

# 1 **Conspiracy Theory Today: Evangelical Religion, The Family, and the Devil**

## 2 **I. Conspiracy Theory in the Family: The Satanism Scare**

- ◆ Began w/ *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.
      - Wave of prosecutions. Most notorious example: McMartin case (1983).
      - Only evidence was semi-coerced, heavily-led testimony from small children.
      - Similarities with early witch trials: naming others, stranger physical signs (anal wink).

## 3 **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
    - ❖ Liberalization of Christian theology: “[Is God Dead?](#)” Vatican II
    - ❖ 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)
    - ❖ [Movies](#) and TV, esp. *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) & *The Exorcist* (1973).
    - ❖ Religious impact: the return of exorcism.

## 4 **II. Explaining the Satanism Scare:**

### **Religion and Social Paranoia in Modern America**

- ◆ 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, premillennial dispensationalism, & the [Rapture](#).
      - [Jack Chick tracts](#) explain it all ([home page](#))
  - 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

## 5 **II. Explaining the Satanism Scare:**

### **Religion and Social Paranoia in Modern America** (cont.)

- ◆ 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](#), [kids version](#)
    - ❖ 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?

## 6 **Anton S. LaVey, “Church of Satan” Founder**

## 7 **Sources of the Satanism Scare:**

## **Ritualistic Crimes**

- 8  **Sources of the Satanism Scare:  
A Devilish Fad in Popular Culture**