and considered in terms of mobility rather than belonging. These long-standing assumptions, generated by earthly politics, make themselves felt in science fiction culture. For example, an understanding of Asian Americans as perpetual outsiders informs Sohn's observation that Asians and Asian Americans "conspicuously appear when interplanetary travel and galactic exploration take center stage" ("Alien/Asian" 6).[12] Conversely, assumptions about Asian American outsiderness help explain their absence from abduction narratives. For a diasporic population never considered as having developed national roots, being plucked up from the United States is an insufficiently dislocating remove to warrant recognition.

Despite its increasing visibility in American culture, the culture of abduction is still tagged as a marginal one. In the film *Independence Day*, an army major mocks an alcoholic Vietnam veteran's claims to have been abducted by aliens—even as they are defending themselves from alien invaders! Nevertheless, the purchase of abduction narratives on US culture signals its agreeability to mainstream American thought, and tracking the infrequent but important minority presence in abduction narratives provides a way to examine the ideological work these narratives perform. The tendency of abduction discourse to pay lip service to America's diversity is conspicuous in a scene of postabduction return in Steven Spielberg's hit film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In the film's final scene, a huge alien ship lands in Wyoming and frees a large group of abductees. Among the dazed people who wander out of the ship is an apron-clad man who appears to be Asian. The film minimizes this instance of racial diversity: although this man, who is presumably Asian American, has suffered the same experiences as his fellow abductees, the audience is discouraged from thinking about him as an individual. His appearance on screen is brief, and the audience's attention is directed toward the freed air force pilots who are greeted by name by military personnel and invited for debriefing. The difference the Asian-American man represents is neutralized by his status as an unimportant part of a collective. The aliens choose Roy Neary, a working-class father from Indiana played by Richard Dreyfuss, to replace the crowd that leaves the spaceship. In the textual economy of the scene, Roy represents all those whose place he has taken and becomes consecrated as a representative American. As he walks onto

the raised and lit ramp of the alien ship and takes a position of centrality Roy becomes increasingly visible to those gathered around. In this shot, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* draws upon the culture of abduction to stage American identity. Needless to say, the unnamed Asian American abductee—who has long since vanished from the screen—could not serve this representative function.

Notes

1. Although he insists that alien abduction is an international phenomenon, John E. Mack admits that abductees tend to be American (445). Bridget Brown accounts for the spread of abduction narratives beyond the United States by classifying them as an American cultural export (11). The conventions of the abduction narrative, which include the beam of blue light that lifts the hapless abductee into a scout ship, invasive surgical or gynecological procedures, sometimes in service of cross-breeding programs, and abductees who recover troubling memories of their experiences long after they have been returned home, have saturated American popular culture to the extent that in 2007 Pixar Studios released a short animated film called *Lifted*, in which a young alien bungles an attempt to abduct sleeping humans. The film's humor relies on the presumption that even audiences composed primarily of children would be familiar with the conventions of the abduction narrative.
2. For a discussion of abduction and postmodern cyber-politics see Dean; for gender see Showalter 195–96; for globalization see Brown 172–73; for philosophic humanism see Badmington; for trauma see Barbeito.
3. Luise White observes that "Alien abductions homogenize differences, except for one. . . . Descriptions of aliens are descriptions of a separate race" (27). For a discussion of how the alien production of human collectivity manifests itself cinematically see Badmington 17.
4. Superficially, the abduction community's suspicions that the US government colludes with aliens, or denies its awareness of them, might suggest a measure of alienation from a national identity. However, the sense of having been lied to by one's government is a form of negative interpellation, and indicates an intimate if unpleasant relationship. In fact, the need to expose a governmental cover-up is grounded in a citizen's sense of duty to fellow citizens.
5. Jodi Dean describes the abduction community as "a reasonable replication of the United States (tilted toward the white middle class)" (18), although she admits she does not have hard demographic evidence and elsewhere emphasizes the whiteness of the abduction community (204-07). Bridget Brown describes the abductee community in New York as "fairly diverse in terms of gender, race, and ethnic background" (12). However, although her fieldwork was done in a racially diverse urban environment, she reports that her minority contacts consisted of one African American and one Latino (12).
6. Davies draws attention to the racial politics of this passage in a 2004 interview.
7. For a discussion of a black tradition of UFO culture that is not grounded in the history of slavery, see Leib. See also Sohn's discussion of the resonance between abduction and the Japanese American internment experience during World War II suggested in Claire Light's short story "Abducted by Aliens!" (*Racial Asymmetries* 175–92).
8. To date, the only reports of this mode of minority abduction I have located come from Asian *Canadians*. See Rutkowski 126, 161–79.
9. For a discussion of alien bodies in abduction narratives see Barbeito 206.

10. For a discussion of science fiction narratives that draw on the tradition of the Yellow Peril, see James 28–32. For an analysis of the stereotypes of the Yellow Peril and model minority in the rebooted version of the television series *Battlestar Galactica* see Pegues 191–92. For discussions of science fiction by Asian American authors, see Huang 95–102 and Shiu.
11. For further discussion of representations in which Asians and Asian Americans bear nonhuman characteristics, see Sohn's discussion of techno-Orientalism ("Alien/Asian" 8).
12. In their respective discussions of a scene in the film *Men in Black* (1997) in which an alien attempts to cross America's southwest border by hiding inside an exoskeleton designed to look like a Mexican migrant worker, Jodi Dean and Katarzyna Marciniak identify the extraterrestrial as a figure for the insufficiently American in America (Dean 155, Marciniak 3–10). If deliberately misread, "Jose Chung's *From Outer Space*," the title of an episode of *The X-Files* that plays with the conventions of the abduction narrative, gestures to a similar equation of ethnic and extraterrestrial identities.

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Lucas Tromly is an associate professor in the Department of English, Film, and Theatre at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, where he teaches American literature, modernism, and travel writing.