
I. Conspiracy Theory in the Family: The Satanism Scare

- Began with *Michelle Remembers* (1980).
  - Story likely resulted from “false memory syndrome.”
- Created a new social problem & psychiatric diagnosis: “Satanic ritual abuse” (SRA).
  - Two categories of SRA “survivors”
    - Adult women who “recovered” memories of childhood abuse.
      - Typical detail: Use as “breeders” for sacrificial babies.
      - Total lack of evidence besides the “memories.”
    - Children allegedly abused by Satanist day-care workers, relatives, or parents.
      - Only evidence was semi-coerced, heavily-led testimony from small children.
      - Similarities with early witch trials: naming others, stranger physical signs (anal wink).

II. Explaining the Satanism Scare:

Religion and Social Paranoia in Modern America

- A Short History of American “Satanism”
  - The decline of radical evil as a concept in postwar American culture
  - Behaviorist psychology: evil could be cured
  - Real Satanism: more 1960s-era religious experiment or satire than conspiracy
  - Anton LaVey (Howard Levey) and the Church of Satan
  - Popularization of the idea of “Satanism”
    - Sensational crimes (Manson & Zodiac) popularly linked to Satanism
    - Other murders blamed on Satanists: Ricky Kasso (1984), West Memphis 3 (1993)
  - Religious impact: the return of exorcism.

- Radical evil makes a comeback: Revival of literal Satan, Hell & other overtly supernatural religious beliefs and practices
  - Examples include demons, exorcism, speaking in tongues, Anti-Christ, Apocalypse, prophecy
  - Background on American apocalypticism
    - Millerites & the Great Disappointment (1843-44)
    - John Nelson Darby, premillenial dispensationalism, & the Rapture
    - Jack Chick tracts explain it all [here](https://www.chick.com)
  - Christian paranoia promoted by televangelists and publishers: Hal Lindsey (*Late Great Planet Earth*) & Jerry Jenkins (*Left Behind*, *Soon*)
    - “It’s a war”: Satan seen at work in everyday life
  - Social/political causes of SRA scare:
    - Guilt over rising rates of divorce/working mothers
    - “Cult cops” convict the West Memphis 3
  - Strange alliance of liberal feminist social workers & conservative anti-feminist Christians
  - Related development: Halloween fears & conspiracy theories
    - Poisoned Pixie Sticks and razored apples
    - Halloween as *Satanic conspiracy* [this version](https://www.cnn.com)
    - Broader Christian attack on magic & occult in popular culture: Harry Potter, Ouija boards, role-playing games
    - Actual Christian origins of most pop-culture occultism
    - Rise of “Hell Houses”
  - Question: Why are middle-class whites so fearful & pessimistic?

Anton S. LaVey, “Church of Satan” Founder

Sources of the Satanism Scare: