

John E. Mack — spec segment

Work sample for American Alchemy · target 1,200–1,800 words, eight to twelve minutes read aloud · written in Jesse's voice

The credential, corrected

Almost everything you have heard about John Mack is a story about vindication. A Harvard professor said something impossible, the institution came for him, and he won. It is a good story. Most of its load-bearing details are wrong — including the ones his defenders repeat, and including one that flatters him.

Start with the credential. You will read that Mack was the head of Harvard's psychiatry department. He was not, and he could not have been, because that post does not exist. Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School is a federation of separate hospital departments, each with its own chief, and there is no single chair sitting above them. What is true is smaller and, to me, more impressive. He was a tenured Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School from 1972 until the day he died. He founded the psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital and ran it from 1969 to 1977. And in 1977 he won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography, for his life of T. E. Lawrence.

I am opening by making my own subject smaller, ninety seconds in, because everything after this only works if you can trust me when a correction goes the other way. Here is where we are going: the investigation, the strongest case against him, the money, and the death. Two of those four contain something that has not been published before.

The investigation

Stay with me through the procedure, because the procedure is where the story actually is.

In 1994 the Dean of Harvard Medical School, Daniel Tosteson, appointed a committee of Mack's own peers to examine his work with people who said they had been taken by non-human beings.

Notice the grounds. Not the subject matter — the Dean said so explicitly. Method, and clinical conduct. Whether Mack was doing science, and whether he was doing right by his patients.

There was no charge letter. There was no existing university procedure to follow, because nothing shaped like this had happened before. The chair was Arnold Relman, editor-in-chief emeritus of the *New England Journal of Medicine* — which is to say, not a crank, and not a man with a grudge about flying saucers. Roughly thirty meetings across about fourteen months, from May 1994 to the third of August 1995.

The BBC states flatly that this was the first such inquiry into a tenured Harvard professor. Relman called it unprecedented. I am tagging both as reported rather than established, because Harvard has declined to characterise it, and "unprecedented" is exactly the kind of claim that gets repeated until it sounds checked.

And here is the part that gets dropped. Mack did not simply win. Harvard took no action against him — and the Dean issued him a warning. Both of those are the outcome.

One more detail, my favourite in the whole file. The inquiry became public because Mack's own lawyer circulated a letter soliciting defence witnesses, and that letter quoted the committee's draft report. The leak came from the defence.

The steelman — give the case against him its strongest form

Now the hard part, and I want to build it properly rather than set up something easy to knock over.

The case against Mack is not that his subject was absurd. The case against Mack, made by his own peers, is that he was not doing science. He gathered accounts. He found them consistent. He treated the consistency as evidence. That is not a procedure that can come back negative, and a procedure that cannot come back negative is not a method — it is a filter.

He also used hypnosis, and he conceded, in writing, that he was not an expert in it. He defended it in terms that are frankly not scientific ones. He insisted, publicly and repeatedly, that hypnosis was not his primary route to these accounts, and I think he meant it. It remains the thing his critics point at, and they are not wrong to point at it.

Then there is Donna Bassett, who came to him as an experiencer, invented her story, and said afterwards that he had taken it. That she did it is fact. What it proves is inference — mine, and I will mark it as mine. It shows his screen was porous. It does not show that everyone who came to him was lying, and the people who use it that way are doing the thing they accuse him of.

And a correction I owe this show. This channel has stated that Rockefeller is the funder in the Greer story. In Greer's own telling, the funder is not Rockefeller. I would rather bring you that on my first day than have you find it on your own later.

The money **ORIGINAL FINDING**

Money. In 1993 Laurance Rockefeller began funding Mack's work — the Center for Psychology and Social Change, and later PEER. That much is established, and nobody disputes it.

Now watch what happens when you try to find out how much.

Three incompatible figures circulate. The one you will meet most often is a million dollars over four years, at two hundred and fifty thousand a year. It cites a source. The source says two years. The number everybody repeats misreports the document it is standing on.

So I did the obvious thing next. I pulled the IRS filings for the Laurance S. Rockefeller Fund, because a foundation that gives money away has to name who it gave it to, and those filings are public.

There is no Mack grant in them — for a reason that has nothing to do with Mack. That fund was created in 2006. EIN 20-4192256, ruling date June 2006. Laurance Rockefeller died in 2004. The entity anyone would naturally check did not exist when the grant was made, and could not have made it.

Sit with what that does. Anyone doing the responsible thing — going to the primary filings instead of repeating the number — finds nothing, and concludes the funding story is unsupported. A false negative, assembled entirely out of authentic documents. The paperwork is real. The absence is real. The conclusion is wrong.

So where is the actual money. At the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, where the Laurance S. Rockefeller papers carry three folder-level entries in the Room 5600 General Files, Science series — and one folder the finding aid titles "UFO — John Mack." I have not read them. Nobody I can find has read them. I am telling you what the catalogue says, not what the folders say, and that distinction is the whole job.

My inference, marked as inference: the likely booking channel is the Fund for the Enhancement of the Human Spirit, documented in the press as his personal giving vehicle in those years. That is documented for other gifts. Nothing ties it to Mack yet.

I am not going to give you a dollar figure. Thirty years, two camps, and a number neither side ever checked. A claim nobody checks can never be wrong — and a claim that cannot be wrong is not doing any work. The absence is the story.

The death **ORIGINAL FINDING**

He died on the twenty-seventh of September 2004, in London, hit by a drunk driver.

A rumour is attached to that. You will hear that other men named John Mack died in England the same day — one, in Timothy Alberino's telling; three, in the stronger version.

That one is checkable, so I checked it.

The General Register Office publishes a death index for England and Wales. For registration year 2004, in the entire country, it holds exactly two male John Mack entries. One registered in May. One in August. A death on the twenty-seventh of September cannot be registered in either.

Our man is not in 2004 at all. John Edward Mack, born the fourth of October 1929, registered June 2005 in Barnet. A nine-month lag — which sounds sinister and is not. It is the ordinary shape of a death where a coroner opens an inquest and criminal proceedings run first. Somebody was prosecuted for killing him.

My inference, and I will mark it: that kills the rumour.

Now the residual, because you should hear it from me rather than find it. The index publishes the month of registration, not the day of death, so in principle a second John Mack could have died that day and also been registered late. I went and looked. The only other male John Mack registered in June 2005 is John Adolphus Mack, born 1913, Kent. Wrong cohort, wrong district, and nobody has ever suggested he was hit by a car.

I cannot close that door to the millimetre. What I can tell you is that thirty years of a rumour rest on two entries in a public index, and pulling them took an afternoon.

Open, not resolved

So where does that leave him.

Not vindicated, which is the story his admirers want. Not debunked, which is the story his critics want. Something less comfortable than either. A man whose method his colleagues were right to question. Who was investigated in a way Harvard has never been willing to describe. Who was funded by someone whose money nobody has traced. And who died in a way that is exactly as ordinary, and as sad, as it looks.

Four things are still open, and I would rather leave them open than perform an answer. What the committee's draft report actually said — the one Mack's own lawyer quoted. Whether the money moved through the Fund for the Enhancement of the Human Spirit, or somewhere else, or in an amount nobody has guessed. What is inside a folder that a finding aid calls "UFO – John Mack." And the one I cannot resolve at all: whether a method that could not fail was a scientist's error or a clinician's choice.

Here is what I keep coming back to. His defenders and his detractors have spent thirty years arguing about a number neither of them checked, and the documents that would settle it have been sitting in an open collection in Sleepy Hollow the entire time. Nobody hid them. Nobody went.

Aleksei Beliankin-Bauer · spec segment for American Alchemy · printed from a workbench, which is why the reasoning is missing here: each beat's evidence class, its source facts and the voice rule that governs it are on the live page at aa.ab7.ai/work-sample · the funding thread this segment narrates is adjudicated in full at aa.ab7.ai/dossier