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Satanic Cults, Ritual Abuse, and Moral Panic: Deconstructing a Modern Witch-Hunt

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During the 1980s and early 1990s, reports of alleged satanic cults, child abductions, baby breeding, ritual torture, infanticide, and cannibalism became quite commonplace. This phenomenon has been described by a number of scholars in North America and Great Britain as forms of collective behavior leading to "rumor-panic" or "moral panic" (Cohen 1972; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:57–65; Jenkins 1992; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991; Victor 1993). As the panic spread, the claims of interest groups grew more outlandish, bordering on mass hysteria. Parents feared that missing children were objects of diabolic efforts by devil-worshiping cults seeking to secure sacrificial victims or, in some cases, turn captive children into sex slaves for pedophiles in child pornography rings. National and regional conferences on occult crime, Satanism, and ritual abuse were held annually, training thousands of police officers, social workers, and mental health professionals to recognize mysterious signs of underground Satanist activities. Hospitals offered new treatment programs for "adolescent satanism," and psychologists, therapists, and family counselors carved out new specialities in treating satanic ritual abuse victims or "occult survivors." In the venues of popular talk shows and tabloid journalism, everything from heavy metal rock music to serial murders was linked to satanic cults. The traditional practice of Halloween trick-or-treating declined nationwide in North America as parents worried about children receiving candy tainted by poison, sewing needles, or razor blades. Proctor and Gamble was bombarded with thousands of letters and phone calls from angry consumers accusing the corporation of using a satanic symbol in their logo. In Newfoundland, Canada, graveyard vandalism sparked rumors of satanic cult activity when crosses on tombs were knocked off and set upside down. Reports of mysterious cattle mutilations surfaced in Texas believed to be the ritual work of Satanists. Taken together, these varied incidents had a measurable impact on public attitudes. By 1994, one survey reported that 70 percent of Americans believed in the existence of sexually abusive satanic cults and that nearly one-third thought these groups were being ignored by law enforcement (Ross 1994:88).

The allegations of threat dissipated, however, as the satanic cult scare received greater scrutiny by researchers, responsible investigative journalists, and law enforcement. A comprehensive, eight-year study by the FBI on occult crime was unable to find evidence of a single homicide attributed to organized satanic cults, despite popular beliefs to the contrary (Lanning 1989). A number of high-profile legal cases involving claims of satanic ritual abuse fell apart in the absence of material evidence and with the discovery of "witness contamination" by overzealous social workers who interviewed allegedly abused children (Nathan 1992; Nathan and Snedeker 1995; Wakefield and Underwager 1992). Many claims of ritual torture or abuse were later recanted by victims, and other claims were found to be contrived (Coleman 1989; Coleman and Clancy 1990). One occult survivor, Lauren Stratford, authored a detailed autobiographical account of her travails in a book titled *Satan's Underground* (1988), which was later determined to be groundless. When investigative reporters attempted to corroborate her stories, they found that friends, neighbors, and relatives could not confirm alleged pregnancies or claims of mutilation. For example, she claimed to have given birth to three children as a "breeder" for a satanic cult during her late teens and early twenties, but none of her family, friends, or teachers could substantiate any pregnancy. Some who knew Stratford said she was deeply disturbed and reportedly observed her engaging in self-mutilation, which she later attributed to Satanists. The publisher of her book, Harvest House, subsequently withdrew the book from the market (Victor 1993:100). In another case, Missouri law enforcement officials investigated two incidents of satanic sacrifices of fetuses reported by a woman in a highly publicized *Geraldo* television episode on Satanism, which first aired on Halloween night in 1987. But a police investigation later concluded that the incidents were fabricated. One woman who claimed to have seen Satanists "cut an infant's stomach, pour gasoline on the baby and set it on fire" later admitted to police that she made up the story (Religious Freedom Alert 1989:9).

Victor (1993) evaluated sixty-two cases of satanic cult incidents reported in the U.S. and Canada between 1983 and 1992. Conducting a content analysis of newspaper reports, he determined that the peak years of occurrence were between 1988 and 1989, catalyzed by two events given sensational media coverage, the *Geraldo* Satanism episode and the Matamoros cult murders in 1989. The Matamoros cult murders grabbed national news headlines when authorities discovered fifteen bodies in a shallow grave only weeks after the disappearance of twenty-one-year-old University of Texas student Mark Kilroy during spring break in the popular Mexican border town. Kilroy's body had been mutilated, along with the others, allegedly in cult rituals by a group of Mexican drug smugglers seeking to obtain supernatural protection for their illegal and high-risk activities (Green

1991). The rituals were orchestrated by Adolpho de Jesus Constanzo, a young, charismatic Cuban-American who selectively culled elements of Afro-Caribbean religions (Santería and Palo Mayombe) and mixed them with indigenous folk beliefs and superstitions. It is not uncommon in Mexico for *brujos* and *curañderos* to visit the villages to cast spells, offer powerful potions and herbs for healing, remove hexes, and sell amulets for good fortune. In this cultural context, Constanzo was hired by the powerful Hernandez family to shield its profitable drug trafficking empire from interlopers and drug enforcement agencies. Constanzo's girlfriend and high priestess, Sara Aldrete Villareal, was reportedly obsessed with the 1987 film *The Believers*, which depicted a group of Santerians in New York practicing ritual human sacrifice in order to derive magical powers (Cartwright 1989). One member of the group, Elio Hernandez Rivera, told authorities he believed bullets would magically bounce off him if he was shot. Villareal later testified in court, however, that only four of the fifteen deceased victims were ever part of any magical or ritual sacrifice. The majority of the victims (eleven) were killed over drug-related disputes ("Death Not Cult-Related, Constanzo Aide Says," *Houston Chronicle*, May 15, 1989). By all indications, Constanzo and Villareal constructed idiosyncratic rituals and ceremonies as part of their efforts to intimidate locals and guard the narcotics operation. Curiously, the print and electronic media framed the stories almost entirely in terms of satanic cult activity while underreporting the drug trafficking angle.

Though the incidents were diffuse, and not peculiar to any region, Victor found that most of the sixty-two reports occurred in small towns and rural areas. Not surprisingly, he determined they were fueled by rumor and unsubstantiated stories. Victor concluded that "In none of these cases was any group found which resembled the stereotype of a Satanic cult, that is, a well-organized group committing crimes and justifying their actions with a 'Satanic' ideology. In a few cases, authorities found groups of juvenile delinquents who had engaged in vandalism and proclaimed themselves 'Satanists' but even that was unusual" (1993:61). He attributed the origins of some of the rumors to "urban legends" prompted by mass media stories, a new genre of horror films, and the growing concern over crime and juvenile violence.

In my own research, I encountered cases of purported satanic cult activity with similar themes and results. In the summer of 1989, for example, I led a team of researchers into a small, rural town in east Texas, following a local satanic cult scare in Sabine County (Wright 1989). According to local news accounts, on April 21, 1989, approximately three hundred students in the Hemphill Independent School District were pulled out of school by frantic parents who descended upon the campus between 9 and 10 A.M. to rescue their children from a rumored satanic cult kidnapping and ritual

sacrifice. A rumor had been circulating in the previous days that a satanic cult was planning to abduct two blond, blue-eyed youths for the purpose of a ritual killing. Hysterical parents gathered outside the school told reporters that "the walls of the school were stained in blood, animal organs were discovered in lockers, and teachers were instructing students in satanic activity" (*Sabine County Reporter* April 26, 1989). Some of those interviewed by both newspaper and television stations spoke to reporters as if they had witnessed these things firsthand. Yet an inspection of the buildings by school authorities, accompanied by television cameras, found no evidence of animal organs, blood-stained walls, satanic graffiti, or any other signs of devil worship. The discrepancy between the sensational accounts of panicked parents in the parking lot and the mundane reality inside the school building shown by television cameras was stupefying. Some versions of the narrative depicted students as the source of satanic worship. One woman I interviewed was told by her son that several classmates had discovered decapitated dogs, cats, and chickens in their lockers. It was alleged by some Hemphill residents that the local mortician's son was involved. Another version placed teachers at the center of the plot. Some teachers were reported to be cult leaders infiltrating the school and using their positions of influence to recruit adolescent Satanists. It was later determined by school authorities that the satanic cult scare was started as a ploy by two students attempting to get out of six-week exams. We concluded that the predisposition of the community to accept the satanist stories was due in large part to the proximity of the event to the Matamoros murders that made national headlines in the preceding weeks and that a number of people alluded to during the interviews.

Other sources of satanic subversion in the 1980s arose within small pockets of the mental health community. Psychologists, therapists, and social workers were implicated in legal cases involving charges of implanted memories. Patients who sought clinical help for such problems as eating disorders or depression were diagnosed as victims of satanic ritual abuse, leading to prolonged therapy in search of repressed memories caused by severe trauma. Repression of traumatic experiences during childhood was thought to be producing dissociative disorders that could be recovered only through hypnosis. By putting patients in an altered state of consciousness, some therapists believed they were uncovering repressed memories of ritual abuse, usually involving family members. Some of these patients were confined involuntarily for extended periods of time and heavily sedated by powerful drugs (Smith 1997, 1998a,b). As a result, marriages and families were torn apart, and patients developed a host of other psychological and personal problems. Tragically, patients were victimized by their therapists, suffering unnecessarily from false or implanted memories of incest, murder, cannibalism, and sexual abuse. Scores of patients accused parents of being

Satanists and ritually abusing them in ceremonies of initiation or blood sacrifice. Horrified and befuddled, parents organized national support groups of falsely accused family members both here and abroad. These included the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF), Casualties of Sexual Allegations (COSA), and the British False Memory Society (BFMS). Where patients eventually realized their memories were implanted, legal actions were taken. Cases of malpractice convictions in civil litigation produced large damage awards. In 1997 a Houston jury awarded a woman, Lynn Carl, $5.8 million for damages she incurred as a result of false memories implanted by therapists at the former Spring Shadows Glen Hospital. Carl was led to believe while in therapy that she had practiced murder, cannibalism, and incest. In November 1997, an Illinois woman, Patricia Burgus, won a $10.6 million settlement in a lawsuit against a leading advocate of satanic ritual abuse therapy, Dr. Bennet Braun, and the Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago for emotional and psychological damages. Under treatment by Dr. Braun, Burgus came to believe she was a child molester, the high priestess of a satanic cult, and a cannibal who ate human flesh "meatloaf." She also came to believe through repressed and recovered memories that she possessed three hundred personalities (Smith 1997).

SATAN AS SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

Widespread fears and anxieties about unexplained social disorder and turmoil (crime, violence, drugs, abortion, and suicide) may be expressed as evil and attributed to satanic forces. Western societies are characterized by a dualistic worldview that depicts all reality as consisting of two fundamental modes or opposing principles, one good and the other evil. These two forces are personified in the forms of God and Satan, respectively, and portrayed as warring figures commanding spiritual armies and battling for the souls of humankind. Satan, sometimes referred to as the Evil One, is believed to be the ultimate source of troubles, casting about to subvert human goodness and exploit moral frailty. According to biblical tradition, Satan was once a mighty archangel, Lucifer, who led an army of angels in rebellion against God and was cast out of heaven for his deeds. From that time until now, Satan has sought to take as many human souls as possible to hell with him, wreaking havoc and moral calamity. In popular literature and folklore, the Prince of Darkness is cunning and shrewd, wielding weapons of temptation and seduction to entrap the innocent, and hawking souls to make the Faustian bargain (Russell 1991). The notion that the devil may appear in disguise to the unsuspecting victim is also a common

theme. Thus the young are often thought to be particularly vulnerable to the wiles of Satan and in need of special protection and vigilance.

Belief in the devil remains strong, according to polls. A 1998 survey of U.S. adults eighteen or older conducted for *CBS News* found that 64 percent of respondents said they believe in the existence of the devil (Goode 2000:166). Southerners (73 percent), Protestants (72 percent), and African Americans (74 percent) were more likely than other groups to believe in the devil. In a 1995 poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, researchers sought to determine popular belief in the activity of Satan in the world. Respondents were asked, "Do you think the Devil can make people do evil things they would not do otherwise?" Forty-two percent of those sampled answered yes to this question (Goode 2000:166). With the pervasive belief in Satan in contemporary society, episodes of perceived moral breakdown and discord help to explain why such conditions provoke popular suspicions of subversion in terms of demonic agents.

EXPLAINING THE SATANIC CULT SCARE

The period in which widespread fears of satanic cult conspiracies were believed to be pervasive is aptly explained in terms of moral panic theory (Cohen 1972; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Jenkins 1992). Moral panic refers to a social condition in which the official reaction to persons or events is significantly disproportionate to any actual threat posed. An exaggerated threat emerges and becomes defined as a danger to societal values, and its nature is presented in stereotypical fashion by interest groups through claims-making activities designed to get the attention of authorities and mass media. The elaboration of threat is spearheaded by "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker 1963) who issue an urgent call to action. Claims by interest groups and moral entrepreneurs defending cherished values may fail initially to arouse authorities or the public because they do not rise to the level of illegality or sufficiently offend the moral order (Jenkins 1992). As such, claims makers then engage in a process of deviance amplification—inflating or exaggerating claims of threat and social harm. Hall et al. (1978) suggest that deviance amplification is more effective when relatively harmless activities are linked to more-threatening ones—a process they call "convergence." Claims of social harm or threat made against suspect groups or practices (for example, new religions, pornography, homosexuality, and abortion), though deviant, are likely to be tolerated in an open democratic society. However, if they can be linked to more serious threats such as satanic ritual abuse, child pornography, sexual predation, or murder, they are more likely to generate official reactions, mobilizing authorities to quell the putative threat. Thus by linking relatively harmless activities to

more serious violations, the benign activities are made to appear more menacing and dangerous. The deviant acts are then pushed upward across the threshold of intolerance and illegality, evoking powerful responses. These rhetorical tactics create implicit or explicit parallels, making one activity a necessary outcome of another, thereby stigmatizing the lesser offense and expanding the domain of potential threat. When successful, they culminate in overreaction and panic.

Concomitantly, there is an element of conspiracy imputed to the suspect group whereby through means of rumor and demonization, a "subversion ideology" is developed (Bromley 1991, 1998). From the perspective of cultural opponents, subversive groups embody quintessential evil and are believed to pose a maximum degree of threat to the social order. Subversive groups are said to be formed secretively in order to orchestrate a conspiracy, which is seen as growing rapidly. They may also be portrayed as having gained control over some segment of the conventional social order, which serves as a base of operations. Finally, subversive groups possess a unique power that is destructive to the integrity of normal individuals and groups. Consequently, a crisis is constructed through claims-making activities requiring urgent and dramatic action on the part of authorities. Thus "[w]hen the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is out of all proportion to the actual threat offered, when 'experts,' in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors perceive the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk with one voice . . . when media representations universally stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases . . . above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a moral panic" (Hall et al. 1978:7). Moral panics tend to be episodic and temporary but can lead to officially sanctioned repression of targeted groups—witch-hunts, purges, red scares, and other forms of social control (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

SOCIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SATANIC CULT SCARE

In the decade before the 1980s, various social conditions converged to give rise to the satanic cult scare. These included the resurgence of Christian Fundamentalism, the emergent anticult movement, the existence of a few real satanic groups, the growth of pornography and the sex industry, feminist efforts to raise awareness of child sexual abuse, and the influx of young mothers into the workforce who placed their children in daycare. These elements were symptomatic of acute social change in the spheres of work, family, and religion. In this period of social upheaval, the construction of a Satanist threat became more salient as an explanation of social problems.

Each of these elements or factors can be shown to contribute to the development of a satanic cult scare.

Christian Fundamentalism

In the decade of the 1970s, Fundamentalist Christians became a viable political force in American society (Liebman and Wuthnow 1982). With some notable exceptions, Evangelicals and Fundamentalists had kept studiously aloof from American politics through the better half of the twentieth century, concentrating on soul winning and private morality issues (Marsden 1980). But the social activism of liberal and left-wing movements in the 1960s challenged religious conservatives to enter the public arena. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority mobilized Christian Fundamentalists through direct mail and video programming, mass petition campaigns against abortion, homosexuality and pornography, yellow journalism, and the fiery preaching of Falwell himself in televised services. Falwell's success prompted the formation of other right-wing groups, including the Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice, National Christian Action Coalition, National Right to Life Committee, Concerned Women for America, Christian Family Renewal, Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, Conservative Caucus, Heritage Foundation, Christian Cause, Christian Coalition for Legislative Action, and Intercessors for America. The range of issues widened to reinstatement of school prayer and Bible reading, greater freedoms for Christian schools and home schooling, as well as opposition to Communism, secular humanism, feminism, ERA, lenient drug laws, gay and lesbian rights, sexual permissiveness, the "liberal media," and other sources of "moral decay" (Diamond 1989).

America's putative decline was trumpeted with great frequency by conservative Christians who were quick to link this decline to biblical and apocalyptic symbolism. Fundamentalists, who have always taken a literalist view of Holy Scriptures and the Bible, predicted the growth and spread of Satan's power in the end time just prior to Christ's return. Millennial and apocalyptic fervor began to build during the 1970s, generated in no small part by the publication of Hal Lindsey's best-selling book *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1972. Lindsey claimed that biblical prophecy had foretold a number of world events that had recently occurred or were soon to transpire. This message found resonance in the conservative Christian community and was preached from pulpits all over the country. Believers were warned of the coming cataclysm, presaged by the spread of iniquity, wickedness, and corruption. As such, various social problems that appeared to be worsening—crime, violence, drugs, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, pornography, AIDS—were readily seen as evidence of the Last Days and the deepening influence of evil forces at work. Fundamentalist leaders called on the faithful to don spiritual armor, to "fight the good fight," and

battle the growing calamity and moral decline. A key figure in end-time biblical prophecy is the Antichrist, an incarnation of the Devil who sets about to rule the world. This final conspiracy is made possible by Satan's minions who manage to deceive worldly authorities and the masses into unwitting collaboration. The specter of covert satanic cult activity in the Last Days, subverting the ignorant and mobilizing the forces of darkness for Satan's reign, was embraced by Fundamentalists as an explanation of social problems.

Anticultism

During the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of new religious movements (NRMs) or cults emerged. Many of these were youth movements that drew from the counterculture during a time of heightened social and political experimentation. Youth who joined new religious movements often dropped out of college, quit conventional jobs or career tracks, reduced ties to family and friends, lived communally, and generally rejected mainstream cultural values and lifestyles. In most cases, these choices and actions did not have the enthusiastic support of parents or family of new converts. Some parents became very concerned that sons or daughters were becoming involved in a dangerous or subversive enterprise. Yet the social science research shows that for most converts to NRMs, involvement was short-lived, averaging about two years, and that former members often reported favorable experiences of their involvement (Barker 1984; Galanter 1989; Levine 1984; Lewis 1986; Wright 1984, 1987). Despite sinister characterizations of NRMs as "destructive cults" or unfounded extrapolations from isolated cases of tragedy (for example, Peoples Temple) by news reporters and anticult organizations, the vast majority of new religions have been benign, if not functional (Robbins 1988), and even therapeutic (Galanter 1989; Levine 1984).

The anticult movement (ACM) arose as a coalition of distraught parents, religious leaders, former members, and others, including a few professional therapists and academics. The groups compiled and exchanged information, lobbied legislators, held press conferences, and distributed newsletters condemning new religions for turning members into robots or mental captives. Brainwashing became the prominent metaphor to characterize conversion and justify attacks on so-called cults. To counteract what the ACM called cult "programming," a powerful and extralegal tactic of forcible dissuasion called "deprogramming" was developed. This involved the abduction of members by deprogrammers, usually hired by parents, for purposes of extracting forced recantations of the individual's new faith.

The ACM was successful in disseminating sensationalistic claims and stereotypes about "destructive cults." Surveys revealed widespread public suspicion and distrust aimed at new religions. In Richardson and Van Driel's

(1984) survey of 400 registered voters in Washoe County, Nevada, 35 percent of respondents agreed that "legislation should be passed to control the spread of new religions or cults." A Gallup poll found that 62 percent of adults reported they "would not like to have as neighbors" members of a religious sect or cult (1989), compared with 30 percent in 1981. Another survey found that 26 percent of respondents supported "FBI surveillance of cults" while 37 percent supported laws "restricting solicitation practices of Hare Krishnas" (Bromley and Breschel 1992). The metaphor of brainwashing became an accepted explanation of conversion to cults by a majority of the mass public and significant portions of the media. In the wake of Jonestown, ACM groups effectively propagated the paradigmatic evil cult stereotype that presented the ever-present threat of mass suicide (Hall 1995; Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000).

Beginning in the early 1980s, the ACM exploited the growing attention paid to Satanism. ACM literature consistently reported on satanic cult activities, presenting them as another example of evil cults at work (Bromley 1991). Through annual conferences, newsletters, press releases, media interviews, and other sources, Satanism was incorporated within the larger framework promoted by the ACM.

These efforts eventually penetrated public schools, neighborhood organizations, and churches, providing expedient explanations for any kind of deviant behavior. For example, in March 1990, a series of three teenage suicides sparked intense rumors and parental fears of satanic cult influences in Alberta, Canada. Evidence of black magic was alleged by some residents, as was secret rituals and pacts. The school board chairman announced that as many as one hundred students might be involved in Satanism in the area of Lethbridge. A group of parents stormed the police station, demanding action be taken. Fundamentalist churches in the neighboring province of Calgary organized a public seminar on the dangers of Satanism. Eight teenagers were placed in psychiatric or foster care, though police found no evidence of organized satanic cults (Victor 1993:351).

Actual Satanist Groups

Moral panics are best understood as exaggerated perceptions of threat. This assumes the actuality of the phenomenon, though one which poses less threat than is alleged. The existence of a few Satanist groups allowed claims makers to offer up "evidence" of the putative conspiracy. Satanism represented a very small portion of the new religious movements that arose during this time. But because the object of veneration was so sensational, it created a substantial amount of media coverage and attention. Of the several thousand new religious movements that emerged, there were only three organized satanic groups of any size or substance: Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, Michael Aquino's Temple of Set, and The Process.

The Church of Satan, headquartered in San Francisco, received the most attention, partly because of the colorful character of its founder, Anton LaVey. LaVey authored *The Satanic Bible* (1969), which became an occult best-seller and is still in print. The work is largely a promotion of hedonism and self-indulgence. The most succinct summary of the book is found in the Nine Satanic Statements, a diabolical equivalent of the Ten Commandments. It inverts many of the commandments encouraging physical, emotional, and mental gratification. LaVey also edited and published a newsletter, the *Cloven Hoof*, which was disseminated among dues-paying members. He parlayed his notoriety into lucrative consulting work for the entertainment industry. LaVey was a consultant to the producers of the film *Rosemary's Baby* and even appeared briefly in the film as the Devil (Melton 1992:112). A former circus hand and lion trainer for the Barnum and Bailey circus, LaVey was a showman and enjoyed shocking the public. Even at the pinnacle of the church's popularity, the curious far outnumbered the members, and the turnover rate was very high. One researcher who conducted a participant observation of the Church of Satan in the late sixties reported that the church had "only four or five hundred active members" even though it publicly boasted thousands (Alfred 1976:193). The study also found that most of the members were not youth but persons over the age of thirty. Melton estimates that the membership peaked at about one thousand, probably in the early to mid-seventies. Interest in the Church of Satan declined in the late seventies, and by the time LaVey died in 1997, the church was facing bankruptcy. The legacy of LaVey's church far exceeds any measurable impact it had in terms of actual adherents.

The Temple of Set, a schismatic sect led by Michael Aquino, managed a smaller following in Los Angeles. Established in 1975, the group was dedicated to the ancient Egyptian deity believed to have been the model for the Christian Satan. Aquino was thought to be more serious and studious about Satanism than LaVey, who actually did not believe Satan was a literal being. Aquino, on the other hand, claimed to have been visited by Set in a vision and recorded the epiphany in his book, *The Book of Coming Forth by Night* (1975). Aquino was also a lieutenant colonel in the Army and held a Ph.D. in religion. According to Melton (1992:114), the program of the Temple was geared to work with an intellectual elite and required of members formidable in self-discipline and extensive readings. By the end of the seventies, the membership of the Temple grew to about five hundred in North America, with some additional members in Europe (Melton 1992:114).

The Process was a deviant psychotherapy group that emerged in the early sixties. It began as a schism of L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology and evolved from a therapy service to a religious group. The transformation took place when the group sought to "escape civilization" in 1966

and visited a plantation in the Yucatan, experiencing a collective rebirth and forming a religious community and the rudiments of a belief system. Bainbridge (1978) describes in great detail the spiritual journey and evolution of the group in his book, *Satan's Power.* By the late sixties, members of The Process were proselytizing in the streets of large cities in North America and Europe adorned in black robes with red satanic emblems sewn on the chests, accompanied by Alsatian hounds. Though seen as Satanists by outsiders, Bainbridge notes that the group was polytheistic and attributed its own meaning to the gods Lucifer and Satan. The Process was nomadic, sometimes establishing "chapters" in cities but only for a short period of time before closing them down and moving on. In the throes of the Vietnam War in 1970, a Toronto chapter of The Process was started, in part as a Canadian asylum for American conscientious objectors and in part as means to get British members admitted into the U.S. expeditiously and for unlimited periods. The Process encountered massive adverse publicity in the early seventies following the unfounded allegation that the Manson family was connected to them in some way. Bainbridge suggests that the fallout from these rumors contributed to the ultimate demise of the group. The Process experienced a split in 1974, resulting in the attenuation of its more controversial doctrines and eventually became absorbed into the New Age movement. Membership never reached more than a few hundred.

Growth of Pornography and Sex Industry

Following the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California,* which liberalized the obscenity laws, there was substantial growth in the pornography and sex industry. Adult bookstores, peep shows, erotic magazines and videos, men's clubs, and sex-oriented businesses exploded. What civil libertarians saw as a removal of unconstitutional government restraints on individual liberties, traditionalists decried as an ominous threat to the moral virtues of society. Most Americans occupied the middle-ground on the issue of pornography, preferring to see the private choices of consenting adults left alone by government. Nonetheless, conservatives mounted anti-obscenity and antipornography campaigns to mobilize public reactions and challenge the new standards (Zurcher and Kilpatrick 1976). With the election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of the New Religious Right, conservatives gained enormous political clout and a stronghold in government. The growing pressure of the Religious Right to combat sexual immorality led to the 1986 report of the Meese Pornography Commission, which in turn produced sweeping new law enforcement crackdowns on all manner of sexual materials. The commission's findings were widely criticized by scholars and researchers for its unscientific conclusions (Linz, Penrod, and Donnerstein 1987). The commission was stacked with conser-

vatives and individuals predisposed to attacking explicit sexual images and sex businesses. Equally as important was the development of an increasingly vocal segment of the feminist movement, which became allied with religious conservatives on the issue of sexually oriented expression. Antipornography feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin argued that pornography should be suppressed because it leads to violence against women. This alliance was highly successful in creating alleged links between pornography and forms of sexual violence against women—rape, incest, pedophilia, harassment, battering, and even murder. So successful was this campaign by allied opponents that it produced what New York University law professor Nadine Strossen later called a "full-fledged sex panic" (1995:20).

Feminism and Child Sexual Abuse

In the 1970s, feminists campaigned to expand the public awareness of child battering, wife battering, and sexual victimization. At the forefront of the child-protection movement, feminists mobilized to create "a large child protection apparatus—a network of protective services workers, police officers, and other specialists with a mandate to do something to help child victims. These workers had a vested interest in expanding their organizational turf by discovering and assuming responsibility for new forms of child victimization" (Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991:10). By the late 1970s, the issues of sexual abuse extended to sexual exploitation linked to child pornography and adolescent prostitution. In the early 1980s, child savers introduced a new form of child victimization—ritual abuse. Incorporating claims of physical and sexual abuse with concerns over missing children, child pornography, and emerging allegations of Satanism, satanic ritual abuse seemed to provide a plausible explanation for the apparent rise in sex abuse cases.

This particular definition of the problem was also largely influenced by the publication of *Michelle Remembers* (Smith and Pazder 1980). The book details the account of a psychiatrist's efforts to help a woman recover childhood memories of trauma when she was reportedly abused and tortured by a satanic cult. This pioneering account was significant because it incorporated virtually all the charges that would become popular among anti-Satanists in the eighties—satanic worship, ritual child abuse, blood sacrifices, murder, cannibalism—and thus effectively shaped the whole occult survivor genre (Jenkins and Maier-Katkin 1991:133). Through hypnosis and treatment covering a period of approximately one year, her therapist, Lawrence Padzer, helped Michelle relive memories of what happened to her when she was five years old. While this account was the first of its kind, by the end of the decade, there were thousands of reported cases by therapists treating satanic ritual abuse victims. However, in none of these cases was

there material evidence to support the claims. Anti-Satanists argued that it was a vast conspiracy involving morticians, police, and people strategically placed in positions of authority (Nathan 1991; Nathan and Snedeker 1995).

Young Working Mothers and Daycare

In the 1970s, the greatest influx of women into the workforce was among mothers of young children. A generation of women who were raised by stay-at-home mothers were compelled to place their children in the care of strangers during a decade that saw double-digit inflation. Many women experienced apprehensions and anxieties about leaving their children in daycare. The conflict between family economic needs and maternal responsibility for the socialization of children produced understandable tension. Bromley (1991:68) observes that "[t]he individuals making the initial allegations of satanic subversion were family members who entrusted their children to daycare facilities about which they had significant reservations and apprehensions." Accused childcare workers occupied a pivotal point of this tension between the spheres of work and family serving as surrogate parents. The socialization effects on young children in daycare were still largely a matter of public debate and moral conservatives roundly condemned the practice.

In the early eighties, a series of sex abuse scandals at daycare centers centered on claims of Satanism and ritual abuse. Beginning with the *McMartin Preschool* case in suburban Los Angeles in 1983, daycare workers were accused of running an organized operation for child predators and Satanists. Virginia McMartin, her daughter Peggy McMartin Buckey, and her son-in-law Ray Buckey, were tried on fifty-two felony charges after children claimed they were forced to participate in ritualistic sex. In 1990, seven years after the case began, McMartin was acquitted, and the charges against Peggy and Ray Buckey were dropped. Dozens of copycat cases emerged across the country. In El Paso, Texas, in 1985, Gayle Doyle, a popular middle-aged preschool teacher, was charged with sexually molesting both boys and girls, inserting sharp objects into their genitals, threatening children with masks, wild animals, and even vows to kill their parents if they disclosed the crimes. In 1986 in suburban Boston, Violet Amirault, daughter Cheryl Amirault, and son Gerald Amirault were convicted of sexually molesting forty boys and girls aged three to six at their Fells Acres Day School. Their case was overturned in appeal after serving eight years in prison when the judge determined that the evidence was based on false memories implanted by therapists and social workers. In Austin, Texas, a middle-aged couple named Daniel and Frances Keller were also convicted of molesting children and engaging in bizarre sexual acts; they were sentenced to forty-eight years apiece. In Maplewood, New Jersey, Margaret Michaels was convicted of engaging in "nude pileups" with three- to five-

year-olds at a daycare center. Michaels was released after five years when a state appeals court overturned her conviction and the New Jersey Supreme Court later criticized investigators for coercive and highly suggestive methods of interviewing the children. In North Carolina in 1993, daycare operator Robert Kelly was convicted on ninety-nine counts of sexual abuse and punished with twelve consecutive life sentences. A PBS *Frontline* documentary, "Searching for Satan," covered the incident, revealing that there was no physical evidence of abuse despite thorough medical examinations of the children. The convictions were based solely on child reports garnered by social workers and a female police investigator. Defendants' attorneys asserted that the children were "coached" into confessions.

American ritual-abuse believers also exported their claims to Canada. The first documented charges surfaced in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1985. Allegations were made against the parents of two young children and the mother's boyfriend. The charges were later dropped for lack of evidence. But in 1992, in the town of Martensville, just north of Saskatoon, nine adults were charged with ritually abusing thirty children at a daycare center. Allegations entailed claims of devil worship, lewd rituals, and an underground Satanic network that included police officers. The incident ignited extensive press coverage and was headline news from Montreal to Vancouver; it became known as the "Martensville nightmare" (Nathan and Snedecker 1995:230). Rumors of secret covens grew rapidly and extended throughout the community, placing everyone under suspicion. Convictions obtained by prosecutors against the adults were later overturned in 1995 on the grounds that investigators improperly questioned the children and tainted their testimonies.

CONCLUSION

Moral panics like the satanic cult scare in North America in the 1980s and early 1990s symbolize the tendency to find or create an enemy to blame for society's ills. Currents of social change introduce new winners and losers in the economy; challenge traditional values; dislodge certain social groups from positions of privilege; rearrange power and status along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, or age; and create contested terrains of cultural or moral authority as groups vie for social control. The anomic conditions erupting from rapid or acute social change lead to the perception of a crisis threatening the moral order. The threat is embodied in perpetrators or conspirators who become regarded as the "enemy." Stanley Cohen (1972) observes that a process of dichotomization or polarization produces a "we" versus "them" perspective that generates "folk devils." This morality play of good versus evil promotes a scapegoating of targeted groups or individu-

als in which to assign blame. These targets then become labeled as evil and hence deserving of self-righteous anger, hostility, and punishment. What follows is a predictable social dynamic. Public pressure demands that social control mechanisms be strengthened to protect the innocent from debauchery. Authorities redouble efforts to tighten enforcement of existing laws or push for new ones. Moral entrepreneurs insist that serious steps have to be taken to repair the damage; there must be a crackdown on offenders and purveyors of evil. In the atmosphere of moral panic, those who do not support the crackdown may themselves become suspect. Sympathizers or defenders of targeted groups may be accused as coconspirators through guilt by association. Research on witch-hunts, red scares, and cult scares have demonstrated this pattern of inculpating family, friends, or public supporters of the accused (Bromley and Shupe 1981; Demos 1982; Fried 1996; Karlsen 1987). This appears to explain, in part, why moral panics are not shot down more quickly, as critics may be less inclined to challenge impassioned claims of moral crusaders. Nowhere has this been demonstrated more compellingly than in the red scare of the 1950s driven by the red-baiting senator Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

Not coincidentally, the satanic cult scare evolved during the same period in which the cold war was winding down, even while the rhetoric aimed at the "evil empire," as Ronald Reagan called it, remained fervent. With the eventual demise of Communism and the diminished threat of a Communist conspiracy, however, Satanists became the new threat, replacing Communists as the designated enemy. Indeed, it appears that the satanic threat increased in direct proportion to the decline of the Communist threat throughout the 1980s. Sociologists have long observed that in situations where external enemies no longer threaten, a society will find groups or individuals within its own ranks that it can construe as threatening (Bergesen 1984; Demos 1982; Durkheim [1895]1960; Erikson, 1966). Social construction of such enemies is particularly important to communities experiencing a crisis in which cherished values are being called into question. According to Bergesen, "A community will commence to ritually persecute imaginary enemies—conduct a witchhunt—to manufacture moral deviants as a means of ritually affirming the group's problematical values and collective purposes" (1984:vii). Deviants come to symbolize threats or changes to the moral order in which a relocation of moral boundaries might be required. In a study of witch-hunts in Puritan New England, Demos (1984) even found that the persecution of witches attenuated during periods of war and reappeared after peace had retumed.

Corresponding the rise of the Religious Right and the electoral success of Reagan in the U.S., the country experienced an intensive political, economic, and moral divide (Bennett 1988; Diamond 1989, 1995). Bitter dis-

putes over moral issues (family values, abortion, pornography, and prayer in schools) led to increased polarization and "culture wars." In response to societal disorganization and change, a subversion ideology was formulated by key moral entrepreneurs to explain the perceived crisis and framed in terms of a diabolical plot by an underground satanic cult network (Bromley 1991). Drawing on the scant "evidence" of a few small Satanist groups, occasional confessions of psychopathic serial killers, the growth of macabre horror films about devil worshipers, and other anecdotal proofs, the claim of clandestine satanic activity by a loose coalition of anti-Satanist groups became a proffered explanation of social problems. These claims were buttressed by the emergence of a child-saver movement focusing on sexual abuse of children, stranger abduction, child pornography, and the concomitant rise of "occult survivor" groups. All of this was set in the context of a resurgence of Christian Fundamentalism in local and national politics in which the personification of evil was readily identified in the form of satanic influence. The demonization of "liberalism" as a root cause of social ills and moral decay by conservative politicians allied with the Religious Right was compatible with an emergent belief in a vast underground satanic cult conspiracy.