Twitter Thread by Jeb J. Card



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Paraconspiracy & "fringe" culture (including New Atheism/skeptical movement) as vector for American extremism has been clear. A number of analyses of these subcultures consistently points to masculinity issues. It is no surprise masculinity feeds American extremism. Thread

> What motivates the motivated reasoning of pro-Trump conspiracists? https://t.co/FyzogB3OyD by @j_timmer
>
> — Ars Technica (@arstechnica) January 16, 2021

First, a modern classic, Barkun's Culture of Conspiracy describes how rejected knowledge makes moving from one ideology (say UFOs) to another (conspiracy, Nazism, MRA), easy.

https://t.co/cbjNY8Yphv

This happens both because there are people in multiple camps (such as holocaust denying Forteans), and because everything rejected by mainstream information ends up in the same gutter, and people start to wonder about other things stewing about them

The role of masculinity in cryptozoology, especially Bigfoot, has been addressed multiple times. This is probably the most thorough

https://t.co/Fom2E5N5PC

Buhs argues that with the decline of heavy industry and related jobs, and media changes in gender roles, Bigfoot becomes a representation of the untamed man, a rejection of the encroachment of urbanism, office culture, and other lifeways making men more like stereotypes of women

From the 1940s to the 1970s, cryptozoology had a big dose of its outreach through "men's magazines" the slicks and others that followed the pulps which had always been aimed mostly at men and promised some sub-pornographic titillation of manly adventures & women in peril



The first time I taught Investigating the Paranormal, it was quite difficult to point at articles and images from the 1950s and 1960s that I felt comfortable showing to students, especially if they included other material from the mags



These images are coming from a solid and enlightening, if again difficult, edited compilation on this very topic. Go check it out

https://t.co/4Th39Ccrr3



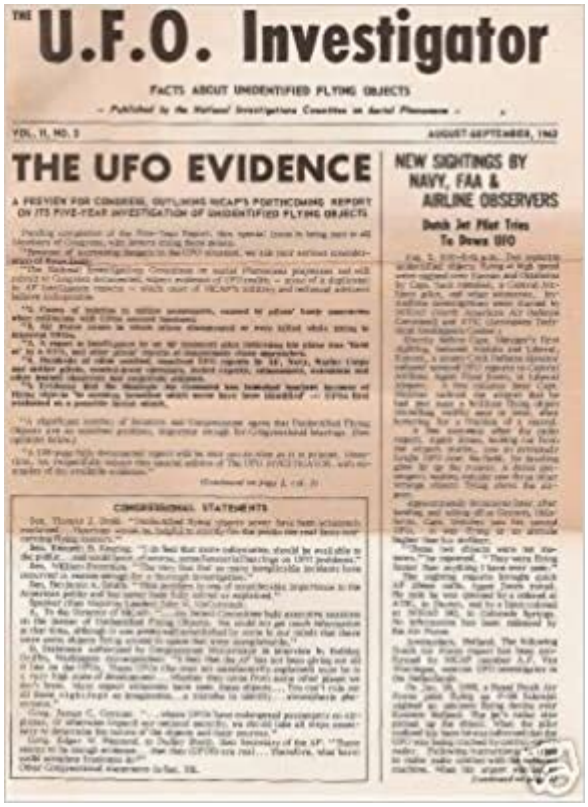
The most basic assessment of UFOs from the 1940s and 1970s makes it clear that with some exceptions, ufology was not only virtually all white and male, but that there were 2.5 major influences: older pulps, sci-fi and horror that followed the pulps, and military concepts

Much of ufo lore from the mid-1940s into the 1970s (I'll come back to why I keep mentioning this decade) was theosophy and other occult ideas (often related to female authors and leaders) but delivered through men who took the material in a very different direction



This was followed up by weirder and weirder horror and sci-fi inflected tales and tropes in sci-fi literature and film. For a time, this led to a schism with sci-fi fandom trying to keep out the Shaver mysteries and their like. It didn't work.

As these ideas became mainstream, saucers and UFOs became household concepts, with occult contactees replaced with "saucer clubs" and then with organizations either led by former military and intel men, or trying to sound like they were


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This fetishization of the national security state and secrets led to the never-ending claims of "disclosure" that was soon going to happen ... and never did. Followers of recent anon conspiracy culture, as well as modern UFO disclosure, will find this quite familiar

One senses a strong sense of demanding information from the traditional powers that be, but never being satisfied with it, something that really exploded in the 1970s with crashed UFO legends but has persisted to this day with disclosure

There is a stereotype that with the rise of alien abduction ideas in the 1970s, women were more involved, but with some exceptions, abduction lore came from white men hypnotizing women & men for info and then publishing it, something that

has led at times to unsavory(!) behavior

Parapsychology deviates from pattern (with some changes in the 2000s) in part because spiritualism & the occult were gendered as more female (psi never really left that influence) & unlike UFOs & crypto, it is more international & less tied to religious culture of the US

I doubt I have to say much about conspiracy culture, at least until recent times, as being stereotyped (often correctly) as not only the province of white guys, but of outcast white guys. This will come back later

Alt archaeology is a huge mess to quantify, but many of the aspects of UFO culture fit well here including roots in pulps and sci-fi, secret knowledge, claims to stereotypically male authority roles, and an added element in a number of cases of more conservative religion

I have pointed to a change in the 1970s. This is when mainstream media started to mine paranormal and conspiracy culture for fiction and for tv "documentary". This is why I co-host a podcast about In Search Of ... arguably the first paranormal-focused documentary tv show

This shift softened and diluted some of the cultural elements of paranormal culture for a wider audience and for broadcast standards. This approach would become a safer tv genre blossoming in the 1990s, and merging with true crime and other topics.

The toxic elements continued outside the spotlight, but became predictable for decades.

Until reality tv

Reality tv, combined with influences from found footage films, revolutionized paranormal culture and media in the 2000s. They were cheap to make, and the main message was that the audience could mimic these techniques for their own adventures.

Whereas ghost hunting had been a small subset of parapsychology, with a fewer celebrities like the Warrens and their demonology, by the mid-2000s paranormal tv inspired the creation of thousands of ghost hunting groups.

These groups were more diverse, especially on gender, but a look at the predominance of black tea shirts, "serious/angry" attitudes, and bald goatee guys made it clear that there was something cultural going beyond in interest in psi



Within these groups, "investigation" techniques were a topic of debate. Using lots of electromagnetic gear, or using a medium, dowsing, or a ouija board. These arguments were not always gendered, but often were.

Reality tv shows tried their hand at replicating this success with UFO and crypto shows, with less success. Many of the ghost hunter media tropes (black t-shirts and utility vests, filming with night vision) and style persisted.

A very different and popular offshoot of this was the rise of Ancient Aliens. This was not a reality show, but increasingly with time its topics veered much more into conspiracy and religious-related topics (giants) than the reality shows.

Ancient Aliens stayed a talking heads show, but inspired alt archaeology and conspiracy shows that meld some reality tropes with conspiracy tropes. Many of the ideas found in ancient aliens and its competitors can be found in anon conspiracy circles. Barkun would be "proud"

Around this time, the rise of social media and youtube led to other subcultures and communities that had previously not flourished in the mainstream to blow up.

One of these was the skeptical/New Atheist movement

While this movement sometimes tackled what was demeaningly called "Bigfoot skepticism", much of this community was focused on religion as a social disease, inspired by first R. Dawkins & then the "Four Horsemen". It seems pretty clear the GWB administrations spurred much of this

During later 2000s, this community was loosely led by bloggers & then youtubers promoting their brand & jockeying to speak at conferences funded by a handful of skeptical or secular organizations. If GWB spurred a lot of this on, it is no surprise tensions rose after 2008.

Gender and to some extent racial demographics were somewhat diverse until a series of blowups on social justice in the early 2010s, leading a schism. Many of the men on one side of that schism would become prominent in Gamergate and the alt-right

Gamergate was integral into growing numbers in the alt-right on various social media, and on the anon message boards. It is out of this stew that the ideologies that powered the attack on the US Capitol emerged

So, what does this all mean?

Paranormal culture has a long history of being dominated by "fringe" appeals to traditional masculinity, with periods of some mainstream success where the weirder and more damaging aspects are hidden away.

In these transition periods, we often see a schism between the "hardcore" or "legit" that are not as media friendly, and smaller (and often more ephemeral) more balanced approaches, tied more to media (again standards & practices)

For example in ghost hunting/occultism, there has been mainstream media interest in rise of progressive occultism, paganism, & ghost stories (but not aggressive ghost hunting) since Trump. I suspect this a few years older, a reaction to some of the conflicts mentioned above

Those conflicts were a clear vector for Trump's election, even before q. They were not a symptom, but ala Barkun played a role in bringing in the disaffected from one community into a broader coalition of the "fringe"

The rejected knowledge folks that stay in the shadows become effective vectors both to preserve old racist and sexist and anti-science ideologies, and to bring them to other disaffected people, and by people, I mean mostly men.

It's a hop & a skip from men's magazines masculine monster mongering to colonialist alt archaeology to dudebros screaming to fight demons to spiritual warriors attacking indigenous sites to "rational" atheists becoming incensed gamers attacking SJWs for woke vid games & star wars