

AMERICAN MONSTERS: TABLOID MEDIA AND THE SATANIC PANIC,
1970-2000

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

“American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970-2000,” analyzes an episode of national hysteria that dominated the media throughout most of the 1980s. Its origins, however, go back much farther and its consequences for the media would extend into subsequent decades. Rooted in the decade’s increasingly influential conservative political ideology, the satanic panic involved hundreds of accusations that devil-worshipping pedophiles were operating America’s white middle-class suburban daycare centers. Communities around the country became embroiled in criminal trials against center owners, the most publicized of which was the McMartin Preschool trial in Manhattan Beach, California. The longest and most expensive trial in the nation’s history, the McMartin case is an important focal point of this project. In the 1990s, judges overturned the life sentences of defendants in most major cases, and several prominent journalists and lawyers condemned the phenomenon as a witch-hunt. They accurately understood it to be a powerful delusion, or what contemporary cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard termed a “hyperreality,” in which audiences confuse the media universe for real life. Presented mainly through tabloid television, or “infotainment,” and integral to its development, influence, and success, the panic was a manifestation of the hyperreal.

This dissertation explores how the panic both reflected and shaped a cultural climate dominated by the overlapping worldviews of politically active conservatives. In 1980, neoconservatives, libertarians, economic conservatives, and evangelical Christians, who had begun their cultural ascent over the course of the previous decade, were brought together temporarily under the aegis of President Ronald Reagan. With collective strength they implemented their joint agenda, which partly included expanding their influence on the nation’s

media sources. Coinciding with a backlash against feminism and the gay rights movement, media outlets often represented working women and homosexuals as dangerous to conservative idealized notions of white suburban family life. Such views were incorporated into the panic, which tabloid media reinforced through coverage of alleged sexual abuse of children at day care centers. Infotainment expanded dramatically in the 1980s, selling conservative-defined threats as news. As the satanic panic unfolded through infotainment sub-genres like talk shows and local news programs (first introduced in the late 1940s), its appeal guaranteed the continued presence of the tabloid genre, and reinforced conservative views on gender, race, class, and religion. Although the panic subsided in the early 1990s as journalists and lawyers discredited evidence and judicial decisions turned against accusers, the legacy of the panic continued to influence American culture and politics into the twenty-first century.

Dedicated to Carl Sagan.

“Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many important people in my life I want to thank for making this project possible. I first want to acknowledge the support of my advisor, Ken Kusmer. His guidance and advice over the past decade have been invaluable and kept me both focused and motivated. I would not have been able to survive graduate school without his encouragement. I also want to thank my committee members: Carolyn Kitch, Susan Klepp, and Elaine Tyler May. I gained both wisdom and confidence from their continued feedback, generosity, and support. My several email exchanges with Elaine Tyler May were particularly helpful and consistently sparked my intellectual curiosity. Collectively, my committee made the process of writing a dissertation both enjoyable and exciting. A Dissertation Completion Grant from Temple University allowed me to spend all of my time focused on researching and writing this project, for which I am also incredibly grateful.

My project would also not have been possible without the help of my family and friends. The brilliance and determination of my mom, Dr. Rhonda Hughes, my dad, Dr. Anthony Hughes, and my brother, Jeremy Hughes, inspires me every single day. I also want to thank my second family, the Grangers, particularly Rose, for always steering me in the right direction. I owe my family everything and sincerely hope that they enjoy reading this dissertation as much as I enjoyed writing it. I want to thank my good friends, including Ross Hutchison, Lisa Gagliardi, Heidi Kendall Middlemas, Amanda Weyerbacher, Rachel Schwab Turbet, Cameryn Robinson, Renisha Griffin, and Amber Clemens for always having my back. My dissertation is partly a reflection of their continued love and support. Finally,

thank you to Drew McKevitt for suggesting the topic. Writing about this episode in American history has changed my outlook on the world and I will always be appreciative.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 1984, in the modestly wealthy suburban community of Manhattan Beach, California, news reporter Wayne Satz of KABC-TV, ABC's local Los Angeles affiliate, delivered a live story on an area daycare center that would eventually lead to the longest and most expensive criminal trial in American history. Over the next several years, Ray Buckey, an employee at the McMartin preschool, along with the women in his family who owned and operated it, stood trial for hundreds of counts of conspiracy and abuse as part of cult practices the media and experts called "satanic ritual abuse." Police and the FBI closed down the daycare center, conducted exhaustive searches, and firebombed the facility. Although juries ultimately acquitted all of the defendants, other communities around the country similar to Manhattan Beach turned against one another in variations of McMartin. After Satz's report, other individuals were arrested and imprisoned, including the Amirault family of Fells Acre Day School in Massachusetts; Robert Fulton Kelly and wife Elizabeth of Little Rascals in North Carolina; Margaret Kelly Michaels of Wee Care in Maplewood, New Jersey; Edward L. Clark and his co-director, Anita Shuler, of Citrus Day Care Center in Inverness, Florida; Frank Fuster and wife Ileana of County Walk Babysitting Service in Miami; Arnold Friedman and son Jesse, who ran an after-school computer class from their home in Great Neck, New York; and parent Paul Ingram, Chief Civil Deputy of the Sheriff's department in Olympia, Washington, as well as Ray Buckey and the McMartin family. They would become the most prominent names and faces of evil in a widespread panic over the presence of devil-worshipping pedophiles in America's suburbs. Daycare centers and after-school programs in communities across the country were closed down and dozens of people incarcerated, a few of whom were never released from

prison. Most others who were accused did not see their sentences overturned until years or decades later, when influential individuals rejected the plausibility of their cases.

Ray Buckey and other defendants were some of the many casualties of the “satanic panic,” which lasted from 1983, when Buckey was first accused of molesting Matthew Johnson, a two-year old boy who attended McMartin, until 1990, when a second hung jury led to Buckey’s final acquittal on all counts. In the interim, men and women were accused of satanic ritual abuse in places as geographically distant as Clarkesville, Maryland; Greer, South Carolina; Grenada, Mississippi; Jordan, Minnesota; Niles, Michigan; Pittsfield, Massachusetts; North Ridge, California; Stuart, Florida; and Wenatchee, Washington. Although charges were only filed against some people, interviews between social workers and alleged child-victims produced hundreds of accusations against friends, teachers, policemen, relatives, religious authorities, case lawyers, and celebrities. Residents who were not accused also suffered, believing that either neighborhood children had been raped and tortured by those tasked with protecting them, or that the accusations against the latter were false. The panic polarized entire towns and brought social and financial devastation to those who had once been well-respected members. It demonstrated that dozens of American suburbs in the 1980s were prone to hysteria, which was catalyzed and initially endorsed by the legal system, as well as news and entertainment media.

This dissertation explores the panic’s causes, trajectory, and consequences. It posits that to a significant degree, the satanic panic was a product of America’s tabloid media, which became increasingly powerful and ubiquitous in the 1980s. It was one consequence of sensational news on television, or infotainment, which invaded the medium throughout the decade in the form of talk shows, entertainment news, and reality programs. Together, these programs joined the growing number of local news shows, which had been selling human-

interest stories as relevant information for local communities since the late 1940s. The profitability of local news for the networks over the next thirty years was a major impetus for the explosion of infotainment in the 1980s. Reports on panic cases around the country garnered high ratings for several tabloid programs, as well as network news and documentary shows like ABC's *20/20*, which increasingly incorporated sensational material. Tabloid hosts like Geraldo Rivera, who debuted his talk show in 1987, generated television audiences of unprecedented size as they delved into topics related to the panic, or, in Rivera's case, presented live interviews with families of the McMartin case. The panic also helped sell tabloid material in print, which included older magazines like *The National Enquirer* and *Star Magazine*, as well as those introduced more recently, like *People*, a human-interest magazine established in 1974. As a story integral to the genre's popularity and cultural triumph in the 1980s, the satanic panic contributed directly to its appeal and long-standing success. The panic was not limited to tabloid sources in the United States, as areas of Canada, Great Britain, and Australia erupted in similar accusations of satanic ritual abuse.¹ Reports were delivered through each nation's respective tabloid media, which often borrowed from, and heavily influenced, their counterparts in the United States. However, the panic's long duration, high volume of cases, and level of media attention were unique to the United States, and produced an unrivaled national hysteria.

As an integral part of tabloid media, the satanic panic provides a clear example of how the content of certain available technologies in the 1980s influenced consumers. As individuals around the country accused one another of satanic ritual abuse following early reports on McMartin, they demonstrated that media stories sold as news, no matter how implausible, could

¹ Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedecker, *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (San Jose: Authors Choice Press, [1995], 2001), 135.

fully shape and change people's perception of their environment. This dissertation provides a social analysis of the panic, but also a cultural one, primarily engaging with various media scholars and theorists, particularly Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard. Writing in the late 1960s, the ideas of McLuhan, articulated in works like *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967), demonstrated his grasp of the profoundness of "electronic informational media." Focusing on television, still a relatively young medium in 1967, McLuhan accurately speculated that it held potentially awesome power. Fueled by dozens of daily television reports, the satanic panic affirms McLuhan's central argument, aimed especially at television, that "all media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered." He advised, "Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments."² McLuhan's general outlook for television was optimistic, evident in pronouncements that likened the living room, which remained television's most influential domain, to a voting booth, for example. He believed that the world was becoming a "global village," a unified community that awakened important primitive "tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us."³ While the panic reinforces many of McLuhan's claims, it also shows that he romanticized television, a view derived from a contemporary spirit of revolution. Major changes within the television industry throughout the 1970s guaranteed that by the 1980s, the context in which McLuhan foresaw it as a force of fundamental positive change had disappeared.

² Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley, California: Ginko Press, [1967], 2005), 26.

³ Ibid., 63.

By the 1980s, television was not the same as it had been in the 1960s. It delivered more human-interest news stories than ever before through sets that continued to more closely mimic reality. It was also joined by a more diverse range of media technologies, particularly towards the end of the decade, when a growing number of cable stations, video game consoles, personal computers, portable music devices, handheld video cameras, mobile phones, and audiovisual media, like VHS and Laserdisc players, became available. While the expanding number of choices began to collectively impact media content in the 1990s, they did not prevent the panic, an episode that enforces a view of television much darker than McLuhan's, put forth by French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard. In 1981, Baudrillard published *Simulacra and Simulation*, his most influential work on American media. It built on McLuhan's contention, as well as those of other theorists', that the cultural impact of "electronic informational media" was profound, but fundamentally rejected McLuhan's idealism.⁴ Baudrillard instead viewed Western culture and society as desperately trapped inside a simulated environment. Particularly in the United States, the availability and ubiquity of media technologies had, according to Baudrillard, created a "hyperreality," a place of real sensations, emotions, and consequences, but stimulated by machines carrying electronic messages, rather than by natural circumstances. Within a hyperreality, "the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" was dissolved.⁵ The natural world became indistinguishable from the purchasable simulacra that invaded, exploited, and appeared to reflect it. For Baudrillard, Disneyland serves as both a

⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image; or, What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Atheneum [1961], 1962).

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, [1981], 1994), 1, 3.

“perfect model” of a hyperreality, as well as a microcosm of the United States, a “miniaturized pleasure of real America.” Its “imaginary world” of “phantasmagoria,” in which paying customers experienced numerous manufactured incitements, distracted consumers from the fact that cities and towns around the country had been subjected to the same fate. “Disneyland is presented as imaginary,” warns Baudrillard, “in order to make us believe that the rest is real.”⁶ Those who experienced the panic directly were arguably inside of a hyperreality, where the panic became more “real” to them than their natural lived experiences. In the 1960s, McLuhan was unable to predict how television and other commercial media platforms would expand and evolve. Baudrillard understood that by the 1980s, the “viral, endemic, chronic, alarming presence” of television “without the possibility of isolating the effects,” rendered it a potential force of alienation and manipulation.⁷ This dissertation lends authenticity to Baudrillard’s theories, although it also seeks to complicate them. Baudrillard’s assertion that Western societies were inescapably trapped in a simulated hyperreality, which he labels an “an impasse of death,” fails to explain why the panic came to an end, with justice ultimately prevailing for many of those falsely accused of satanic ritual abuse.⁸ The dozens of overturned cases in the 1990s reveals that America’s submersion into a hyperreality was not as sweeping as Baudrillard suggests.

As an exploration into the consequences of consumer interaction with commercial media technologies, this study adds to important work in media theory, but it also makes a

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Ibid., 154.

contribution to consumer histories of the United States. It builds on several historical works that examine how American citizens negotiated their consumer identity in the decades following World War II, most specifically corroborating Lizabeth Cohen's argument in *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* that "post-war mass suburbia" became a "landscape of mass consumption." According to Cohen, this consumer-driven society strongly shifted Americans away from their previous identity as "citizens," or "individuals in a political relationship with the government." By the 1980s, Cohen argues a "*consumer/citizen/taxpayer/voter*" was gaining traction "in a *Consumerized Republic*, where self-interested citizens increasingly view government policies like other market transactions, judging them by how well served they feel personally."⁹ The hundreds of community members involved in satanic panic cases indicated that many Americans had internalized their consumer identity in the 1980s almost to the point of self-destruction. They arguably purchased fear of one another through tabloid media, leading to divided neighborhoods, emotionally traumatized children, individual financial ruin, and prison sentences for dozens of innocent people. While consumer movements in the 1970s demonstrated that such an identity could affect important political change, the panic also exposed an inherent powerlessness. Neighbors emotionally turned on one another over scenarios that were never physically proven.

This dissertation also complements several studies of television that center on its cultural impact, enhancing arguments on the medium from important works like Lynn Spigel's *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* and Arthur Asa Berger's *Manufacturing Desire: Media, Pop Culture, and Everyday Life*. Spigel's study examines how, between World War II and the

⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 6, 8, 9.

1990s, “visual media culture (especially television) and suburbia” worked to “mutually reinforce each other as social practices and cultural fantasies.” She argues, “media and suburbs are sites where meanings are produced and created.” They exist as “spaces (whether material or electronic) in which people make sense of their social relationships to each other, their communities, their nation, and the world at large.”¹⁰ As an almost exclusively suburban phenomenon, the panic provides a sense of television and suburbia’s codependency by the 1980s. While the various towns where the panic manifested differed in size and demography, images of their nearly identical tree-lined, single-family homes populated by mostly white residents contributed to, and affirmed, the media’s primary representation of suburbia during the decade. When inhabitants of these neighborhoods saw others like them on television, the medium misleadingly seemed to reflect reality. Like Spigel’s work, I also view the relationship between television and suburbia as gendered. Spigel explains that “television’s incorporation of the public sphere into the home did not bring ‘male’ space into female space; instead it transposed one system of sexually organized space onto another.” During the 1980s, the power structure in media representations of suburbia was almost exclusively patriarchal, with conservative white men mostly in control. The panic was arguably one consequence of its transposition onto the domestic space.

This dissertation differs from Spigel’s study, however, to the extent that it substantiates Arthur Asa Berger’s opposing claims of television as “an instrument of terror.”¹¹ The panic

¹⁰ Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 15.

¹¹ Arthur Asa Berger, *Manufacturing Desire: Media, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 2.

exposes a negative outcome of television's ubiquity in American homes. While Spigel views suburbia and television as negotiated spaces, where audiences sometimes had "the chance to reflect on their own expectations," Berger disagrees. He does not feel that the "people who read or see or listen to these texts, are aware, generally speaking, of the extent to which these texts are educating them, giving them ideas about the nature of love and life and society."¹² The satanic panic demonstrates that media consumers did not always pause to consider the content, complexity, or potency of the messages delivered to them through the screen. Such reflection was also difficult because messages were contradictory and illogical. Representations sometimes "provided an illusion of the ideal neighborhood—the way it was supposed to be," while simultaneously spotlighting its alleged enemies, a practice that became much more common in the 1980s with the expansion of infotainment.¹³ The satanic panic reinforces Berger's point that the interplay between media and reality could inflict "a reign of terror on people, which was all the worse since people didn't recognize what was happening to them."¹⁴ Communities that appeared to mimic the media ideal were also prone to manufacturing its threats.

My study explores other media technologies available in the 1980s and how they contributed to, and shaped, the panic, but it mostly tells the story of television. As a work that addresses cultural, as well as social, context it joins studies similarly oriented towards the medium, like Thomas Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*, which emphasizes "the incalculable ways that television transformed American life—in

¹² Ibid., 5; Spigel, *Dreamhouse*, 133.

¹³ Spigel, *Dreamhouse*, 43.

¹⁴ Berger, *Desire*, 1.

family and friendships, leisure and literacy, consumer habits and common memories.” Doherty focuses on the immediate decades after World War II, arguing that, by the mid-1950s, “television had become a living room fixture, ascendant not only over radio but motion pictures and, so it seemed, all of American culture.”¹⁵ I carry this idea through the 1980s, outlining television’s expanded presence in the home during that decade. The panic was a product of television’s continued ascent. However, I also challenge Doherty’s positive assertion regarding the medium, that “the embrace of human difference must be counted among its most salutary legacies.”¹⁶ Communities embroiled in the satanic panic show that not everyone became more open-minded from watching television. Other works on the social history of the medium, like Erik Barnouw’s classic history of the medium, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, chart television’s commercial development, helping to clarify its function and economic structure in the 1980s.¹⁷

As an episode rooted in 1980s culture and society, the satanic panic also contributes to our understanding of the relationship between culture and politics during the decade. It corroborates and extends the arguments of many scholars that Ronald Reagan’s presidency remains fundamentally influential to vast segments of American culture and society. In *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, Gil Troy explains that many citizens internalized Reagan’s view that the government was the only major obstacle to corporate growth,

¹⁵ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 2, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

“something to ‘get off our backs’ rather than to protect us,” and supported his policy of governing by “discrediting government.”¹⁸ In the 1980s, Reagan’s strategy “found fertile soil and the right political climate, at the right time.”¹⁹ He cemented and endorsed the collective platform of the era’s rising conservative interests, primarily represented by libertarians, neoconservatives, economic conservatives, and evangelical Christians. Together, they passed legislation oriented towards moral issues, deregulated business activities, and limited social welfare programs. By reducing federal restrictions on corporate ownership of media platforms, Reagan also granted them substantial power to disseminate their worldview. Conservatives influenced television content in particular, but used a diverse range of media sources to convey their shared ideals, which rested on “love for a raptly imagined future” and nostalgia for “an equally imaginary past.”²⁰ According to Garry Wills in *Reagan’s America: Innocents at Home*, Reagan personally yearned for both a quaint, mythical “religious past” and a “technological future.” However, his images of each, which affected his policies and governing style, were largely shaped by “the movies he saw or made, with their celebratory approach to American exceptionalism,” as well as television.²¹ Conservatives during the Reagan era found a potent resource in tabloid television, which only sold stories as news if they supported prevailing conservative ideology. Despite the implausibility of satanic ritual abuse cases, their nearly

¹⁸ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14, 15.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America: Innocents at Home* (New York: Penguin Books, [1987], 2000), xxii, xxiii.

²¹ Ibid., xxv, xxiv.

identical narratives confirmed conservative arguments that demonic evil existed in the United States and posed an urgent threat to the vitality of white suburbia. While no physical evidence ever linked any of the defendants in panic cases to their alleged role as devil-worshipping pedophiles, tabloid reports seemed to authenticate their presence. District attorneys, reporters, and television stations benefited financially from the panic, supporting Gil Troy's argument that it was a time of "growing superficiality and selfishness, even hard-heartedness, as the wealthy seemed to reap Reagan's bounty disproportionately."²²

Finally, this dissertation adds to a growing panic literature. Several studies since the early 1990s focus exclusively on cases of satanic ritual abuse, many of them written by journalists or lawyers working in support of various defendants. Put together, studies on the panic support the episode as one of irrational fear that descended into hysteria.²³ In *Remembering Satan: A Case of Recovered Memory and the Shattering of an American Family*, author Lawrence Wright, at the time a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, analyzes the case against Paul Ingram. Ingram remained in prison when the book was published in 1994, with Wright darkly concluding, "the Ingram case makes obvious the perils of a fixed idea—in this instance, the fixed idea being that the truth of human

²² Troy, *Morning*, 15.

²³ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*. Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (New York: Scribner's, 1994), on which the title of this dissertation is partly based; Mark Pendergast, *Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives* (Hinesburg, Vermont: Upper Access, 1995); Dorothy Rabinowitz, *No Crueler Tyrannies: Accusations, False Witness and Other Terrors of Our Times* (New York: Free Press, 2003); James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley, *The Satanism Scare* (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1991); David K. Sakheim and Susan E. Devine, *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992); Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993); Richard Wexler, *Wounded Innocents: The Real Victims of the War Against Child Abuse* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, [1990], 1995); Lawrence Wright, *Remembering Satan: A Case of Recovered Memory and the Shattering of an American Family* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

behavior, and even of one's own experience, can be cloaked by a trick of the unconscious mind, which draws a certain amnesia over a painful past."²⁴ In *No Crueler Tyrannies: Accusations, False Witness and Other Terrors of Our Times*, journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz focuses primarily on the case against Gerald Amirault and his family. The book was based on a series of Rabinowitz's articles initially published in *The Wall Street Journal*, for which she eventually won a Pulitzer Prize. It laments that in the late 1990s, the "Supreme Judicial Court" in Massachusetts, where the Amiraults' resided and had run Fells Acres, "continued to find no miscarriage of justice."²⁵ These works provide detailed accounts of case participants and a chronology of events, collectively mounting a compelling challenge to guilty verdicts. Journalist Debbie Nathan and lawyer Michael Snedecker offer the most comprehensive overview of the satanic panic in *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt*, first published in 1995. The book centers on McMartin but delves into several other substantial cases that influenced, and coincided with, Ray Buckey's arrest. In an attempt to understand their cause, Nathan and Snedecker briefly cite the role of media sources, particularly books, but also news programs and tabloid television.²⁶ They likewise look at issues of gender and social class, providing an essential foundational text for this dissertation. This work also contributes to a growing number of important studies on moral panics in the United States, many of which mention the satanic panic as only one of dozens of unwarranted hysterical episodes over sexual behavior, and issues of

²⁴ Wright, *Satan*, 199-200.

²⁵ Rabinowitz, *Tyrannies*, 210.

²⁶ Nathan and Michael Snedecker, *Silence*, 4, 234, 242, 113.

morality more generally, in American history.²⁷ This dissertation, conversely, provides a comprehensive overview of the panic, its root causes, and the lingering cultural influence of satanic ritual abuse, as well as of tabloid television. The panic joins several other moments in American history in which the nation became hysterical over a circumstance that did not exist, or was greatly exaggerated. Although the context in which various panics have occurred has varied dramatically, they all share an environment in which accusations were based on irrational fears and where those leading the charges were not required to produce physical evidence of alleged crimes. The Salem witch trials, McCarthyism, and the satanic panic can be understood as similar events in the sense that powerful people strayed from reason and successfully punished individuals for situations that were fabricated or overblown.

Chapter one provides an introductory overview of television in the 1980s, focusing on how conservative access to the medium influenced the rise and success of tabloid fare. It discusses the qualities that defined sensational news on television, of which there was a growing amount, as it appeared in the 1980s. The chapter argues that it was the tabloid practice of supposedly authenticating the existence of conservative-defined threats that made the panic possible. Chapter two outlines the McMartin case, highlighting how it unfolded through tabloid sources. Because of the publicity it received, McMartin laid the groundwork for subsequent cases, serving as both a model and the panic's most extreme manifestation. To provide a full

²⁷ John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch-Hunting in the Western World* (New York: Viking, 2008); Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things?* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998); Neil Miller, *Sex Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002); Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

sense of the panic's scope and influence, the chapter weaves in other cases and examines how they were collectively endorsed and exaggerated through tabloid media.

Chapter three looks at how conservative Protestant evangelical Christians, one of the most important strands of the conservative coalition in the 1980s, influenced the panic. Allegations of devil-worshipping pedophiles at daycare centers encompassed several different evangelical-defined threats to their white suburban ideal. Conservative evangelical anxieties pervaded multiple media platforms throughout the 1980s, in part made possible through an expansion of the long-standing relationship between Christianity and American media. The evangelical fear of suburban enemies, conveyed through television in particular, give rise to the panic, which further endorsed their Christian worldview. The cultural ascent of powerful Protestant evangelicals dated back to the early Cold War, when television first began airing religious programming to cement America's alleged Judeo-Christian tradition. American corporations often employed the latter to provide capitalism with biblical underpinnings and demonstrate the system's moral authority in the face of "godless" Communism. Evangelical leaders in the 1980s, like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, began building their religious media empires in the 1950s, amid a commercial environment heavily influenced by contemporary Judeo-Christian interpretations of biblical morality. The panic confirmed a world viewed through their eyes, one rife with conspiracy, deception, sexual violence, lost innocence, and rampant fear.

Chapter four focuses on conservative ideals of gender, sexuality, and childhood in the 1980s, the most prominent of which were shaped by evangelicals. It demonstrates that these categories fundamentally reinforced one another in media sources, which had a strong bearing on the panic. The panic was part of a backlash to social movements in the late 1960s and 1970s

that had challenged white patriarchal norms. Many conservatives in the 1980s waged a cultural and legislative war on these movements because the latter worked to empower minority groups in the United States. Feminists and homosexuals incurred the particular wrath of evangelicals, who argued that both inflicted irreparable damage to children, whom evangelicals simultaneously elevated to mythic status. Media outlets heavily influenced by conservatives, which included tabloid television, portrayed childhood as a time of moral purity and sexual innocence. Many different media sources argued that career-oriented women and predatory sexual deviants compromised the alleged sacredness of a universal childhood. Such representations were woven into the panic, which acted to further endorse them. Adult authorities in panic cases viewed children as incapable of lying, whereas defendants like Ray Buckey, a young man in his early twenties, were cast as manipulative pedophiles.

Chapter five examines the influence of conservative views of race and culture on the panic, which primarily took place in white suburban communities that appeared comfortably middle-class. The panic's exclusive suburban location was a consequence of the fact that a vast array of commercial media content in the 1980s labored to create clear racial divisions between black and white. The former was often associated with criminally-minded urban African-Americans, as well as dangerous foreign threats, which were most commonly associated with parts of Africa and the Middle East. Conversely, the latter was tied to an idealized middle-class suburban landscape, far removed from cities plagued by poverty and crime. A black/white divide was visible in both television and reality, since communities continued to practice residential segregation. However, despite the physical absence of African-Americans and certain foreign groups in many suburban neighborhoods, tabloid news stories, as well as popular movies, depicted them as constantly threatening to destroy white suburbia and its nuclear family

values. The panic indicated that participants legitimated these alleged enemies by projecting the “black” identity of the latter onto white residents. Media representations of Ray Buckey and other defendants barely differed from those of black rapists and rioters, or violent foreign leaders. They all expressed the same deviant sexuality, anarchy, lawlessness, and conspiratorial-minded goal of destroying white suburbia.

Chapter six discusses how and why the panic waned in the early 1990s, as well as its many continued legacies. Although many prominent lawyers and journalists began to challenge panic cases after Buckey’s acquittal in 1990, the political climate that allowed conservatives to strongly influence media content did not change dramatically. Successive presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush adhered to, and expanded, many of the conservative economic policies enacted under Reagan, particularly those deregulating media ownership and content. As a result, tabloid television grew significantly, particularly the popular sub-genre of reality television, a term first loosely applied to programs like *America’s Most Wanted* before MTV’s *The Real World*, launched in the 1990s, gave it a unique identity, despite some overlaps. Although conversation about satanic ritual abuse at daycare faded by the mid 1990s, conservatives continued to shape many commercial images of white suburbia and its enemies across multiple media platforms. Challenges to those images, mostly in the form of a resurgence of satire on television throughout the 1990s, still profited directly from the commercial system it often claimed to parody.

The satanic panic serves as a cautionary tale. In the 1980s, corporations and individuals with a vested interest in expanding American commercial empires heavily influenced media content, particularly on television. The messages they conveyed about family, work, home, leisure, and the world outside of white suburbia worked to endorse, justify, and prolong their

mission for profits. Conservative politicians enacted simultaneous legislation that delivered real consequences, through incarceration, financial loss or instability, and social stigma, to those who failed to adhere to their strict standards of the ideal consumer. Beginning in the 1970s, more aggressive state, local, and federal laws regarding shoplifting, abusing or selling drugs, cult membership, abortion, and certain sexual preferences, punished individuals who did not share the collective conservative worldview. Together, conservatives under Reagan dreamed of America as a place of vast suburbs inhabited by white, patriarchal, evangelical nuclear families. Nestled in comfortable neighborhoods, they used their relative financial stability to surround themselves with the latest appliances and consumer products. The panic demonstrates that hundreds of people had accepted that dream by affirming a narrative that reinforced a wide range of conservative values.

CHAPTER 1

A “VAST WASTELAND”: AMERICAN MEDIA PENETRATION IN THE 1980s

“Strong stuff for television”

As a unique episode of paralyzing fear over devil-worshipping daycare centers in America, the satanic panic both influenced, and reflected, 1980s culture and society. It represented a climate where suburban residents were surrounded by commercial products, many of them tied to rapidly evolving media technologies, which helped to define the decade as one rooted in consumerism. Throughout the decade, large national corporations across dozens of industries increasingly invested in one another, as well as in foreign companies, and successfully pushed for government deregulation of many of their practices. They expanded their influence around the globe, helping to drive many Western nations towards conservative economic policies that were most pronounced, extreme, and aggressive in the United States.¹ For Americans, a growing number of personal needs and transactions were tied to the marketplace, where manufacturers of vastly different products potentially stood to benefit from one another's success. Continuing a trend evident since the 1950s, consumers also expanded the share of their income that went towards commercial entertainment.² The satanic panic was deeply rooted in the decade's conservative political mission to expand the size, power, and influence of American corporations around the world. It unfolded amid the cultural collision of conservatism's most

¹ Wills, *Innocents*, xxi, 264.

² Derek Thompson, “How America Spends Money: 100 Years in the Life of the Family Budget,” *The Atlantic*, April 5, 2012, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/04/how-america-spends-money-100-years-in-the-life-of-the-family-budget/255475/>.

triumphant strands, all of which employed the media, particularly television, to disseminate their overlapping agendas. At the essence of each conservative platform stood an endorsement of corporate deregulation.

In the 1976 satirical film *Network*, directed by Sidney Lumet, an evening news anchor named Howard Beale, played by Peter Finch, becomes a ratings success when he states he will commit suicide on air the following week. Although fictional network Union Broadcasting System (UBS) had recently fired Beale, which prompted his initial outburst, the popularity of his cantankerous rants lead network management to offer him his own show through the entertainment division. Dubbed “the mad prophet of the airways,” Beale spends his time on *The Howard Beale Show* venting his frustration with a society he condemns as both complacent and self-destructive. Beale preaches personal empowerment, which he most directly imparts to viewers by encouraging them to chant his catch phrase, “I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!”³ However, when Beale’s cynical message begins a ratings decline, network executives hire a terrorist group to kill him on live television, an act that launches a new season of *The Mao Tse-Tung Hour*.

Network, a film that experienced both critical and commercial success, was one of the first to present an explicit and coherent indictment of commercial television programming in the United States. Through the character of Howard Beale, film audiences were told that television was full of “illusions.” “None of it is true,” Beale explained, “But you people sit there, day after day, night after night, all ages, colors, creeds.” He continued, “You’re beginning to believe the illusions we’re spinning here. You’re beginning to think that the tube is reality, and that your

³ *Network*, directed by Sidney Lumet (1976; Burbank, California: Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD. “Network (1976): Quotes,” *IMDb.com*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074958/quotes>.

own lives are unreal.” Beale importuned to viewers that television is “the most awesome goddamn propaganda force in the whole godless world,” adding, “woe is us if it ever falls into the hands of the wrong people.” Beale’s scathing arguments, along with his exploitation at the hands of the network, offered a condemnation of contemporary television news and its penchant for sensationalism. Faye Dunaway as Diana Christenson, head of programming for the network, continuously demonstrates that in her search for new television content, she has no regard for the lives or emotions of others. She proposes a “weekly dramatic series” based on the terrorist organization that killed Beale. “The way I see the series,” she explains, “each week we open with an authentic act of political terrorism taken on the spot.” Christenson intends to work with “wanted criminals” in order to deliver a hit network series. She says of Beale, “let’s kill the son-of-a-bitch.”⁴

The potent messages in *Network* were embedded in a society that continued to undergo rapid technological change, much of it tied to television. By the 1970s, some people in the film industry were demonstrably anxious about these changes. Beale and other characters expressed fear and anger over how the corporations in control of television utilized it. Of particular concern was television’s persistently commercial role, which, in the film, had led Frank Hackett, UBN’s Executive Senior Vice President played by Robert Duvall, to label the network a “whorehouse.” Commercial radio companies had initially been responsible for the medium’s development and expansion in the 1930s and 1940s, reorganizing to form four commercial television networks: the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and the soon defunct Dumont Company. In the post-World War II era, as Western culture enlisted itself in the fight against

⁴ “Network.”

Soviet Communism, television became one of America's most important Cold War weapons. As Richard Nixon explained to Nikita Khrushchev on his vice-presidential visit to the Soviet Union in 1959, its existence and success proved that capitalism afforded a cornucopia of goods to its citizens.⁵ Nixon pointed to washing machines, houses, and cars as examples of how Americans enjoyed a higher standard of living than the Soviets, but employed color television as irrefutable validation that the United States was technologically more advanced. He did, however, concede that the Soviets were winning the space race.⁶

Housed in a rising number of living rooms around the country, television served as a constant reminder to Americans of their allegiance to a growing corporate system. While only nine percent of households in the United States had a television in 1950, by 1965 the number had reached more than ninety-two percent. Almost twenty percent owned multiple sets that same year.⁷ Thomas Doherty examines how an early advertisement for the medium captured the debilitating social consequences for those who failed to purchase a set. The ad warned viewers that children would “‘suffer in school and be shunned by their friends’ if the family resisted buying a television set.” “Soon it would be impossible to participate in schoolyard chatter or watercooler banter without the common reference point of the small screen,” adds Doherty.⁸

⁵ Cohen, *Republic*, 126; “The Kitchen Debate,” *Teachingamericanhistory.org*, accessed January 13, 2014, <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-kitchen-debate/>

⁶ Barnouw, *Tube*, 242; Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 73-74.

⁷ “Multi-Set & VCR Households,” and “TV Households,” *TVB.org*, last modified June 2012, 2, 6, 18, accessed August 28, 2014, www.tvb.org/media/file/TV_Basics.pdf.

⁸ Doherty, *Medium*, 4-5.

One intellectual wrote critically in the 1950s that Soviets commendably avoided television, which he designated the “supreme symbol of American commercial culture” because they understood that personal submission “to large doses of consumer incitement through visual images and some expectations of fulfillment,” would unleash a powerful commercial force into their society.⁹

However, neither corporate entities nor the technology that aided them were static. *Network* revealed that by the 1970s, American television was becoming increasingly exploitative, violent, sensational, and omnipresent. These controversial features were primarily tied to the dramatic expansion of television news, an important and continued addition to media content that, in the 1980s, spawned infotainment, or tabloid television. Diana Christensen’s statement in *Network* that UBN’s six o’ clock news was “straight tabloid,” a compilation of “sex, scandal, brutal crime, sports, children with incurable diseases, and lost puppies,” provided audiences with a realistic overview of much of the material on contemporary network television news shows.¹⁰ The trend is traceable back to 1949, with the broadcast of *Pitt Parade* on Pittsburgh’s local WDTV. The show aired for ten minutes each day in the early evening. Its expressed purposes, as articulated by the station producer, was to gain more local programming for the station, get “connected with television,” and bring in revenue. As Lynn Boyd Hinds explains, there was some uncertainty about selling the show as news because it focused mostly on social events in the Pittsburgh area. Stories included ribbon cuttings, spelling bees, fashion shows, bar mitzvahs, robberies, political events, sports games, notable deaths, and traffic problems, an eclectic array of

⁹ William Y. Elliot, *Television’s Impact on American Culture* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 16.

¹⁰ “Network.”

topics that former newscasters and writers for the show summarized as “light-weight stuff,” and “quick and dirty news.” Producers of *Pitt Parade* and subsequent imitators in other cities, however, decided to designate it “news,” reasoning that it copied the “personal and conversational” voice-over narration of movie newsreels, which were far less formal in their delivery than radio and national network news and often denounced by professional journalists as blatantly sensational. George Eisenhower, who worked at the station for forty years as its announcer, clarified in a 1993 interview that he had never considered the program “news” until recently, when the contemporary context rendered such a characterization appropriate. *Pitt Parade* had a strong influence on WDTV’s own studio-based news, which joined the independently produced show on air a year later. The station’s local news differed from *Pitt Parade* in that its delivery more closely resembled the national network news it imitated, using an anchor reporting “live” at a desk, which “gave the audience the impression this was someone who was authoritative.”¹¹ In function, the show was similar to *Pitt Parade* and employed many of its photographers as its first full-time employees. Although the two shows did not use the same footage because producers considered it a waste of money for the station, they were explicitly designed to bring in revenue and were successful in that respect, despite the fact that *Pitt Parade* ended after a decade.

Local network in-studio “Action” or “Eyewitness” news programs, which proliferated around the country as *Pitt Parade* gained popularity, brought to television America’s long tradition of selling human-interest as “news.” Until the advent of the medium, sensational news

¹¹ Lynn Boyd Hinds, *Broadcasting the Local News: The Early Years of Pittsburgh’s KDKA-TV* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2004), 47, 53-55, 68-71, 91-92.

was most often found in print.¹² The number of news programs rose with the expanding television audience and catered to a growing number of regions around the country. In 1952, Pittsburgh's WDTV became the first station in the country to broadcast twenty-four hours a day, which included a growing amount of material classified as "news." That same year, for example, Pittsburgh residents were able to watch NBC's new live morning news program, the *Today Show*, which imitated the "Happy Talk" format of local news, as well as the studio's in-house news, network national evening news, and *Pitt Parade*.¹³ Throughout the 1960s, local news shows became so popular and profitable that they helped to transfer "the power base from the network to the local station."¹⁴ Many shows were extended to half-an-hour, exploiting the solid reputation of live national network evening news broadcasts, which had also recently been lengthened from fifteen minutes to thirty starting in 1963.

In 1934, the Fairness Doctrine of the Communications Act had labeled licensees "public trustees" who were required to keep viewers informed of "controversial issues of public importance."¹⁵ To fulfill these public service obligations, networks started to air short, commercially sponsored national news broadcasts to keep the country updated on what they deemed relevant issues. The first sponsored television news programs debuted in 1947 with *Camel News Caravan*, featuring John Cameron Swayze, and CBS's *Television News with Douglas*

¹² Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 5, 16, 23, 30, 56.

¹³ Hinds, *Broadcasting*, 62.

¹⁴ Michael D. Murray and Donald D. Godfrey, eds., *Television in America: Local Station History from Across the Nation* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1997), xxv.

¹⁵ "History of the Fairness Doctrine," *PBS.org*, last modified December 17, 2004, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/fairness.html>.

Edwards, sponsored by Oldsmobile. While network evening news programs earned a solid reputation, they were not as profitable as local shows. When the economy declined towards the end of the decade, national networks, which received all the ad revenue from local affiliates, looked to their long-running local news programs to revive their profits. By 1968, a survey of 329 commercial stations around the country reported, “news is *the* major element in local programming, and the local television station has become the chief source of information for the country at large.”¹⁶ In the 1970s, news programs switched from film to videotape, which made it faster and easier to gather news because film reels no longer had to be processed. As the 1980s dawned, networks broadcast “local news inserts during the morning,” as well as “news at noon, and news in the evening and late at night.”¹⁷

In the United States, selling human-interest stories as news had consistently worked to reinforce commercialism. In the 1830s, urban “penny papers” were the first to successfully wed advertising to sensational news, which fundamentally reprioritized “newsworthy” information and reduced its price to a cent, as opposed to the era’s six cent political papers. The stories presented in penny papers were stripped of their historical context and seemingly unaffiliated with any political party, although their existence depended on maintaining commercial sponsors. Its model of using advertisements to fund a media enterprise was replicated with the birth of mass circulation magazines and yellow papers at the end of the century, initiating a pattern that would recur repeatedly throughout the twentieth. The growth of local television news during the early Cold War demonstrated that sensational human-interest stories had infiltrated the new

¹⁶ Herbert W. Land Associates, “Television and the Wired City” (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Broadcasters, 1968), 7, quoted in Hinds, *Broadcasting*.

¹⁷ Hinds, *Broadcasting*, 7, 139.

medium. While *Network* warned of the harmful consequences of such material, the film preempted an unprecedented expansion of sensational fare on television after 1980. As the decade progressed, local news was folded into the larger genre of tabloid television, or what critics labeled “trash TV.”¹⁸ According to Kevin Glynn, tabloid television encompasses “a loosely delineated collection of related genres rather than a singular cohesive one.”¹⁹ Taken together, the increasing number of tabloid shows in the 1980s worked exclusively on behalf of their corporate sponsors.

The satanic panic was an integral part of the rise and triumph of tabloid television, or infotainment. Infotainment shows introduced during the 1980s differed from one another in many respects, including style, delivery, and format, but shared an exclusive focus on sensational content. The most prominent tabloid programs of the 1980s included *Sally Jesse Raphael* (1985-2002), *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011), *The Geraldo Rivera Show* (1987-1989), and *The Morton Downey Jr. Show* (1987-1989), which were talk shows based on the model established by *The Phil Donahue Show* (1967-1995), first introduced in 1967; *Entertainment Tonight* (1981-present), *A Current Affair*, (1986-2005), *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987-2002) and *Inside Edition* (1989-present), which were classified as entertainment or “unconventional” documentary news programs; and *America’s Most Wanted* (1988-2012) and *Cops* (1989-present), defined as reality or “actuality” programming,

¹⁸ Harry F. Waters, Peter McKillop, Bill Powell, and Janet Huck, “Trash TV,” *Newsweek*, November 14, 1988, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 30, 2013.

¹⁹ Kevin Glynn, *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power, and the Transformation of American Television* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), 6; Kevin Glynn, “Tabloid Television,” *Museum of Broadcast Communications*, last modified 2014, accessed September 15, 2013, <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/tabloidtelev.htm>.

because they utilized “actual” crime footage like surveillance tapes.²⁰ Infotainment aired on the networks, which were joined in 1986 by FOX, and in syndication on cable. Their content was sometimes recycled into Hollywood films and network made-for-television movies, and increasingly picked up by national network news programs. Since the late 1960s, the latter had been shifting its stories towards more sensational human-interest to stay competitive with local news. The proliferation of tabloid material through television also influenced the creation and shape of Cable News Network (CNN), the first rolling 24-hour cable news network, launched by Ted Turner in 1980. Critics initially called CNN the “Chaos News Network” and the “Chicken Noodle Network,” because of its “news-*is*-entertainment philosophy.”²¹ A *Saturday Evening Post* article on Turner described him as the “41-year-old brat, genius, internationally acclaimed yachtsman, multimillionaire-owner of the Atlanta Braves (baseball) and the Atlanta Hawks (basketball),” who was “revolutionizing the television-news industry.”²²

Tabloid television included stories of scandal, crime, crisis, celebrity, and wealth that had long been popular with American consumers. As expressed by James Gordon Bennett’s managing editor of the *New York Herald*, a penny paper established in the 1830s, the paper’s

²⁰ Glynn, *Tabloid*, 4.

²¹ Stephen Cushion, “Three Phases of 24-Hour News Television,” in *The Rise of 24-hour News Television*, eds. Stephen Cushion, and Justin Lewis (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 17; Chris Paterson, “The Hidden Role of Television News Agencies: ‘Going Live’ on 24-Hour News Channels,” in *Rise*, 100; Joseph B. Cumming, Jr., “Ted Turner: ‘Captain Outrageous,’” *The Saturday Evening Post* 252, no. 7 (1980): 67, Academic Search Premier, accessed October 5, 2014.

²² Cumming, “Turner.”

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featured commercial fare apparently reflected the hopes and dreams of “the people.”²³ A century and a half later, Burt Dubrow, executive producer of *The Sally Jessy Raphael Show* in the 1980s, offered a similar statement, explaining, “We’ve been accused of showing women who used to be men, of focusing on nudists and terrorists and wives who shot their husbands. We’ve been accused of outfreaking each other, but I don’t agree.” He continued, “We just do subjects we feel will compel people to watch.”²⁴ Dubrow’s quote demonstrated that tabloid media on television continued to incorporate a populist tone tied to its origins, offering to “the people” an allegedly welcome circus of “the grotesque, the scandalous, and the ‘abnormal.’” Its main narratives revolved around “gender disturbances and ambiguities, troubled domestic and familial relationships, and paranormal phenomena that apparently outstrip the explanatory power of scientific rationalism.” It also highlighted “the ubiquity of victimization and the loss of control over the outcomes of events, and of one’s fate.”²⁵

Technological developments since television’s inception had made live broadcasts not only a major component of the medium, but central to the success of infotainment. A 1984 *Saturday Evening Post* article on Phil Donahue’s show insisted that delivering such emotional content live provided a guarantee that nothing was “faked.” The author of the article added that the show’s live broadcast made it “strong stuff for television.”²⁶ Live tabloid television programs

²³ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 46; Schudson, *News*, 17, 26, 52.

²⁴ Waters et. al, “Trash.”

²⁵ Glynn, *Tabloid*, 7.

²⁶ Starkey Flythe, “Phil Donahue: His Name is Controversy,” *Saturday Evening Post* 248, no. 9, (1976): 93, Academic Search Premier, accessed October 15, 2014.

mainly included talk shows and local news broadcasts, which allowed their content to take on urgency and appear credible. The genre also added more popular live content to television, joining national network news programs, *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), and sports broadcasts.²⁷

Tabloid television was incredibly popular. Throughout the 1980s, as it expanded in scope, it helped redefine television. Its appeal stemmed in part from its sensational stories, many of which were delivered live. Some of the genre's most spectacular fare was found on live talk shows. *Donahue*, *Oprah*, and *Geraldo* explored an eclectic array of intensely private matters, often through female guests, who opened up about topics they normally "would not have a chance to engage in, even with their physicians," according to a *Newsweek* article on the sub-genre.²⁸ A list of episodes for the 1981/1982 season of *Donahue* reveals that much of the material was violent and sexual. Some episodes featured intellectual and political guests like Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, Jesse Jackson, Ralph Nader, Senator Jesse Helms, Congresswoman Bobbi Fiedler, and Congressmen Jack Kemp, indicating that not all content was strictly tabloid. However, many others bore titles like "Missing Children: The Atlantic Story," "Male Sexual Solutions," "Women and Extra-Marital Affairs," "Abused Wives Who Have Killed," "Gigolos," and "Parents of Murdered Children," which demonstrated a strong penchant for sensationalism. Celebrity guests like Paul Anka, Loni Anderson, Harry Belafonte, Ringo Starr, and Itzhak Perlman also affirmed a tabloid fixation with wealth, celebrity, and talent.²⁹ An episode

²⁷ Tony Verna, *Live TV: An Inside Look at Directing and Producing*, ed. William T. Bode (Boston: Focal Press, 1987), 159-161.

²⁸ Flythe, "Donahue," 93.

²⁹ James D. Watson, "Phil Donahue Show Transcripts," *CSHL Archives Repository*, Reference JDW/2/8/2/12, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://libgallery.cshl.edu/items/show/53531>.

exclusively featuring Ted Turner, who had recently launched CNN, reinforced the credibility of both Donahue's show and Turner's cable network. Tabloid television's graphic material, the ire of many print sources, was central to much of its success. A 1984 *TV Guide* cover asking, "Is Local News Going Too Far," exposed the extent to which the genre revolved around transgressing personal boundaries.³⁰ As Kevin Glynn argues, infotainment constantly worked to "defamiliarize the ordinary and banalize the exotic."³¹

At the heart of tabloid television was its charismatic hosts. As the satanic panic played out throughout the decade, the infotainment universe became more crowded, with talk show hosts like Sally Jessy Raphael, Morton Downey, Jr., Oprah Winfrey, and Geraldo Rivera, who joined veteran Phil Donahue; tabloid news correspondents like Maury Povich of *A Current Affair*, Robert Stack of *Unsolved Mysteries*, and current FOX News anchor Bill O' Reilly, who was the first host of tabloid news program *Inside Edition*; and celebrity victims like John Walsh, who hosted *America's Most Wanted* after his son Adam was abducted and murdered a few years earlier. Some, like Phil Donahue, a former anchorman in Ohio, hailed from local news, but mostly their professional training and expertise, whether in broadcast journalism or another field, was not made transparent. Maury Povich appeared to boost the credibility of the entire enterprise when he took a job hosting the entertainment news show *A Current Affair*. Povich publicly scoffed at his earlier career as a serious journalist, which he made known in order to reject its conventional definitions of news. As he made the transition, he was quoted as saying that all news "was a

³⁰ "The Cover Archive/1980s/1884/February 11, 1984," *TV Guide Magazine*, accessed March 17, 2014, http://tvguidemagazine.com/archive/suboffer/1980s/1984/19840211_c1.jpg.html.

³¹ Glynn, *Tabloid*, 7.

circus delivered by clowns and dancing bears and should be taken with a lot of serious skepticism.”³²

Hosts received abundant media attention as their shows gained popularity, gracing the covers of a diverse set of magazines and print sources. A laudatory 1976 article in *The Saturday Evening Post* on Phil Donahue titled “Phil Donahue: His Name is Controversy,” added “What this country needs is a good five o’ clock listener.” The author commended Donahue for being “down to earth without being folksy.”³³ In 1984, Donahue, along with national network news anchor Ted Koppel, moderated the televised debates between Democratic candidates for president, marking them as “the first-ever presidential talk show debate with three hours of live television on PBS and eight candidates reaching some 9 million viewers in a nationally aired event.”³⁴ A 1987 article in *People* magazine on Geraldo Rivera stated, “He’s Tough, Smart and Honest—Just Ask Him—But Geraldo Wants Something More: Respect.”³⁵ According to many print sources, tabloid personalities exhibited a commendable “anything goes” attitude, despite resting their credibility on the fact that the show’s title bore their name.

Tabloid television as it expanded in the 1980s had a major impact on other media content. Following a trend that began in the late 1960s, when the profitability of local news

³² Glynn, “Tabloid”; Waters et. al, “Trash TV.”

³³ Flythe, “Donahue,” 70.

³⁴ “ABC Evening News for Friday, Jan 13, 1984, Headline: 1984 Vote/Debates,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed October 10, 2014; “The Republican Presidential Debate at Dartmouth,” *Dartmouth.edu*, last modified October 9, 2011, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/debates/about/history/1984.html>.

³⁵ Alan Richman, “He’s Tough, Smart and Honest—Just Ask Him—But Geraldo Wants Something More: Respect,” *People* 28, no. 23 (1987), accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20097773,00.html>.

became clear to network owners and executives, national news pushed towards sensational material that was often first covered by local affiliates. After Wayne Satz reported about McMartin on his local Los Angeles ABC affiliate in 1984, national evening news quickly picked up the story, as did network documentary news programs like ABC's *20/20*. Also, as cable stations were added to the medium throughout the 1980s, many revolved around, or incorporated, news on human-interest topics. New cable channels included ESPN, which focused exclusively on sports news; CNN, labeled "sensational" by critics; and MTV, a video music channel that in the late 1980s debuted a music news program called *The Week in Rock* (1987-present). The latter show, anchored by Kurt Loder, borrowed from tabloid media the assumption that celebrities and the entertainment industry were news.

Network "made-for-television" movies, produced by the station and a regular feature of the medium since the 1960s, also increasingly turned tabloid news headlines into a fictional afternoon or evening drama, which then claimed to be based on a true story. ABC's 1984 made-for-television movie *Something About Amelia*, for example, starring Ted Danson and Glenn Close, drew an unprecedented television audience of sixty million viewers. The feature took place in an affluent suburb and centered on a young white female victim of incest. According to the *New York Times* review, the film successfully demonstrated "that incest is not exclusively the dominion of lower-class, poorly educated, abusive parents—and that it is tragically possible for even the most 'mature' of grownups to confuse love with sex."³⁶ Although there was not a made-for-television movie on the panic, several others during the decade, like *Kids Don't Tell*

³⁶ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 107; "Something About Amelia (1984)," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2014, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/129084/Something-About-Amelia/overview>.

(1985), *Children of the Night* (1985), and *When the Bough Breaks* (1986), dealt with child sexual abuse, potentially validating its more extreme manifestations.

Many sources chastised infotainment for both its content and influence on other television programming, but also because it penetrated almost every American home. Television had long been criticized for a variety of reasons, notably condemned as a “vast wasteland” in 1961 by Federal Communication Commission (FCC) chair Newton Minow, but the scale and reach of the medium had grown significantly since then.³⁷ Technological developments like color television, which became cheaper and more widespread after the 1950s, improved the images’ visual approximation to reality. By the 1970s, a growing number of manufacturers offered color sets that were slowly expanding in size. Several different technologies helped improve signal quality and image resolution, although the United States held off on implementing a high-definition television (HDTV) standard, available in other countries, until the 1980s. HDTV “would perceive the same resolution, color, motion, depth of field, sounds, and immersion in the scene as real life.”³⁸ The number of households with multiple sets rose substantially, standing at fifty percent by 1980 and continuing to climb throughout the decade, reaching roughly sixty-five percent by 1990.³⁹ American consumers also invested in television’s growing number of accouterments, which in the 1980s included audio surround sound, Videocassette Recorders (VCR), video game consoles, satellite dishes, and cable television. Between 1980 and 1990, VCR use increased from just over one percent to nearly seventy and

³⁷ Barnouw, *Tube*, 299-300.

³⁸ Alexander B. Magoun, *Television: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 158-167.

³⁹ “Multi-Set & VCR Households,” 2.

the number of commercial television stations rose from 734 in 1980 to 1,092 by 1990, reaching a peak of 1,383 in 2010.⁴⁰ In 1990, cable reached fifty million subscribers, a number that had expanded exponentially since 1950, when it served fewer than one hundred customers.⁴¹ While these developments enhanced television's choice of content and the level to which the medium could immerse the viewer, they coincided with a dramatic expansion in sensational news content. As a story that was first made public on the local news, and that mostly unfolded through tabloid media, the panic was a direct outgrowth of television's ubiquity, as well as of the major changes in its content that increasingly orbited around sensational news.

From *Network* to *Videodrome*

By the 1980s, the expanding presence of tabloid television in the lives of most Americans mainly stemmed from the ascendancy of conservative political influence that had begun in the previous decade. That mass media platforms in the 1980s, particularly television sets, multiplied in number, became larger in size, and conveyed clearer images and sounds, was partly a reflection of the cultural prevalence of several different conservative ideologies. Although cable and VCRs opened up more commercial content choices for media consumers throughout the 1980s, conservative values influenced new material and helped yield television's domestic omnipresence. Tabloid television provided the media with one of its most effective means of promoting conservative ideals. While many books, movies, magazines, and songs

⁴⁰ "Commercial Television Stations," *TVB.org*, accessed August 28, 2014; "Multi-Set & VCR Households"; "TV Households."

⁴¹ William Emmons, "Public Policy and the Evolution of Cable Television: 1950-1990," *Business and Economic History, Second Series* 21 (1992): 182, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.thebhc.org/sites/default/files/beh/BEHprint/v021/p0182-p0191.pdf>.

increasingly reflected and shaped various conservative views, they did not generally share with infotainment a prestigious association with “news,” or the possibility of a live broadcast, a defining feature of many shows on tabloid television. These qualities rendered tabloid material, which circulated across a wide array of sub-genre shows, more credible. Sidney Lumet’s *Network* was both a response to, and criticism of, the simultaneous conservative turn taking place in media ownership and content that continued unabated in the 1980s. The film failed to stop the cultural encroachment of sensational news, which gave rise to the panic. McMartin and other panic cases were a product of the growing availability of sensational television content.

In the 1983 Canadian cult film *Videodrome*, directed by David Cronenberg, CIVIC-TV, a local fictional cable station, hopes to boost its ratings by airing programs that push the ethical boundaries of sensationalism. The station’s president, Max Renn, played by James Woods, discovers *Videodrome*, a live program that allegedly broadcasts out of Malaysia. Renn is aroused by the show, which airs individuals raping, torturing, and murdering naked female victims in a dark chamber. Even after learning that the content is real, Renn adopts it for the station. He soon discovers that the show is the creation of his friend, Brian O’ Blivion, a professor of cultural theory played by Jack Creley, who uses it as part of his selfish experiment to create a world where television completely replaces reality. O’ Blivion reveals that watching *Videodrome* induces a brain tumor in the viewer, triggering realistic hallucinations of body parts transforming into both television and weapons technologies. “There is nothing real outside our perception of reality, is there?” O’ Blivion asks Renn, who falls victim to the tumor’s terrifying hallucinations. Acting against her father, O’ Blivion’s daughter, Bianca, played by Sonja Smits, is eventually able to “reprogram” Renn to destroy *Videodrome*. With his hand morphed into a gun, he kills everyone trying to get their hands on the broadcast and its related technologies, ultimately even

himself. In the final scene of the film, Renn puts his hand to his head and shouts “Death to Videodrome! Long live the new flesh!” before the screen goes dark.⁴²

The film, which presented a more frightening view of television than the one earlier offered in *Network*, suggested that the medium’s content had continued to sensationalize since the 1970s. Although the higher body count and more graphic imagery in *Videodrome* reflected that sexual and violent material in film had become more acceptable, it also demonstrated that television seemingly had become more ruthless in its quest for ratings. By the early 1980s, Diana Christenson, the cold, remorseless network programming director in *Network*, had become Max Renn, a man whose ability to transform into both a gun and television set implied that all three had become fundamentally connected and shared a similar capacity for violence. *Videodrome* also proposed that the origins of television programming were more conspiratorial and sinister than they appeared in *Network*. Renn traces the broadcast of *Videodrome* beyond O’ Blivion to some of the world’s most powerful organizations, including an eyeglasses company, the U.S. government, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), who work together to realize their goal of brainwashing, manipulating, and ultimately destroying television audiences.

Videodrome placed the blame for destructive sensational television content on a collaborative effort between corporations and government agencies. Like *Network*, the film’s sentiments presented a critique of conservatism’s political and economic influence on television, which began to significantly affect the medium in the 1970s. Under successive presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, Congress signed legislation that made it easier for large, powerful American industries to monopolize, receive tax breaks, expand into foreign

⁴² *Videodrome*, directed by David Cronenberg (1983; New York, New York: The Criterion Collection, 2004), DVD; “Videodrome (1983), Quotes,” *IMDb.com*, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086541/quotes>.

markets, and manufacture their products cheaply abroad. Ronald Reagan's election to president in 1980 cemented a coalition of conservatives who jointly promoted the continued government deregulation of corporate policies. Although Jimmy Carter "had moved to the right on national security issues," he could not compete with Reagan, who supported corporate tax cuts and "a federal bailout for the Chrysler Corporation."⁴³ While the worldviews of each conservative strand contained fundamental differences, prominent figures in the movement made compromises in order to realize their collective goal of removing regulatory obstacles to global corporate expansion. The overwhelming dominance of American conglomerates on a worldwide scale in the 1980s allowed their owners, top managers, and political advocates to amass phenomenal wealth, but also to gain significant control of mass media outlets. Working together, neoconservatives, libertarians, economic conservatives, and evangelical Christians used their growing political and cultural credibility to push their values into the culture.⁴⁴ Throughout the decade, they consolidated several of the most prominent film, radio, television, newspaper, magazine, book, music, and telecommunications companies to disseminate their ideas. While the biggest, most profitable mergers did not occur until the 1990s, those of the 1980s guaranteed conservatism's political and economic success.⁴⁵

⁴³ William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 78; Troy, *Morning*, 37; Gil Troy, *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 38, 50.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Holt, *Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation, 1980-1996* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 9.

⁴⁵ James Walker and Douglas Ferguson, "The Structure of the Broadcast Television Industry," in *The Media and Entertainment Industries*, ed., Albert N. Greco (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 162.

Although “the FCC adopted formal rules prohibiting cross-ownership,” of media industries in 1974, the Supreme Court continuously ruled in favor of the many media conglomerates that objected to those rules in subsequent years. By 2003, dozens of successful challenges led the FCC to relent and allow for “unlimited ownership in large media markets.”⁴⁶ Over the interim, several media industries had consolidated. A year after ABC purchased television network ESPN from Getty Oil in 1984, it merged with Capital Cities Communications to become Capital Cities/ABC. As a “transaction valued at more than \$3.5 billion,” it was the “largest acquisition in U.S. broadcasting history” to that date. As a response to the historic merger, the FCC “stated they wouldn’t automatically oppose a network takeover.”⁴⁷ By the mid-1980s, just twenty corporations controlled more than half the nation’s newspapers and accounted for over half of total annual magazine sales. Roughly fifty companies controlled almost all print and electronic media.⁴⁸ In 1996, when Time Warner and Turner Communications merged, they “brought together a staggering array of entities,” which included film, television, cable, satellite, music, publishing, sports, and entertainment companies. Hanna-

⁴⁶ Adam Candeub, “Media Ownership Regulation, the First Amendment, and Democracy’s Future,” *University of California, Davis Law Review* 41: 1568, 1574, 1579, accessed October 2, 2014, lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/issues/41/4/articles/41-4_candeub.pdf.

⁴⁷ Charles Storch, “Capital Cities To Take Over Abc, Deal Tops \$3.5 Billion, Stocks Soar,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 1985, accessed October 15, 2014, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-03-19/business/8501150668_1_capital-cities-communications-american-broadcasting-cos-abc-television-network.

⁴⁸ “Fortune 500: A Database of 50 Years of FORTUNE’S List of America’s Largest Corporations, 1985” *Fortune Magazine*, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500_archive/full/1985/; Charles R. Geisst, *Wall Street: A History*, Updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 284, 329, 339; Eli Noam, *Media Ownership and Concentration in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 348; Don R. Pember, *Mass Media in America*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1987), 376, 378-80; Walker and Ferguson, “Industry,” 161.

Barbera Entertainment, New Line Cinema, CNN, Cartoon Network, Comedy Central, TBS, TNT, Sega Channel, Black Entertainment Television (BET), The WB, Time Warner Cable, Warner Brothers Records, Atlantic Group, Elektra, Time, Inc., Book-of-the-Month Club, Warner Books, Little, Brown & Co, the Atlanta Braves, World Championship Wrestling, and Six Flags Theme Parks were just some of the companies that were acquired. When Walt Disney Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, and ABC merged in 1995, “the deal represented 4.6 billion in cash flow and affected 85,000 employees.”⁴⁹

The consolidation of media industries in the 1980s was not possible without a simultaneous relaxation of many FCC policies, which allowed corporate interests to specifically enhance television’s commercial role. At the start of the decade, Ronald Reagan appointed Mark Fowler as FCC chairman. Fowler “initiated numerous liberalizations,” which included raising “the station cap for FM, AM, and television from seven to twelve stations with the stated intent to eventually eliminate it altogether,” and permitting companies to maintain television station licenses for five years rather than three.⁵⁰ However, controlling more stations also led media companies to push for content deregulation. In 1987, the FCC changed its guidelines for children’s programming by allowing companies to air program-length commercials, dissolving any “clear separation between program content and commercial messages.” Toy companies like Mattel immediately lined up shows based on their “highpriced interactive toys.”⁵¹ That same

⁴⁹ Walker and Ferguson, “Industry,” 161, 162.

⁵⁰ Candeup, “Ownership,” 1558.

⁵¹ Susan Pearson, “The Media Monopoly: Babes in the Marketplace,” *The Multinational Monitor* 8, no. 9 (1987), accessed May 12, 2014, <http://www.multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1987/09/pearson.html>.

year, the FCC also overturned the Fairness Doctrine, which had been established with the Communications Act of 1934 and adopted by the FCC in 1949 to mandate equal time to both sides of a political issue, as well as political candidates.⁵² It had also been responsible for the introduction of network evening news, establishing networks as “public trustees.” As a result of FCC deregulation, television shows, as well as many other media outlets, increasingly aligned their content with the conservative political agenda.

While their respective ideologies differed, neoconservatives, libertarians, economic conservatives, and evangelicals also shared an interest in idealizing, articulating threats to, and investing in the protection of, white, suburban, middle-class nuclear families. While evangelicals in particular held up the suburban nuclear family as sacred, all influential conservative groups rallied around it to some degree. They mostly did so to erase any vestiges of their interpretations of sixties liberalism. Central to 1980s conservatism was an intense spirit of backlash against leftist groups of the 1960s and 1970s. The collective efforts of the latter were problematic to conservatives because they directly challenged a desirable early Cold War norm that fueled American capitalism. Integral to “sixties” protest was a rejection of white, suburban patriarchy, as well as of the larger commercial system to which those norms were wed. Many prominent sixties liberals and their respective organizations had become disillusioned with one of the main driving forces behind America’s Cold War global expansion, labeled a “military-industrial complex” by President Dwight Eisenhower in his 1961 parting speech. Several social movements built on Eisenhower’s warnings against the “grave implications” of “an immense military establishment and a large arms industry,” arguing that their inescapable role in the

⁵² Barnouw, *Tube*, 76, 86, 271, 396; Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 298; “Timeline.”

success of capitalism rendered the entire system destructive, violent, oppressive, and unsustainable.⁵³ In a 1967 speech in New York, a year before his assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr. criticized the United States government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.” He explained that the nation operated under the misguided notion that “massive doses of violence” would “solve its problems.”⁵⁴

These critiques posed a serious threat to the potency and appeal of corporate capitalism, particularly in the United States. They provoked a growing number of increasingly powerful conservatives to shape a reactionary platform starting in the late 1960s. Throughout the 1970s, as intersecting conservative groups unified and concentrated their control over several commercial enterprises and media messages, they launched a cultural war on the many liberal groups that continued to grow and arise. They began to cast feminists, gay rights activists, black power advocates, hippies, environmentalists, and communists, who remained a reliable Cold War foe, as misplaced and selfish. Groups and individuals earnestly committed to social change were reduced to caricatures, painted as dire threats to the security and sanctity of white suburbia. Conservative representations depicted them as greedily feeding off the commercial system to satisfy their own depraved, dangerous desires, rather than as rejecting it outright. Feminists became cold, career-oriented mothers, gay rights activists became pedophiles, and black power advocates became ghetto thugs. The horror genre, which applied to books, film, and made-for-

⁵³ Berman, *Turn*, 43; Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 127-128; “President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Farewell Address (1961),” *Ourdocuments.gov*, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=90>.

⁵⁴ “Martin Luther King Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle,” *Stanford.edu*, accessed October 15, 2014, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/.

television movies, made a particular point of killing off teens who smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, engaged in sexual activity, hitchhiked, went camping, or defied adult authority. Paul Wells explains that the monsters of horror movies can be interpreted as “a moral force, excessively punishing the young for immoral and amoral acts.”⁵⁵ The genre also became notorious for quickly killing off racial and ethnic minorities.⁵⁶ Any association with liberal movements rooted in “the sixties” almost always earned characters a brutal, violent death. These representations were popular in the 1970s but accelerated after Reagan’s 1980 election.

However, as conservatives gained power in the 1970s, they also engaged in a process of redefining whiteness, suburbia, and who comprised the American middle-class to better fit their worldview. They revived and exaggerated elements of the post-World War II ideal to render these categories synonymous, as well as inherently non-ethnic, heterosexual, evangelical, patriarchal, financially comfortable, superior, individualistic, materialistic, and patriotic.⁵⁷ Certain foreign nationalities, as well as African-Americans from the inner city, became the polar opposite.⁵⁸ The situation appeared all the more catastrophic to conservatives because those who embodied the white suburban norm began to fade from view in dominant media outlets of the 1970s. For example, many television shows shifted away from family-oriented fare of the 1950s to deal with grittier material. While shows like *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974) and *The Partridge*

⁵⁵ Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2000), 79.

⁵⁶ Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 145-169.

⁵⁷ Graham C. Kinlock, “Black America in the 1980s: Theoretical and Practical Implications,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 14, no. 1/2 (1987): 17, JSTOR, accessed June 3, 2014.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Family (1970-1974) continued to present wholesome white nuclear family values, they were joined by programs like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), *All in the Family* (1971-1979), *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978), *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), and *Three's Company* (1977-1984), that explored, albeit often superficially, themes of poverty, feminism, homosexuality, and racism. However, as conservatives made substantial political inroads, the vast and growing media universe of the late 1970s and 1980s was increasingly repopulated by white middle-class suburbanites, as well as the stereotyped sixties liberals who threatened them.

As Reagan took office in 1980, an expanding number of media sources were invested in positioning conservative definitions of the white suburban nuclear family as sacrosanct, but also in peril. The horror genre not only offered negative stereotypes of “sixties” activists, but also successfully placed endangered white suburban families or teens at their center. Beginning in 1974 with the publication of *Carrie*, the many novels of author Stephen King, some of which were later adapted for film and television, provided devastating tales of nuclear family trauma. King's best-selling 1977 novel *The Shining*, which was subsequently made into a popular movie directed by Stanley Kubrick, focuses on a young nuclear family that spend the winter looking after a desolate hotel high in the mountains.⁵⁹ Even though the Torrance family does not reside in white suburbia, they embody its ideal. Jack, Wendy, and their son, Danny, conform to traditional patriarchal gender roles, do not openly associate themselves with any particular ethnic group, and take for granted the economic stability afforded by their lives at the hotel. Although

⁵⁹ Edwin McDowell, “Behind the Best Sellers,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1981, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/09/lifetimes/kin-v-behindbest.html>.

the family's religious affiliation is not mentioned in either book or film, the mental breakdown experienced by Jack involves inexplicable supernatural encounters. Otherworldly entities with malevolent designs prey on all members of the family, hinting that possession, rather than psychological illness, is behind Jack's violent mental snap. Jack spends the last half of the film stalking his family in a homicidal rage.

The growing amount of material categorized as horror aided and endorsed conservative claims about the nuclear family by providing terrifying representations of its enemies, some of which were allegedly based on true events. Movies like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Amityville Horror* (1979) claimed in their opening scenes to be portraying actual lived circumstances. The narrator at the start of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* explained to audiences, "The film you are about to see is an account of the tragedy which befell a group of five youths," adding, "For them an idyllic summer afternoon drive became a nightmare." His concluding sentence was particularly effective at allegedly rooting the film in reality, as it revealed that "the events of that day" had led "to the discovery of one of the most bizarre crimes in the annals of American history, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre."⁶⁰ Jay Anson's novel, *The Amityville Horror*, was compiled from his interviews with George and Kathy Lutz. Along with their children, the Lutz's claimed to have experienced paranormal activity in their suburban home. The family had moved into the house nineteen months after a man had brutally murdered his wife and children. The subsequent film seemed to validate the Lutz's story as told in Anson's book by asserting in the credits, "This motion picture is based on the book 'The Amityville Horror.' Certain

⁶⁰ "The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974), Quotes," *IMDb.com*, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072271/quotes>.

characters and events have been changed to heighten dramatic effect.”⁶¹ In 2013, Daniel Lutz, the family’s nine-year-old son at the time of the hauntings, finally broke his thirty-year silence on the experience. However, he did so by attempting to corroborate it. He insisted that his stepfather, George Lutz, “dabbled in the occult and was capable of telekinesis.” Daniel was “deeply traumatized by his past,” also stating that he was possessed by a spirit, “complete with a violently shaking bed.”⁶²

Fictional entertainment like horror movies supplied vivid visual material for tabloid media stories, which proved to be an even more potent weapon for supporting and enhancing the conservative worldview. The panic was not possible without a sensational news media that alleged, often on live television, that enemies in fictional films were actually corrupting and destroying the white suburban middle class. Beginning in the late 1960s, as the number and length of local news programs continued to expand, reports of urban black rioters, serial killers, female homicidal maniacs, cults, child pornography rings, and pedophiles attempted to expose them as embodying the grotesque and violent excesses of sixties liberalism. Infotainment sold as news the myriad horror-movie threats to white nuclear families. It appeared to confirm the anarchy and chaos wrought by a rejection of white patriarchy, Christianity, and nuclear family life, placing the white suburban middle class at the center of a “seamy exploration of life’s sleazy

⁶¹ “The Amityville Horror (1979),” *IMDb.com*, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078767/>.

⁶² Rafer Guzman, “Daniel Lutz, real ‘Amityville Horror’ victim, tells his new story in new documentary,” *Newsday*, March 14, 2012, last modified March 14, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.newsday.com/entertainment/movies/daniel-lutz-real-amityville-horror-victim-tells-his-story-in-new-documentary-1.4806550>.

underside.”⁶³ When Wayne Satz broke the McMartin story in early 1984, it was only the most recent of dozens of media reports on nightmare daycare centers. Equated with feminism, daycare was slandered in news media throughout the 1970s. However, the panic was also a means by which tabloid news on television further extended its reach. As they were introduced in the 1980s, talk shows, documentary or entertainment news programs, and actuality shows corroborated and built upon tabloid news narratives like the panic. McMartin and other cases appeared mostly on national network news and talk shows, as did related stories of satanic ritual abuse, child pornography, and bad daycare centers.

Conservative interests in the 1980s portrayed the white suburban nuclear family as a precious and essential commodity. Doing so allowed them to justify their political influence, including the legislation, military engagements, and discriminatory rhetoric that came along with it. It provided them with absolute moral authority to determine suburbia’s threats and aggressively campaign against them. That many suburban communities agreed with, and perpetuated, conservative ideology during the decade was evident in the growing numbers of gun owners. Between 1980 and the mid-1990s, Gallup polls indicated that the percentage of American households with guns rose from roughly forty percent to over fifty, despite a drop in the mid-1980s. The number of manufactured firearms rose from three million to five over the same years.⁶⁴ However, it was also evident in the satanic panic. The panic was primarily a product of the influence of tabloid media, which fully served America’s corporate system. It held

⁶³ Waters et. al, “Trash.”

⁶⁴ Jordan Weissman, “America’s Handgun Boom—in 4 Charts,” *The Atlantic*, December 14, 2012, , accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/12/americas-handgun-boom-in-4-charts/266305/>.

up a nuclear family ideal that was essential for the expansion of conglomerates and tasked citizens with identifying and punishing its enemies. While some individuals expressed frustration and anger with the commercial system during the era, their voices were mostly muted or drowned out. The panic unfolded unabated until 1990, when jurors in the McMartin case rejected the tabloid storyline presented by prosecutors.

CHAPTER 2

“THE HYPERREAL AND THE IMAGINARY”¹: THE SATANIC PANIC AS
INFOTAINMENT

Bad Mothers

Infotainment pervaded television in the 1980s. Those who watched it daily witnessed bizarre stories from a vast array of individuals, their testimony on talk shows corroborated throughout the day on local and network news. Some of the decade’s fictional media, particularly horror movies, which consumers increasingly had access to at home via VCRs, Betamax, LaserDisc, and premium channels like HBO, also reinforced events portrayed on tabloid television. They helped enhance tabloid fare’s growing visual repertoire, adding graphic images of violence and mayhem to news reports portraying similar scenes. Stripped of any political context that might undermine sensational tabloid and film content, many viewers accepted stories as not simply plausible but actually happening, in real-time, in towns across America. The satanic panic of the 1980s was both a cause and consequence of tabloid media’s cultural ascendancy. Hysteria over an implausible scenario swept dozens of residential communities, demonstrating that in the cultural struggle over the definition of “news,” the tabloid version had temporarily won out, particularly in its televised format. Hundreds of people fully invested in the idea that daycare operators around the country had molested and tortured children for years as part of cult practices called “satanic ritual abuse.”

In the summer of 1983, a schizophrenic woman named Judy Johnson dropped off her two-year-old son Matthew at the McMartin preschool. Although employees previously told Johnson the facility was full, one of the owners decided to accept Matthew for the summer.

¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 12.

However, after a few days of taking Matthew to McMartin, Johnson determined that she had found blood in her son's diaper and evidence that he had been sodomized. She called the police, reporting that a young male employee named Ray Buckey, known to the kids as "Mister Ray," had sexually assaulted her son. Although doctors initially found no signs of abuse, the police department sent Matthew to researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team (SCAN), agreed he had been sexually abused.² Various hospitals around the country had started organizing SCAN teams in the late 1950s. They were comprised primarily of doctors, nurses, and social workers tasked with reviewing abuse cases and aiding other professionals involved.³ Once Dr. Michael Durfee, who directed SCAN teams at a growing number of hospitals in Southern California and would remain central to the McMartin case, confirmed Judy Johnson's fears, Buckey was arrested.⁴ Although Buckey had not yet stood trial, local police chief Harry Kuhlmeier sent a letter to 200 parents of children who attended McMartin explaining that Buckey had potentially engaged in "oral sex, handling of genitals, buttock or chest area, and sodomy, possibly committed under the pretense of 'taking the child's temperature.'" He added, "photos may have been taken of the children without their clothing," and urged parents to ask their children if they had ever spent time alone with Buckey or seen him tie up a child.⁵ After parents received the letter in early

² Nathan and Snedeker, *Silence*, 70.

³ Marilyn Strachan Peterson, Michael Durfee, and Kevin Coulter, eds., *Child Abuse and Neglect: Guidelines for Identification, Assessment, and Case Management* (Volcano, California: Volcano Press, 2003), 239.

⁴ Michael Durfee, "Proposal to Reduce Child Deaths Due to Maltreatment," *Hearing Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives*, 112th Cong., 2 (2012), 69, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg78759/pdf/CHRG-112hhrg78759.pdf>.

⁵ Robert Reinhold, "The Longest Trial—A Post-Mortem; Collapse of Child-Abuse Case: So Much Agony for So Little," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1990, 1, accessed

September of 1983, a group of child sex abuse specialists arrived in Manhattan Beach to interview the children; law enforcement shut down, searched, and eventually firebombed the school; hundreds of charges were filed against Ray Buckey and Virginia McMartin, as well as her daughter, granddaughter, and other center employees; and talk show hosts and local reporters descended on the town of roughly 31,000 residents, providing the lens through which the panic unfolded.⁶

Judy Johnson was a young mother in her thirties with two children. Although she had a job at a department store, she spent time at home caring for another terminally ill son, Mitchell, especially around the time of her 1984 divorce.⁷ Johnson lived in a culture that was increasingly surrounded by infotainment, a fact that was potentially made apparent to her when her own life became part of a tabloid story. Tabloid television, as well as the law enforcement agents who reinforced its credibility and added to its substance through arrests, were primed to endorse Judy Johnson's schizophrenic delusions because they had been taking seriously individuals with similar stories for at least a decade. Although Virginia McMartin had established the McMartin preschool in 1966 and received recognition four times for her "outstanding community service," including the Rose and Scroll award, the city's highest honor, hundreds of people, including the

October 22, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/24/us/longest-trial-post-mortem-collapse-child-abuse-case-so-much-agony-for-so-little.html>.

⁶ "Table C-1. Cities—Area and Population, Manhattan Beach city," *U.S. Census Bureau, County and City Data Book: 2000*, April 1, 2000, 646, accessed September 22, 2014, www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/00ccdb/cc00_tabC1.pdf.

⁷ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 69.

reporters, detectives, FBI agents, doctors, lawyers, and social workers tied to the case, supported Johnson's claims, on behalf of her son, that it was a site of rampant satanic ritual abuse.⁸

After Satz reported the story, copycat cases were filed around the country and covered by local news programs, print media, and national television news. Less than a year later, in Malden, Massachusetts, a suburb outside of Boston, Gerald Amirault, a twenty-two-year-old daycare center employee, was charged with crimes identical to Buckey's and sentenced to eighteen years in prison. His sister and mother, who also operated the daycare, each spent eight years in jail.⁹ In 1985, Frank Fuster and his young wife Ileana, who cared for children out of their home in County Walk, a suburb of Dade County, Miami, were arrested for molesting children with drills, masks, and snakes as part of satanic ritual abuse. Ileana, who was only sixteen years old when she married Frank, a Cuban immigrant twenty years her senior, turned against her husband after Janet Reno, the state Attorney General of Florida, offered to reduce her sentence if she implicated him. Ileana and twenty of her client's children in County Walk, an area Frank Fuster described as a "fancy" private community, and "a high-middle-class development," testified against him, and he continues to serve out a 165-year sentence.¹⁰ In Thurston County, Washington, a suburb of the small capital city of Olympia, Paul Ingram, Chief Civil Deputy of the Sheriff's department, was sentenced in 1987 to twenty years in jail after

⁸ John Earl, "The Dark Truth about the 'Dark Tunnels' of McMartin: The Beginning," *Institute for Psychological Therapies* 7, (1995), last modified April 15, 2014, accessed January 3, 2015, http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume7/j7_2_1_1.htm.

⁹ Demos, *Enemy*, 282-292.

¹⁰ "Interview Frank Fuster," *PBS.org*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/interviews/fuster.html>; "A Summary of the Frank Fuster 'County Walk' Case," *PBS.org*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/frank/summary/html>.

being charged with raping his daughters and her friends as part of satanic ritual abuse.¹¹ As accusations surfaced against Ingram, Edward Clark and his co-director, Anita Schuler, of Citrus Day Care in Inverness, Florida, faced charges of “shocking crimes” in a town otherwise characterized by “the low cost of living, world-class golf courses and a gleaming network of lakes and rivers.”¹² Although the charges against Clark were dropped, Schuler went to prison two years later. In 1988, aspiring actress Margaret Kelly Michaels, an employee at Wee Care in the small suburb of Maplewood, New Jersey, spent five years in jail after a child said she had taken his temperature.¹³ The same year, Robert Kelly, who ran The Little Rascals Day Care Center in Edenton, North Carolina, was sentenced to twelve consecutive life terms, his wife Betsy to seven years, and Arnold Friedman, as well as his teenage son Jesse, who ran an after-school computer class for younger children in Great Neck, New York, received thirty and eighteen years, respectively.¹⁴

Although not all defendants were young, white men like Ray Buckey who worked for a neighborhood daycare center, tabloid media described every case in the same way following a template established with McMartin. Articles and infotainment reports glossed over major

¹¹ Wright *Satan*.

¹² Jan Glidewell and Barbara Behrendt, “A Nightmare Hits Home,” *St. Petersburg Times*, May 6, 1990, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 19, 2013.

¹³ Lona Manning, “Nightmare at the Day Care: The Wee Care Case,” *Crime Magazine*, January 14, 2007, last modified January 14, 2009, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.crimemagazine.com/nightmare-day-care-wee-care-case>; Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 108.

¹⁴ “Exonerating Jesse Friedman: Case Chronology,” *Freejesse.net*, 2012, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www.freejesse.net/original-case-chronology>; Miriam Durkin, “N.C. Day-Care Operator Convicted: Defense blunders, independent therapists, credible witnesses aid prosecution,” *ABA Journal*, July 1992 78, no. 7 (1992): 36, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 15, 2013; Dorothy Rabinowitz, “A darkness in Massachusetts-III,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 1995, last modified July 9, 2001, accessed August 15, 2013, http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122635385065015163?mod=_newsreel_2.

disparities in geography, social class, race, ethnicity, age, and gender between defendants and instead imagined an enormous, interconnected network of Satan worshippers. The cult ring was painted as so vast that it eventually seemed to trump any single individual, although accusations were often first directed towards white men. Those accusations included similar stories in which daycare operators or other prominent community members had sexually assaulted children with sharp objects, taken them on airplanes and to graveyards where they dug up bodies or sacrificed animals and babies, and forced them to participate in nude, pornographic games called “naked movie star” or the “stackup game.” With the help of social workers during private interviews, young children related these stories, often becoming animated in the process. One mother in the Wee care case said of her daughter’s responses: “it was almost as though I had to throw her into a cold shower to calm her down.”¹⁵ By 1988, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* identified at least thirty-six satanic ritual abuse cases around the country in which a total of ninety-one people had been charged.¹⁶ That same year, the publication of David Finklehor’s study on the phenomenon, titled *Nursery Crimes*, found 270 substantiated cases of ritual abuse between 1983 and 1985, although Jeffrey Victor points out, “fewer than a third of the cases were prosecuted, and less than a tenth resulted in guilty pleas or convictions.”¹⁷ *Time* magazine simultaneously reported that instances of sexual abuse around the country had reached 350,000, nearly a 5,000

¹⁵ Maria Eftimiades, “Mother’s Story of Child Abuse at Nursery,” *The New York Times*, August 18, 1991, 1, accessed August 5, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/18/nyregion/mother-s-story-of-child-abuse-at-nursery.html>.

¹⁶ Glidewell and Behrendt, “Home.”

¹⁷ Jeffrey S. Victor, “The Satanic Scare and Allegations of Ritual Child Abuse,” *Institute for Psychological Therapies* 3, no. 3 (1991), accessed January 3, 2015, http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume3/j3_3_1.htm.

percent increase from a total of 6,000 in 1976.¹⁸ Although the sexual abuse of children was a real and increasingly recognized problem in the United States, which the rising number of reports reflected, Judy Johnson's accusations as conveyed by reporter Wayne Satz launched a widespread hysteria that made it increasingly difficult to separate factual claims from fictional ones.

That Satz saw a story in Johnson's accusations against Buckey was the result of tabloid media's propensity for content that was cheap, live, local, and sensational, but also of relatively recent media attention and legislation on child abuse. In Kuhlemeyer's letter to parents, he specified that Buckey had been accused of committing child sexual abuse and engaging in producing child pornography, both first understood and articulated as widespread and dangerous societal problems in the mid-1970s.¹⁹ The major child-abuse legislation enacted during that decade had first gained momentum in the 1960s and directly addressed the issue of how children in America were treated in their own homes. Doctors, lawmakers, politicians, social workers, advocacy groups, and media sources, some of whom were later present at the McMartin trial and other panic cases, had begun to call public attention to contemporary forms of child abuse, or what medical professionals initially labeled "the battered child syndrome," in the early 1960s.²⁰ As a result of their activism, all fifty states passed abuse laws and, by the end of the decade, each had an operational central registry for filing abuse reports. After nascent agencies were quickly pushed to capacity by the large and growing number of cases, Minnesota

¹⁸ Margaret Carlson, Jonathan Beaty, and Elaine Lafferty, "Six Years of Trial by Torture," *Time* 135, no. 5 (1990), Academic Search Premier, Accessed August 12, 2013.

¹⁹ Jenkins, *Panic*, 119, 148.

²⁰ Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe, eds. *The Battered Child* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); C. Henry Kempe, *Helping the Battered Child and His Family* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1972), xi.

Senator Walter Mondale attained nearly unanimous congressional support for his sponsored bill, the first comprehensive federal initiative to recognize and confront the problem of domestic child abuse.

CAPTA, or the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, was signed into law on January 31, 1974 by Richard Nixon to provide “Federal funding to States,” as well as “public and nonprofit agencies including Tribal organizations,” to be used “in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities.” It established two bureaus, whose activities fell under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to address the problem of abuse: the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, which compiled, analyzed, and disseminated data, and the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), which supported programs and research on abuse.²¹ CAPTA injected the contemporary movement for child welfare with momentum, substance, and legitimacy, opening up broader inquiries into other potential forms of child exploitation. The issues of kidnapping, child pornography, and abuse within the foster care system were addressed in subsequent laws. In 1978, congress passed the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation Act, prohibiting commercial pornographic material of children under eighteen years of age. Prosecutors in many panic cases hoped to hinge their arguments against Buckey and others on the new law, but settled on conspiracy and sex abuse charges after multiple searches for evidence of child pornography, several of which were conducted by the FBI, turned up empty. The 1984 Child Protection Act, which partly resulted from, and fueled, the panic, guaranteed harsher penalties for alleged pornographers by reducing the age of a minor from

²¹ “About CAPTA: A Legislative History,” 2011, accessed January 26, 2014, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/about.cfm>; “Child Abuse Prevention Act, 1973,” *Eric.ed.gov*, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED081507>; Debra A. Poole and Michael E. Lamb, *Investigative Interviews of Children: A Guide for Helping Professionals* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1998), 10-11.

eighteen to sixteen and clarifying that material did not require images of children actually engaged in sexual activity to be deemed pornographic.²² By the early 1980s, Los Angeles County, which would handle the McMartin case, had an exceptionally widespread apparatus in place to address issues of abuse. Hundreds of professionals and volunteers dealt exclusively with identifying and combating sexual abuse, including law enforcement agencies, activist groups, therapists, social workers, lawyers, and medical professionals at many of the area hospitals and other health facilities, parts of which were overseen by SCAN director Dr. Michael Durfee.²³ By the mid-1980s, the number of area hospitals with SCAN teams had grown from six to thirty.²⁴ However, streamlining the process by which abuse cases were reported, filed, assessed, and handled remained difficult, particularly as tabloid media became involved and interfered at various stages.²⁵

CAPTA as it was initially devised was not without problems, some of which opened up the possibility for hysteria. As the law established large local, state, and federal bureaucracies, critics and scholars questioned the practicality and necessity of requiring the services of dozens of people from a wide spectrum of professional services and dragging families through the criminal court system.²⁶ CAPTA also left room for premature actions on the part of law enforcement, as was the case with police chief Kuhlmeier, who sent the letter to McMartin parents about Ray Buckey's alleged guilt before he had been tried for any crime. However, its

²² "H.R. 3635 (98th): Child Protection Act of 1984," *Govtrack.us*, accessed September 15, 2014, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/98/hr3635>; Jenkins, *Panic*, 149-150.

²³ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 76.

²⁴ Durfee, "Proposal," 5.

²⁵ Helfer and Kempe, *Family*, xiv.

²⁶ Poole and Lamb, *Interviews*, 11.

most problematic issue was that it rested on a general lack of consensus or information on what motivated abuse, including when it was most likely to occur and by whom, and the extent to which it involved mental, physical, and sexual assault. Although Brandeis sociologist David Gil found an intimate link between abuse and poverty in his landmark 1970 study *Violence Against Children*, when he remarked as much at CAPTA's hearings he was interrupted by Walter Mondale, the bill's sponsor, who explained that abuse was a "national problem," not a "poverty problem."²⁷ Regardless of its positive intentions, CAPTA mostly avoided confronting or defining what many scholars felt was a critical relationship between financial struggle and the propensity for a parent or guardian to abuse the child in their care. In a prelude to CAPTA, medical professionals argued in 1968's *The Battered Child*, an early influential text on abuse, that "social "social, economic, and demographic factors...are somewhat irrelevant to the actual act of child beating."²⁸

As Gil's perspective was silenced, male pediatricians arose as the nation's preeminent experts on abuse. They had determined based on their samples, which were often pooled from patients in their private practices, that abuse was definitively caused by "bad mothering," or the lack of a "mothering imprint" in abusers due to "unrewarding experiences with their own mothers."²⁹ Such testimony weighed even heavier as medical researchers coupled it with confident declarations that most abusers were women. While identifying mothers as the nation's primary abusers, they argued with passion and hyperbole, as psychologist David Bakan did in his 1971 monograph *Slaughter of the Innocents: Study of the Battered Child Syndrome*, that "the crushing out

²⁷ David G. Gil, *Violence Against Children: Physical Child Abuse in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 37; "Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 14.

²⁸ Brandt Steel and Carl Pollock, "A Psychiatric Study of Parents who Abuse Infants and Small Children," in *Battered*, eds., Helfer and Kempe, 108.

²⁹ Steele and Pollock, *Battered*, 108, 112.

of the life of a child...the killing of the new life that results from the coming together of the male and the female,” is “the most heinous of all crimes.”³⁰ Literature on sexual abuse also blamed mothers but took a different approach, partially because emerging experts like Dr. Roland Summit, a key player in the satanic panic, were often not in direct dialogue with physical abuse experts. Summit concluded that fathers committed incest because they felt unsupported by their aging wives and turned to their developing daughters for comfort.³¹ The patriarchs in this scenario were only indirectly at fault. A 1984 *Newsweek* “special report” on McMartin cited Summit as “a Los Angeles psychiatrist who is an authority on molestation.”³² Although such conceptualizations of bad mothers in western culture were not new in the 1970s, they served as the foundation of the most comprehensive and influential child abuse legislation in the nation’s history. They were clearly woven into CAPTA’s conceptualization of abuse, which conflated all abusers with “a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare” in its definition. The new law accepted and endorsed the conclusions of society’s leading medical professionals on the topic: that abuse of a child in a parent or guardians’ care, whom certain statistics suggested to be the mother, was one of the nation’s most urgent and widespread problems. As tabloid television launched the panic, it took CAPTA’s assumptions for granted and built on them, constructing bad mothers out of essential surrogate caretakers.

Ray Buckey did not obviously fit the description of a “bad mother,” but tabloid media represented him as such. By reporting frequently on ritual abuse cases, sensational news sources helped imagine a network of satanic cults that deceptively ran daycare centers, after-school

³⁰ David Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents* (New York: Beacon Press, 1972), preface, 1.

³¹ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 11, 18.

³² Russell Watson, Gerald C. Lubenow, Nikkifink Greenberg, Patricia King, and Darby Junkin, “A Hidden Epidemic,” *Newsweek*, May 14, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed April 15, 2014.

programs, or, in the case of Paul Ingram, a community police force. The panic's hysterical tenor was partially the result of a conspiracy whose betrayal was fundamental because of the role played by defendants. Described as "trustworthy authority figures," Buckey and other alleged perpetrators enjoyed harming the children they had agreed to help care for.³³ In one of two documentary specials on satanic cults, Geraldo Rivera validated the fundamental deception: "in the very places created to care for children, in nurseries and daycare centers across the nation, there are increasing reports of ritual sexual abuse." The television image then cut to a shot of three McMartin children, dramatically positioned with their backs to the camera.³⁴ Other negative stories of daycare centers pervaded media in the 1980s, but the panic demonstrated the extent to which tabloid media in particular was committed to portraying surrogate parenting as not simply inadequate but terrifying. McMartin children were quoted in *People* magazine as anxiously stating, for example, "Ray could come waltzing down the street anytime he wants—and we can't do a thing about it." According to tabloid media, Ray Buckey, his mother Peggy, and his grandmother Virginia were not only dangerous but lacked a "mothering imprint," already made vulnerable by their surrogate status. Coupled with a growing number of books, newspaper and magazine articles, national television news programs, and activist literature invested in the topic of satanic ritual abuse, tabloid media successfully pitted suburban nuclear families against less conventional surrogate ones.

In allegiance with the prevailing scholarship, the dominant child abuse narrative spun across dozens of media outlets in the 1980s, with infotainment lesading the charge and lending it legitimacy, was that financially comfortable white children around the country were being raped,

³³ Carlson et. al, "Torture," page.

³⁴ Geraldo: Devil Worship-Exposing Satan's Underground," 1988, *YouTube* video, 1:29:46, September 5, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcWbuBPNTpw>.

murdered, kidnapped, and abused by legions of “bad mothers” residing in suburbia. The panic was the narrative’s most extreme manifestation. While daycare center operators were arrested and publicly implicated in the panic, “bad mothering” extended to schoolteachers, ministers, doctors, police officers, social workers, friends, neighbors, relatives, and, in the case of McMartin, celebrities like Chuck Norris, who were also accused but generally not indicted.³⁵ Although statistics on crime in the era demonstrate that the narrative had little basis in reality, as shoplifting and residential burglary were much more endemic to the white middle-class suburbs surrounding Los Angeles, its improbability was clouded by the fact that some sensational news stories about white suburban children had tangible consequences.³⁶ For example, reports of McMartin and other panic cases were accompanied by arrests and convictions for many neighborhood adults.

Unlikely stories of violent abuse and exploitation against white suburban children were also potentially hard to dismiss because sometimes they were true. In the same decade, press outlets began reporting on sex abuse cases among Catholic clergy, many of whom were later convicted for their crimes, demonstrating that dozens of suburban children were truly part of a widespread child sex abuse problem. Other young people undeniably met tragic ends, as when news media across the country reported the story of six-year-old Adam Walsh, the son of *America’s Most Wanted* host John Walsh, who was kidnapped and subsequently murdered in 1981 while shopping with his parents in Hollywood, Florida. The case made headlines partly because of dad John’s aggressive public activism after efforts by state and local cops to find Adam

³⁵ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 114.

³⁶ Sanjay Marwah, *Suburban Crime: The Interplay of Social, Cultural, and Opportunity Structures* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, LLC, 2006), 212.

appeared uncoordinated and initially ineffective.³⁷ The McMartin case was embedded in a culture of intense media saturation where some reports of random or undeserved violence against white suburban children were true, but tabloid media had effectively blurred the line between reality and fiction, triggering hysteria. The environment led seven jurors in the McMartin case to emphasize that they believed a few of the children had been molested, but that someone other than the defendants was responsible.³⁸

As child abuse became an increasingly central cultural issue during the 1970s, early tabloid media exploited it and advanced the medical profession's rejection of the role of family economy in abuse and an explicit embrace of bad mothering as the cause. Stories of white, middle-class suburban children in danger from predatory bad mothers appeared in books, movies, magazines, and newspapers, especially in the wake of CAPTA. Most ignored social class, providing a powerful endorsement of the era's conservative cultural turn, which they were also helping to shape. McMartin unfolded as tabloid media's ubiquity became more pronounced, and VCRs and other new technologies brought fictional video and recycled television entertainment into dens and living rooms, further populating the world inside the television with bad mothers.

The Devil Worshipers

In 1968, Dr. Ray E. Helfer, an early leading expert on abuse and co-author of *The Battered Child*, feared that any system put in place to confront the abuse of minors, many of whom were too young to speak for themselves, had to account for opportunists who might use it for

³⁷ Glynn, *Tabloid*, 35.

³⁸ Susan Schindehette, "The McMartin Nightmare: California's Notorious Sexual Abuse Trial Ends in Acquittals, Leaving a Legacy of Anger and Anguish," *People* 33, no. 5 (1990), <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20116681,00.html>, accessed August 12, 2013.

personal gain. He cautioned against a district attorney eager for an easy win, or an “overzealous police department,” because an innocent person could suffer. He issued an especially stern warning against the news media, all of which were increasingly under the influence of infotainment, stating “sensationalism may sell newspapers, but it does nothing to help the people who deal with this problem.” Despite his own biases against mothers in understanding the causes of abuse, Helfer earnestly urged journalists to report on the problem responsibly in order to help combat it, rather than to sell papers.³⁹ The satanic panic serves as proof that no one heeded his warnings.

After Buckey’s September 1983 arrest, he continued to deny Matthew Johnson’s charges against him. He was released due to lack of evidence after a police search of the family’s property for pornography and physical evidence turned up empty. Many McMartin parents also questioned or openly challenged the charges, although a 1984 *Newsweek* article on McMartin quoted Bill Dworin, “a detective who works with the sexually exploited-child unit of the Los Angeles Police Department,” dismissing their challenges as denial. “Parents do not want to believe what has happened,” he explained, adding, “often, they accuse the child of lying or making things up.”⁴⁰ However, a week after Buckey’s arrest, a survey given to Los Angeles residents by the District Attorney’s office found that on overwhelming number considered child abuse a greater threat to children than drugs or drunk driving.⁴¹ A month later, in October, the case dramatically changed course. Although evidence for the initial charges against Buckey was weak, Los Angeles District Attorney Robert Philibosian, who was in the process of losing his 1984 campaign for reelection, decided to have his Assistant District Attorney, Joan Matusinka,

³⁹ Helfer and Kempe, *Battered*, 44.

⁴⁰ Watson et. al, “Hidden.”

⁴¹ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 75.

look into the case following the survey results. Matusinka was a child-abuse prosecutor who had worked with Dr. Roland Summit in founding Parents Anonymous, a sex abuse advocacy group created in 1967. Matusinka was actually part of several different organizations, many of them in the Los Angeles area, that had been established by doctors, social workers, therapists, prosecutors, and concerned parents over the past couple of decades to confront abuse.

While a member of The Preschool-Age Molested Children's Professional Group, a spin-off of the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), Joan Matusinka encountered social worker Kee MacFarlane, who was central to the group's efforts to improve police and trial interview techniques for young abuse victims. In its early years, Dr. Michael Durfee's wife, Deanne Tilton Durfee, had run the nation's largest branch of ICAN, a private non-profit established in the late-1970s for improving "policy development, provision of services, public awareness, education and training" on abuse.⁴² Matusinka recruited MacFarlane and other female social workers from the latter's full-time employer, Children's Institute International (CII), a private research group founded earlier in the century, to interrogate the McMartin children.⁴³ That she was able to do so was the result of a 1981 state law allowing specialists to conduct criminal investigations into abuse without police oversight. The law effectively incorporated recommendations from leading abuse experts that "law enforcement officials should be used at a minimum."⁴⁴

⁴² Durfee, "Proposal," 1.

⁴³ "About CII," *Children's Institute, Inc.*, 2014, accessed January 29, 2014, <https://www.childrensinstitute.org/about>; "About Us," *Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse & Neglect*, accessed January 29, 2013, <http://ican.co.la.ca.us/about.htm>; Carlson, Beaty, Lafferty, "Six"; Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 75-77.

⁴⁴ Robert Mertens, "Child Sexual Abuse in California: Legislative and Judicial Responses," *Golden Gate University Law Review* 15 *Golden Gate U.L. Rev.* (1985), 9, accessed May 29, 2014, <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev/vol15/iss3/1>.

Over the next six months, after CII came to Manhattan Beach in October, 1983 to begin interviewing children at the preschool, many of whom had initially denied that Buckey had molested them, the allegations against him were renewed. They were also extended to his mother, Peggy McMartin Buckey, his sister, Peggy Ann Buckey, who was reportedly “arrested in front of her high school class,” his grandmother and school founder Virginia McMartin, and six teachers.⁴⁵ With dozens of charges added in the spring, the owners and employees of McMartin were collectively indicted on more than 300 felony counts of conspiracy and “forced lewd and lascivious acts upon a child under age 14” over a five-year period.⁴⁶ Five government agencies, including the FBI, began an international search for evidence and Wayne Satz, who would eventually enter into a romantic relationship with Kee MacFarlane, began reporting the story on the local news.⁴⁷

When Matusinka brought in MacFarlane and CII to launch the investigation, they were working primarily with Matthew Johnson’s testimony as told by his paranoid schizophrenic mother. However, despite Judy Johnson’s deteriorating mental health, which prevented her from continued involvement in the case, CII began testing out their new interview techniques on McMartin preschoolers. The videotaped interrogation sessions of McMartin children conducted by CII’s social workers were part of methods recently devised by members of the Preschool-Age Molested Children’s Professional Group, like MacFarlane, and other such regional and national organizations, to coax information from young children about their experiences with sex abuse.

⁴⁵ Carlson et. al, “Six Years of Trial by Torture,” 26.

⁴⁶ “Molestation Charges Added,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1984: LexisNexis Academic, accessed March 17, 2014; Nathan and Snedeckerer, *Silence*, 71, 73; “New Charges Seen in Coast Molestation Case,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 1984, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/25/us/new-charges-seen-in-coast-molestation-case.html>; Schindehette, “Nightmare.”

⁴⁷ Carlson et. al, “Six”; Schindehette, “Nightmare.”

Lawyers and law enforcement agents were not yet sure how to best approach interrogating potential victims without further traumatizing them. The biggest issue they confronted was piecing together an abuse case from a child who was too young or scared to speak.

MacFarlane's controversial methods became standard practice in ritual abuse cases amid this environment of uncertainty, legitimated through state laws that passed investigative oversight to social workers. Although MacFarlane told Ray Buckey's lawyer, Daniel Davis, during her cross-examination that she could not recall having ever been tested for her credentials as an interviewer, she claimed she and her team had successfully elicited testimony of abuse from young children. They had done so by dressing as clowns and employing props like hand puppets and anatomically correct dolls. Until the McMartin interviews, the latter were most often used in sex classes for adults, offered by famed sex researchers William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to "illustrate sex positions."⁴⁸ After interviewing 400 children in this manner, CII concluded that more than 350 had been ritually abused over the past five years.⁴⁹

The strange, sexual stories children told to social workers sat at the center of the panic, comprising the bulk of its substance and appeal. As tabloid media reported it, children from ages two to sixteen told "dirty secrets" of getting undressed, fondled, touched, tickled, tied up, and probed. They said Buckey and other defendants had molested them in meat markets and bathrooms and taken pornographic pictures of them performing sex acts on adults. They reported episodes of "digging up dead bodies at cemeteries, jumping out of airplanes, [and]

⁴⁸ John Heidenry, *What Wild Ecstasy: The Rise and Fall of the Sexual Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 27, 289

⁴⁹ Carlson et. al, "Six."

killing animals with bats.”⁵⁰ Alleged victim Kyle Daniels testified that Ray Buckey had “sodomized him orally and anally in the preschool bathroom; another boy said he and a group of children were taken to a car wash, where Buckey molested them one by one.”⁵¹ In nearly every major panic case, interviews conducted with children by CII and other professionals versed in their techniques yielded narratives similar to one another. Although they denied it at first, children increasingly claimed they had been violently assaulted during cult ceremonies, describing in court and on tabloid television how they had been stabbed, raped, impregnated, and tortured, or forced to watch and participate in animal and human sacrifice. Children in the McMartin case “told of being forced to watch a rabbit sacrificed on a church altar,” as well of “mutilated corpses and a horse killing, and of blood drinking, satanic rituals and the sacrifice of a live baby in a church.”⁵² These “utterly absurd accusations” were straight out of a horror movie, a critical *National Review* article from 1990 argued in the wake of Buckey’s acquittal.⁵³ On one of Geraldo Rivera’s two live specials on satanic ritual abuse, he interviewed a young boy from Grenada, Mississippi, who had accused his father of ritually abusing him. In 1988’s “Devil Worship: Exposing Satan’s Underground,” five-year-old alleged victim Kaleb Kellum told Rivera that he was taken to “an old caboose,” sodomized, and forced to throw babies against a wall during satanic rituals. “Ow, did it hurt,” said Kaleb of his experiences, as a camera panned over his stick-figure drawings of abuse memories he had labeled “Hells House” and “Terror” in red crayon. Although the camera did not remain on one image long enough for the viewer to make

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Schindehette, “Nightmare.”

⁵² Reinhold, “Longest.”

⁵³ “The Salem Epidemic,” *National Review* 42, no. 17 (1990). Academic Search Premier, accessed August 14, 2013.

out its precise content, Rivera not only adamantly concluded that they “can chill a parent’s soul,” but also preempted the segment by urging adults to “get [children] away from the TV during the next report.” “We’re not kidding,” he warned.⁵⁴

However, Kyle Zirpolo, one of the handful of McMartin children who openly testified for the prosecution, later spoke out against CII’s interviews, during which most of the panic’s central narratives were elicited. In a 2005 *Los Angeles Times* exposé titled “I’m Sorry,” written by anti-panic journalist Debbie Nathan, Zirpolo told Nathan that he remembered thinking during an interview with CII, “I’m not going to get out of here unless I tell them what they want to hear.” Although Zirpolo kept insisting that “nothing happened” at the preschool, he explained, “I remember them almost giggling and laughing, saying, ‘Oh, we know these things happened to you. Why don’t you just go ahead and tell us? Use these dolls if you’re scared.’” Zirpolo recognized that their questions were manipulative, adding, “it was really obvious what they wanted. I know the types of language they used on me: things like I was smart, or I could help the other kids who were scared.”⁵⁵ When children claimed they had forgotten or simply did not know information, MacFarlane chided, “you must be dumb!” or asked, “are you going to be stupid.”⁵⁶ Although CII interviews provided a sensational news story, in the panic’s first and biggest case they did not ultimately hold up in a court of law.

On January 18, 1986, after a nineteen-month preliminary hearing, recently elected District Attorney Ira Reiner, who had defeated Robert Philibosian, dismissed charges against all McMartin defendants except Ray Buckey and his mother Peggy McMartin Buckey, whose

⁵⁴ “Geraldo,” 30:55.

⁵⁵ Kyle Zirpolo as told to Debbie Nathan, “I’m Sorry,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2005, 2, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/30/magazine/tm-mcmartin44>; Schindehette, “Nightmare.”

⁵⁶ Wexler, *Wounded*, 149.

charges were collectively reduced due to what Reiner cited as “incredibly weak evidence.”⁵⁷

While Peggy Buckey’s charges were dropped after the second trial, Ray faced two subsequent juries that eventually acquitted him on all counts for the same reason. Lawyers, jurors, and journalists ultimately criticized that MacFarlane “asked leading questions and rebuked children who did not tell of abuse.”⁵⁸ “I could not tell from watching the tape...that the children were telling what actually happened to them or if they were repeating what their parents told them,” a 1990 article in the American Bar Association journal quoted one juror as saying.⁵⁹ However, in the cases of the Amiraults, the Fusters, the Kellys, the Friedmans, Edward Clark, Anita Schuler, Paul Ingram, and Margaret Kelly Michaels, jurors believed the testimony of children and sentenced the defendants to life terms. Jurors on panic cases were in a difficult position because they had to distinguish their own courtrooms from the same ones depicted on television. Prosecutors and tabloid media unquestionably accepted the stories of children, influencing less sensational press outlets to do the same. It became potentially impossible for jurors to see that tabloid media might use guilty verdicts to promote its own credibility, as well as that of the panic.

Jurors also had to contend with the fact that the same names, faces, and people cycled in and out of courtrooms and news stories. Kee MacFarlane, who headed CII’s investigations, regularly appeared in national evening news broadcasts about McMartin on ABC, CBS, and NBC. Due to her role in the McMartin case, MacFarlane was interviewed in several taped segments over the months leading up to NBC’s August 1984 special documentary news report

⁵⁷ Schindehette, “Nightmare.”

⁵⁸ Durkin, “Operator,” 36.

⁵⁹ Don J. DeBenedictis, “McMartin Preschool’s Lessons,” *ABA Journal* 76, no. 4 (1990). Academic Search Premier, accessed August 14, 2013.

“Silent Shame.” The hour-long special “uncovered” the world of child sexual abuse, exposing viewers to frightening statistics, like the Justice Department’s claim that almost seventy percent of the prison population in America had been sexually abused as children, and that the number of female abuse victims was potentially one in three.⁶⁰ MacFarlane continued to appear on news segments following the special report.⁶¹ An ABC multiple-part evening news segment that also aired in 1984 entitled “The Molested Child: The Victim,” included an interview with Dr. Nahman Greenberg, an expert witness for the prosecution in the McMartin case.⁶² Glenn Stevens, a McMartin prosecutor, likewise made appearances on evening news reports on child abuse.⁶³ Other fixtures of both panic cases and news reports included FBI Agent Ken Lanning, who at the time of the McMartin case served as a special agent with the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) where he studied child molesters and other violent criminals; renowned sociologist David Finklehor, who became a researcher for a study on McMartin entitled *Nursery Crimes*, and sex abuse specialists Dr. Michael Durfee, his wife, Deanna Tilton Durfee, and Dr. Roland Summit.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “The Silent Shame, Headline: The Silent Shame,” August 25, 1984, *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*, accessed March 18, 2014; Key word search of “Kee MacFarlane,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed March 18, 2014. The search yielded 59 results total and 9 relevant results.

⁶¹ “ABC Evening News for Saturday, Dec 20, 1986, Headline: California/McMartin Child Abuse Scandal,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*, accessed September 16, 2014.

⁶² “ABC Evening News for Tuesday, Nov 13, 1984, Headline: The Molested Child: The Victim (Part II),” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed September 16, 2014.

⁶³ “ABC Evening News for Saturday, December 20”; “NBC Evening News for Sunday, Jan 27, 1985, Headline: California/Day Care Center Abuse Trial,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed September 16, 2014.

⁶⁴ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 130-132.

The panic gained momentum because it was part of the decade's expansion of tabloid media, which increasingly influenced most of America's major news outlets, a trend that the panic also helped solidify. Local news was always the first source to break stories of satanic ritual abuse cases. Following Satz's lead, numerous local network reporters relentlessly covered the major cases in their respective markets. In her criticism of the Fells Acre case in Massachusetts, journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz observed, it "had begun its long nightly run on the local news."⁶⁵ However, as they were introduced or expanded throughout the 1980s, other tabloid sources became invested in the story, exploiting it for their success. Several issues of the weekly magazine *People*, a human-interest and celebrity gossip magazine introduced in 1974 as part of the "rise of the celebrity-sex-entertainment niche," dealt directly with McMartin and other panic cases.⁶⁶ Headlines in the mid-1980s that may have been gleaned in supermarket checkout lines and magazine kiosks, where issues of *People* were centrally located and in abundant supply, included, "The McCartins: the 'Model Family' Down the Block that Ran California's Nightmare Nursery," and "The Young Witnesses in the McMartin Sex Abuse Case Undergo a Legal Battering in Court."⁶⁷ The former article painted the McMartin family as sinister and eccentric. It provided quotes from parents of allegedly abused children interpreting previous actions at the preschool as "creepy." One mother who once saw Peggy discipline a child, for example, claimed, "all she did was make him stand in a corner, but it seemed like she

⁶⁵ Rabinowitz, "darkness."

⁶⁶ David E. Sumner, *The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 10.

⁶⁷ Michelle Green, "The McCartins: the 'Model Family' Down the Block that Ran California's Nightmare Nursery," *People* 21, no. 20 (1984), accessed August 12, 2013, www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20087858,00.html; William Plummer and Joshua Hammer, "The Young Witnesses in the McMartin Sex Abuse Case Undergo a Legal Battering in Court," *People* 24, no. 2 (1985), accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20091231,00.html>.

enjoyed it.”⁶⁸ Both articles were published as Gerald Amirault and Ileana Fuster began to face accusations of abuse and Manhattan Beach plunged deeper into hysteria. Around the same time, the small town of Jordan, Minnesota, attracted particular media attention because twenty-four adults were arrested and dozens of others accused out of a total population of 2,600 people. The peculiar circumstances arose when “two mothers and their daughters” told police that a trash collector and “previously convicted molester named James Rud” had assaulted the young girls.⁶⁹ Journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz reported that in the wake of Buckey’s arrest, “investigators calculated at least 1,200 children had been molested in the South Bay area alone—one third of the population.”⁷⁰ As media outlets invested in the panic, a growing number of American towns became mired in accusations of satanic ritual abuse, their stories then quickly cycled into the growing numbers of sensational reports.

The panic also received a potent endorsement from the decade’s expanding population of talk shows. Their incredible popularity in the 1980s allowed Geraldo Rivera, Oprah Winfrey, and Sally Jesse Raphael to join Phil Donahue as household names. During the panic, shows featured episodes on both satanic ritual abuse and repressed memory, although as the decade came to a close, hosts displayed a “growing skepticism” regarding their validity.⁷¹ *The Geraldo Rivera Show* remained the exception, continuing to address satanic ritual abuse as a legitimate

⁶⁸ “Green, “McMartins.”

⁶⁹ Green, “McMartins”; Press et. al, “Witnesses.”

⁷⁰ Rabinowitz, “darkness.”

⁷¹ Dr. Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketchum, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 202.

epidemic through 1995.⁷² In 1988, a year after his show first debuted, Rivera presented a two-hour live special called “Devil Worship: Exposing Satan’s Underground.” It was the second, and more popular, of the two specials aired during the decade on the subject. The first, broadcast a year earlier, was titled “Satanic Cults and Children.”⁷³ “Devil Worship” was prefaced with an announcer’s warning that “parental discretion should be exercised” because the program dealt “with devil worship and satanic beliefs,” as well as “violent crimes and rituals.”⁷⁴ Produced by Rivera’s own Investigative Reporters Group, “Devil Worship” offered a graphic and panoramic view of “Satan’s Underground,” where scenarios like McMartin were a frequent occurrence.

The show was subjected to some public criticism, with executives of *The Today Show* refusing Rivera’s request to appear in a promotional interview before it aired and *NBC Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw commenting that the network’s choice to air documentaries outside of the news division “troubles me greatly.”⁷⁵ The day after the episode aired, the *New York Times* denounced the program as part of an overall decline in NBC’s entertainment standards, which, no longer subject to the rules of the news division, had “been all but eliminated recently.” The article highlighted Rivera’s difficulty finding sponsors, indicating that some companies chose to avoid the program’s subject matter. When asked about the problem, Rivera dismissively

⁷² “Geraldo Rivera: Satanic Ritual Abuse & recovered memories,” *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*, last modified November 7, 2007, accessed September 17, 2014, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/geraldo.htm>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Geraldo,” 0:01-0:11.

⁷⁵ Peter J. Boyer, “Program on Satan Worship Spurs Controversy at NBC,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 1988, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/26/business/program-on-satan-worship-spurs-controversy-at-nbc.html>.

responded by calling network standards “a noose around my neck.”⁷⁶ Reluctance on the part of commercial sponsors may have also stemmed from the fact that two years prior, Rivera had gathered hundreds of reporters to record live as he and construction crews unsealed cement rooms under Chicago’s Lexington Hotel. The NBC live special, called “The Mystery of Al Capone’s Vault,” scored high in the ratings, but reruns in syndication led to “unusually low network numbers” after the vault turned out to be empty. Rivera resorted to singing songs when two hours of searching yielded only a few empty whiskey bottles.⁷⁷ The episode aired carrying only fourteen commercials, two for the *National Enquirer* and “three for new horror movies” out of thirty-six potential spots.⁷⁸ However, it earned NBC its highest ratings ever for a two-hour documentary, reaching an audience of 19.8 million, or one third of all television viewers for its evening time slot.⁷⁹

As a live, sensational “documentary” program, “Devil Worship” was the essence of tabloid television. That it centered on satanic ritual abuse demonstrated the extent to which the panic was integral to the development and success of both the genre and Rivera’s notoriety. In the episode, Rivera claimed to expose a vast network of cults, pedophiles, pornography rings, and serial killers operating in America, and tied them directly to heavy metal music and Satan. “Satanism is more than a hodge-podge of mysticism and fantasy. It’s more than a Halloween motif. It’s a violent impulse,” stated Rivera’s voice-over narration, which also informed viewers

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ John Carmody, “The TV Column,” *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1986, LexisNexis Academic, accessed March 18, 2014.

⁷⁸ Jay Sharbutt, “Cauldron Boils Over Geraldo’s ‘Devil Worship’: ‘Satan’ Wins Ratings, Loses Advertisers,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1988, accessed March 18, 2013, http://www.articles.latimes.com/1988-10-27/entertainment/ca-449_1_devil-worship.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

that his show had chosen not “to laugh it off” as so many people did. They had instead courageously chosen to ask “why.”⁸⁰ The live documentary attempted to reflect to viewers a society characterized by depravity and chaos, where the presence of devil-worshippers implied the existence of something more sinister. It began with Rivera telling the story of Tommy Sullivan, a young white boy who murdered his mother and slit his wrists and throat after writing up a contract with the devil. Rivera asked, “how could this happen here? To a nice boy from a good Catholic school and a fine middle-class family?” The image cut to a tree-lined, yellow ranch house with a sedan parked outside. The police investigator told Rivera he did not expect to see such a brutal crime in “a town like this.”⁸¹ The rest of the documentary showcased several similarly disturbing stories of white suburban children devastated by ritual abuse.

To confront and weave together the “devil underground,” Rivera interviewed law enforcement agents, convicted serial killers, sex offenders, and alleged victims of ritual abuse, including McMartin parents and children. Rivera also questioned those who appeared to influence the practice of satanic worship. He interrogated Ozzie Osbourne, lead singer of the successful heavy metal group Black Sabbath, as well as members of the official Church of Satan, who were interviewed live via satellite and on the studio stage, respectively. However, Rivera brazenly interrupted and argued against their responses while sympathizing with, and supporting, those from alleged victims and law enforcement. He narrated to audiences that “a nationwide network of Satanic criminals exists” in the United States, purportedly dating back to Charles Manson and “demented Son-of-Sam killer David Berkowitz.”⁸² A previously recorded segment showed Rivera talking with Manson, who was not handcuffed, inside a federal prison, his arm

⁸⁰ “Geraldo,” 0:43, 3:50, 5:30.

⁸¹ Ibid., 11:10-13:06.

⁸² Ibid., 3:00-3:15.

draped casually on Manson's chair as they conversed. Other "documentary" footage included movie clips of exorcisms, courtroom videos of serial killer convictions, and taped interviews with famed American criminals. The urgency of the problem was reinforced by overlaying pre-taped footage with ominous music and Rivera's overwrought narration, as well as including highlights of the "notorious" McMartin case, which was still ongoing. "The children of McMartin are still filled with lurid stories of their awful experience there," stated Rivera in order to introduce audiences to the case. Rivera was then shown asking two McMartin children, a boy and a girl, positioned with their backs to the camera to protect their anonymity, "what did they say the devil would do to you." "They said that if we told that the devil would come and kill our parents and he said that we wouldn't live to be the age nine," the boy responded. "They would scare us really much," the girl concluded.⁸³

"Devil Worship" was infotainment at its most extreme, but its presence and popularity indicated that it was embedded in a society where sensational tabloid media content was both available and accepted. Such content directly influenced national network news programs, which forayed deeper into implausible material via the panic. "The Devil Worshippers" was a 1985 segment on ABC's hour-long television newsmagazine *20/20*, created in 1978 to compete with CBS's popular program *60 Minutes*. According to a *Los Angeles Times* review of the episode, which dealt with McMartin, it was pure sensationalism, taking "a back seat to none when it comes to drum rolls and vamping for the camera." Even McMartin parents watching the special told the reporter that it was incomplete and used "dramatic devices to make points."⁸⁴ Between 1984 and 1986, the NBC, CBS, and ABC national evening news collectively ran eighteen reports

⁸³ "Geraldo" 43:14-43:55.

⁸⁴ Howard Rosenberg, "'20/20' Takes a Limited View of McMartin Case," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1985, 1, accessed September 15, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-02/entertainment/ca-6193_1_mcmartin-case.

that dealt exclusively with McMartin, sometimes as part of longer stories on child sex abuse and pornography rings, with a few labeled “special segments.” Of McMartin, ABC’s substitute nightly news anchor Hodding Carter pondered in a 1984 segment, “All of those accused have pleaded not guilty. But there is no question in the minds of investigators that children were abused over a period of many years. How could it have gone on undetected?”⁸⁵ Network evening news also reported on some of the other major panic cases, including that of James Rud in Jordan, Minnesota and those of Frank and Ileana Fuster in Dade County, Miami.⁸⁶

Print sources, many of which explicitly denounced the excesses of tabloid media’s sensationalism, demonstrated the latter’s extensive and expanding reach as they played an essential role in promoting the panic. The weekly newsmagazine *Newsweek*, whose circulation numbers in the 1980s remained small when compared to leading tabloid magazines like *Star Magazine* and *National Enquirer*, ran headlines that read, “A Sordid Preschool ‘Game,’” and “The Youngest Witnesses.”⁸⁷ Despite decrying in a 1988 article titled “Trash TV” that the nation’s “pristine” news structure had “been invaded” by “brash, showbizzy hucksters bent on pandering to the most basic urges of the broadest possible constituency,” *Newsweek* depicted a society crawling with pedophiles. “Special reports” like 1984’s “A Hidden Epidemic,” claimed,

⁸⁵ Key Word search of “McMartin,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*, accessed March 17, 2014. The search yielded 40 relevant results out of 43; Wexler, *Wounded*, 147.

⁸⁶ “ABC Evening News for Monday, Oct 22, 1984, Headline: Special Assignment (Jordan, Minnesota, Child Sexual Abuse Controversy),” *Vanderbilt Television Archives*, accessed September 17, 2014; Key Word search of “James Rud,” 5 results; “Ileana Fuster,” 67 results, but only 4 on panic cases, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed March 18, 2014. Searches for others yielded no results. “Robert Kelly,” “Little Rascals,” “Margaret Kelly Michaels,” results only for 1994, “Arnold Friedman,” “Jesse Friedman,” 1 result from 2004.

⁸⁷ Aric Press, Mary Hager, Patricia King, Tessa Namuth, Diane Sherman, and Sharon Walters, “The Youngest Witnesses,” *Newsweek*, February 18, 1985, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 5, 2014; Steven Strasser and Elizabeth Bailey, “A Sordid Preschool ‘Game,’” *Newsweek*, April 9, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 5, 2014; Sumner, *Magazine*, 10.

“between 100,00 and 500,000 American children will be molested this year.” The report also supported the plausibility of satanic ritual abuse by recounting children’s testimony in McMartin of being forced to watch “the slaughter of pets such as rabbits and birds.” It emphasized that, while some people were raising doubts about the validity of particular cases, “molesters do hurt children.” “The bodily damage can include torn vaginas and rectums and venereal disease,” explained the authors before adding, “foreign objects are used with sickening frequency.”⁸⁸ Although *Newsweek*’s articles occasionally raised questions over whether the “pendulum of enforcement” had “swung too far” in sex abuse and satanic ritual cases, it continued to run stories throughout the 1980s that lent credibility to child abuse in its most extreme forms. Additional reports at mid-decade contained headlines like, “Epidemic of Child Abuse,” “California: Devilish Deeds?” and “Turning an Eye on the Lurid.”⁸⁹ The last article, from May 1984, discussed CNN’s live coverage of the McMartin case, reiterating the network’s position that it “would help educate viewers about a sensitive subject.”⁹⁰

Other print sources contributed to the environment of panic less explicitly than *Newsweek* by including sensational reports on sexual abuse of children. Stories of rampant pedophilia around the country, some of which included reports of satanic ritual abuse, appeared in a diverse range of mass circulation magazines, including *Time*, *Commonweal*, *Working Woman*,

⁸⁸ Press et. al, “Witnesses”; Watson et. al, “Hidden.”

⁸⁹ “Epidemic of Child Abuse,” *Newsweek*, August 20, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed September 15, 2014; Ron Givens and Janet Huck, “California: Devilish Deeds?” *Newsweek*, September 16, 1985, LexisNexis Academic, accessed September 16, 1984; Eloise Salholz, Alexander Stille, and Holly Morris, “Turning an Eye on the Lurid,” *Newsweek*, May 7, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed September 15, 2014;

⁹⁰ Salholz et. al, “Lurid.”

Nursing, *Ebony*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Life*.⁹¹ Throughout the decade, articles like a 1984 cover story in *Working Woman* titled, “When a child is sexually abused,” and a 1986 report in *Ebony* magazine called “How to Protect your Children from the People they Trust,” kept sensational representations of sexual abuse relevant and credible. The article in *Working Women* cautioned, “the old rule of not taking candy from strangers isn’t enough.”⁹² An article in *Time* entitled “Child Abuse: The Ultimate Betrayal” exactly coincided with Judy Johnson’s reports to police that Ray Buckey had allegedly molested her son. The story was published shortly before satanic ritual abuse had made a cultural mark, so the article did not discuss the phenomenon, but it included lurid tales of women recounting sexual abuse as children. One explained that her father took her to “secret places,” where he “would pretend that he was going to hang her or he would put her in a coffin-like box before abusing her sexually.” Another, through her “autobiographical account” titled *The Silent Scream*, told “of how her father had regular intercourse with her, as well as with her three sisters, from the time she was seven until she was 16.” After the article cited that the number of reported abuse cases had reached 851,000 by 1981 and climbed another twelve percent the following year, it sweepingly concluded, “at stake is America’s most precious asset, its human capital. At stake, too, is simple human dignity.”⁹³

⁹¹ Lori Carley, “Helping the Helpless: The Abused Child,” *Nursing* 15, no. 11 (1985), Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014; “Child-abuse agencies caught short,” *Commonweal* 112, no.15 (1985): 388, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014; “Helping Molested Children,” *U.S. News & World Report* 100, no. 10 (1986), 66, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014; “Sexual abuse,” *Life* 7, no. 12 (1984), Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014.

⁹² Marilyn Marshall, “How to Protect your Children from the People they Trust,” *Ebony* 42, no. 1 (1986), Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014; “When a child is sexually abused,” *Working Woman* 9, no. 8 (1984), 74, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014.

⁹³ Ed Magnuson, James Wilde, and Meg Grant, ““Child Abuse: The Ultimate Betrayal,” *Time* 122, no. 10 (1983), Academic Search Premier, accessed September 15, 2014.

The *New York Times*, which circulated nationally, conveyed similar tones in a 1983 article titled “Before a Parent Becomes a Child Abuser.” However, these self-designated non-tabloid print sources did not report on abuse often and mostly lost interest in the topic by the late 1980s. With the exception of *Newsweek*, they also generally avoided any discussion of satanic ritual abuse.⁹⁴ Regardless, for a few years they helped to paint American society as infotainment envisioned it, a place where middle-class white suburban children were in terrifying and constant danger at the hands of perverse adults.

Despite the climate of hysteria, some individuals began to effectively cast doubt on the phenomenon of satanic ritual abuse, with a few specifically condemning the hyperbolic reports on child sexual abuse. In 1986, CBS’s *60 Minutes* aired an interview between reporter Mike Wallace and the defendants of the McMartin case that Daniel Davis, Buckey’s attorney, believed was “wholly sympathetic to the defense point of view.”⁹⁵ That same year, Glenn Stevens, initially a prosecutor for the District Attorney’s office, defected to the defense, calling the case an “aberration.” Stevens publicly admitted that initial charges were filed prematurely and attacked CII’s subsequent handling of the investigation.⁹⁶ Over the next two years, defense efforts, along with Ira Reiner’s dismissal of charges against five of the defendants after his election to District Attorney, resulted in hung juries in two subsequent trials for Ray Buckey. However, it was after Buckey’s third and final acquittal in 1990 that skepticism of satanic ritual abuse cases turned to blatant condemnation. Exposé’s in *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York*

⁹⁴ “Before a Parent Becomes a Child Abuser,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 1983, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/23/opinion/1-before-a-parent-becomes-a-child-abuser-117854.html>.

⁹⁵ David Shaw, “Media Skepticism Grew as McMartin Case Lingered: News Analysis,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 21 1990, accessed March 19, 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-01-21/news/mn-980_1_mcmartin-case.

⁹⁶ DeBenedictis, “Lessons.”

Times, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* labeled the panic a witch-hunt and attacked the media's general complicity with the prosecution in every case.⁹⁷ Lawyers like Michael Snedecker, who co-authored *Satan's Silence* in 1995 with *Washington Post* journalist Debbie Nathan to condemn the panic as an episode of hysteria, expanded their efforts to release individuals wrongly convicted of sex abuse. The introduction to *Satan's Silence* explained, "the national mood has changed. Doubting is easy now."⁹⁸

In 1991, Peggy McMartin Buckey filed a class action suit against "the City of Manhattan Beach, Los Angeles County, Robert Philibosian, Los Angeles County District Attorney, Children's Institute International," as well as Kee MacFarlane, Capital Cities/ABC, and ABC reporter Wayne T. Satz, claiming her "rights to due process, privacy, equal protection, and a fair trial had been violated." Although she was unable to successfully appeal the lawsuit's eventual dismissal, its filing indicated that those who were persecuted felt more empowered by the early 1990s. Case transcripts cited that Peggy had accused MacFarlane of leaking the story to Satz at ABC. She believed that "Capital Cities/ABC wanted to sell a sensational story, and was willing to go beyond bounds of reasonable journalism to do so. In other words Capital Cities/ABC created rather than simply reported the news."⁹⁹ PBS subsequently conducted interviews with Frank Fuster that portrayed him as a victim and in 1995, HBO aired its original film *Indictment*, a

⁹⁷ See Robert Reinhold, "Long Molestation Case Viewed as System Run Amok," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1989, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/27/us/long-child-molestation-trial-viewed-as-system-run-amok.html>; Reinhold, "Longest"; Shaw, "Skepticism"; Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*; Rabinowitz, *Tyrannies*.

⁹⁸ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, page.

⁹⁹ Peggy McMartin Buckey, Plaintiff-Appellant, v. County of Los Angeles; City of Manhattan Beach; Robert Philibosian; Children's Institute International; Wayne T. Satz; Capital Cities/ABC; Kathleen "Kee" MacFarlane, Defendants-Appellees, (U.S. App 1991), LexisNexis Academic, accessed March 18, 2014.

dramatic fictional account of the McMartin case starring James Woods as Ray Buckey's lawyer. The movie presented the case from the perspective of the defense lawyers involved. Over the next two decades, convictions for the defendants in all major panic cases were overturned, with the exception of Arnold Friedman and Frank Fuster. Accusations of satanic ritual abuse at daycare after Buckey's acquittal in 1990 became rare and largely ignored by the media.

While many important and powerful people ultimately turned against the panic, it exacted significant damage to entire communities. Judge William Pounders, who presided over Buckey's second trial, stated after the latter's final acquittal, "the case has poisoned everyone who had contact with it." Buckey's trial remains the longest in the country's history, spanning from 1987 to 1990 after a nineteen-month preliminary hearing. It cost the state of California fifteen million dollars, which critics complained diverted resources from other parts of the judicial system, and amassed 63,000 pages of testimony, 927 exhibits, and 124 witnesses.¹⁰⁰ Although other panic cases were less sizable, they had a similar impact on their respective county criminal justice departments, as well as on all of the families and suburban communities involved. Most defendants lost businesses, jobs, homes, and friends. They spent years in prison for crimes they did not commit. Alleged victims like Kyle Zirpolo, some of whom as young children had testified in court, later publicly apologized for fabricating stories. Despite Zirpolo's fears that everyone would figure out that his responses were false, his only attempt to confess the truth failed because his mother refused to accept it. Concerning testimony of his alleged abuse, Zirpolo recalled, "it was like anything and everything I said would be believed."¹⁰¹ Victims like Kyle Zirpolo suffered great emotional turmoil, as did dozens of others earnestly involved, including doctors, judges, juries, law enforcement agents, lawyers, social workers,

¹⁰⁰ Reinhold, "Longest."

¹⁰¹ Zirpolo, "Sorry."

parents, and other relatives. As part of the panic, funding for CAPTA in the 1980s often privileged the issue of sex abuse in suburban communities at the expense of a substantial number of other forms of child abuse, many of them tied to family economy. The damage exacted by the panic was widespread and profound. While satanic ritual abuse was largely discredited and clearly exposed the dangers of deregulated commercial television in the 1980s, tabloid media continued to expand. Additional content in the 1990s included more channels, niche programming, reality television, and rolling news networks. Although the panic demonstrated that extreme and implausible stories conveyed through tabloid media were, for the most part, not legally sustainable, it also showed the extent to which tabloid media was shaping, influencing, and transforming the culture, as well as the definition of “news.”

CHAPTER 3

NIGHTMARES AND DREAMSCAPES: PARANORMAL ACTIVITY IN EVANGELICAL
SUBURBIA

The House that TV Built

Although it played an enormous role in spawning and perpetuating hysteria over satanic ritual abuse in America's suburbs, tabloid media sources were not solely responsible for the panic. It was also informed by the dynamism of conservative evangelical Christianity in America in the 1970s and 1980s. While religion in its various manifestations has played an instrumental role in shaping all human societies, America's particular brand of Protestant religious fundamentalism in the 1980s was uniquely pervasive because it was tied to the era's expanding global corporate structure. The satanic panic was a physical manifestation of the media's accelerated coupling of evangelical conceptions of suburbia with the occult during the 1970s, made possible in part by the simultaneous rise of tabloid television. Infotainment tightened and validated the relationship between the two by covering paranormal activity in suburbia as a news story and insisting that edited images, personal testimony, dramatic reenactments, authoritative narration, and live coverage served as indisputable evidence of an otherwise impossible reality. Tabloid media also joined the decade's various movies and sitcoms in endorsing and shaping evangelical ideals of nuclear family life.

During the twentieth century, leaders from America's leading Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish denominations often used cutting edge media technologies to spread their respective doctrines and wed their religious beliefs to political movements. Despite fundamental disagreements, these groups became integrally entangled in how those technologies were developed and controlled. Beginning in the 1930s, Father Coughlin, a Catholic priest from

Detroit, used his weekly radio show on CBS to discuss the New Deal and gradually criticize Franklin D. Roosevelt's policies as "dictatorial" and "communistic." By 1934, Coughlin had a weekly audience of over a million, a staff of over a hundred, and received ten thousand letters a day, testaments to his cultural influence and popularity, as well as radio's. His growing anti-Semitism, which echoed similar sentiments expressed by Adolph Hitler in Germany, led Roosevelt to adopt FCC regulations that effectively pushed Coughlin off the air.¹ Despite his forced retirement from radio, Coughlin demonstrated the potential power of evolving media technologies to turn religious figures into national celebrities and influence popular opinion.

After World War II, television became one of the most essential means of shaping and promoting America's alleged "Judeo-Christian" tradition, a recently articulated concept that was used as a political strategy in the 1940s. The phrase was designed to exemplify and parade American religious unity in the face of "godless" Soviet Communism. Other major mid-century efforts to craft a "Judeo-Christian" nation included adding "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and adopting "In God We Trust" as the national motto. The latter phrase was stamped on the currency, providing a clear religious endorsement of the nation's money supply.² In 1950, the United Synagogue of America, which represented several conservative Jewish congregations, asked that the government's *Voice of America* radio broadcasts, directed at Russian audiences, include "biblical readings, daily in order that the religious basis of our democracy may be carried to the world and that all men everywhere may benefit by the inspiration and strength that the Bible affords."³ As a new commercial technology, television was adequately poised to

¹ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 119, 266, 273.

² Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 274.

³ *Ibid.*, 80.

promote the tenuous alliance of three fundamentally different faiths, each with their own internal tensions, by allowing them to coexist on air through a few token representatives.

Several religious figures began hosting their own television programs in the 1950s. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen hosted *The Catholic Hour* (1930-1950) on radio, followed by *Life is Worth Living* (1951-1957) and *The Fulton Sheen Program* (1961-1968) on television.⁴ The success of evangelical preacher Billy Graham's earlier radio show *Hour of Decision* (1950-1951) primed it to make the switch to television in 1952, although it also continued as a radio program. Around the same time, a Lutheran church in Missouri launched *This is the Life* (1952-1988), a popular television show that centered on individuals confronting and resolving difficult personal situations by consulting a pastor. The show began on the DuMont network and was broadcast in syndication until the 1980s.⁵ In 1953, Rabbi Morris Kertzer aired *Faith of a Teen-ager* on CBS, the first of several similar shows in which Kertzer discussed various aspects of Judaism in conversations with family members and friends, in this case with daughter Ruth. The network also presented two Kertzer family Seders, the first live from their home in 1957 and the second filmed from inside a replica built at CBS.⁶ The success of these programs wove dogmatic religious content into the fabric of television. Prominent religious groups employed magazines, newspapers, books, and movies to explore and impart doctrine, but television, as it supplanted radio, was at the center of religious efforts to forge a permanent relationship between Judeo-Christianity, politics, and the content of American media. Although televised broadcasts from

⁴ Kathy Bruner, "Thinking Outside the Tribal TV Box," in *Understanding Evangelical Media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication*, eds., Quentin J. Schultze and Robert Herbert Woods, Jr. (Sacramento: University of California Press, 2009), 47.

⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁶ Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (University of California Press, 2009), 136.

Catholic and Jewish denominations began to fade in the 1970s, as well as their publicized involvement in American politics, the effectiveness of early Cold War efforts to prove the superiority of American religion over Soviet atheism guaranteed that the Holy Bible remained a defining cultural text.⁷

The panic and tabloid media were a product of the primacy of America's early Cold War Judeo-Christian tradition. Ray Buckey, the McMartin clan, and others were ultimately accused of perpetrating "satanic ritual abuse," an idea that could only be conceived and condemned in a society universally acquainted with the Bible and accepting of its interpretations of good and evil. According to tabloid media, the depths of Ray Buckey's depravity were indisputable partly because he worshipped Satan. However, the panic was not simply the manifestation of Judeo-Christianity's cultural prevalence. It was a symbol and result of its inherent tensions and the ascendancy of conservative evangelical Protestantism during the 1970s, which positioned itself on the frontlines of a holy war against a growing number of enemies. In the early 1980s, the increasingly popular media presence of conservative evangelicals began to crowd out the views of rival religious groups and political parties. Evangelicals were able to quickly influence much of the nation's expanding commercial media through powerful alliances forged with members of the Republican Party during the previous decade.

One of the most "controversial and prominent" evangelical conservatives of the 1980s was Jerry Falwell, a Baptist clergyman from Virginia and a member of the growing population of "televangelists" who preached religious sermons from their "electronic churches" on television.⁸

⁷ Peter Steinfels, "Roman Catholics and American Politics, 1960-2004," in., *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, eds., Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 345-346.

⁸ Steve Bruce, *Conservative Protestant Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 225.

Television provided Falwell and other preachers with the most influential platform available to inject contemporary evangelical ideology into the domestic space. Other recognizable televangelists of the decade included Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, James Robison, and Oral Roberts, each transporting “images and voices of God-fearing Christians into living rooms all over the country.” A 1985 *Time* article cited a survey estimating that over thirteen million television viewers watched religious programming the previous year, most of it from evangelicals.⁹ By the end of the 1980s, televangelists were raising hundreds of millions of dollars annually for their respective religious organizations through television, on both personal programs and as “staple subjects and topics in news broadcasts, talk shows, television specials, newspapers, and national magazines.”¹⁰ The *Time* article also appropriately labeled televangelists “celebrities,” who were “well financed, visible, organized and effective.”¹¹ Tabloid media rested some of its legitimacy on the cultural prominence of televangelists, who in turn gained notoriety by being on numerous television programs other than their own. Televangelists also directly benefited from Ronald Reagan’s relaxed FCC policies, which allowed more aggressive media monopolization and the broadcast of program-length commercials. When the FCC abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, it also absolved the need to present alternative sides of a political issue on any program, including the news.

Jerry Falwell began his personal political activism in 1973, after the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision legalized abortion. In 1979 he created the Moral Majority, an organization designed to insert a stronger conservative religious voice into national policy and embed it in a

⁹ Richard N. Ostling, Joseph J. Kane, Russell B. Leavitt, and Gregory H. Wierzynski, “Jerry Falwell’s Crusade: Fundamentalist Legions Seek to Remake Church and Society, *Time* 126, no. 9 (1985), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid, 79, 105.

¹¹ Ostling et. al, “Crusade.”

Biblical context. While Falwell's agenda was not entirely unique, since religious representatives from all denominations had long been engaged in American politics, it was tied to the immediate Judeo-Christian culture in which Falwell was raised, and exploited contemporary mass media on an unprecedented scale. Building on his religious efforts that first began in the 1950s, Falwell eventually amassed a political media empire that included audiotapes, videos, books, magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, radio shows, and television programs like *The Old-Time Gospel Hour* and *Jerry Falwell Live*, the latter of which debuted in the mid-1980s on Turner Broadcasting System (TBS), a recently introduced cable network.¹² In 1971, he also founded Liberty University, an institution of higher education that promotes itself as a "Christian academic community" and "incorporate[s] the facts of scripture into its teaching."¹³ While Falwell was not the era's only visible evangelical crusader, he was a movement leader and employed the media, particularly television, as his primary means of influencing the culture and politics. Through his efforts and that of his cohorts, evangelicalism, television, and conservative politics became further intertwined and potently influential. By 1987, an article in *The Christian Science Monitor* put the movement's followers at roughly 160 million.¹⁴

Over the course of the 1970s, as the evangelical agenda gained momentum, it increasingly centered on halting the "liberal" social movements of the 1960s. The thrust of Jerry Falwell's political activism was catalyzed by the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion in 1973, which was directly tied to feminist efforts. Falwell "and other anti-abortion Christians

¹² Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9-12.

¹³ Bruce, *Protestant*, 55, 63, 173.

¹⁴ Marshall Ingwerson, "Falwell's Move to PTS Seen as Attempt to Protect TV Preachers," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 3, 1987, Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014,

were meeting to discuss the idea that America would never fully realize its Christian potential unless the sin of abortion ceased.”¹⁵ Falwell and his Moral Majority organization contributed to and shaped an enormous “pro-life,” or “pro-family” movement that placed the abortion issue at its center and politicized many of the nation’s conservative religious groups. Although a few members of the Catholic Church figured prominently in the fight against abortion throughout the era, evangelicals dominated the media and pushed a more aggressive anti-abortion platform. They argued that the Church compromised with the devil by tolerating exceptions when the mother’s life was in danger.¹⁶ By the early 1980s, a powerful coalition of televangelists were working together, expanding the strength and size of their explicitly political organizations, the most prominent of which included Religious Roundtable, National Christian Action Coalition, and Christian Voice, as well as Falwell’s Moral Majority.¹⁷ One of their most successful tools was television, which helped them to articulate, define, and enhance their pro-life agenda, although they effectively utilized many other powerful media platforms. In 1986, for example, Falwell published a controversial novel entitled *If I Should Die Before I Wake*. It followed the story of a young middle-class girl who becomes pregnant twice and chooses to end the first with an abortion. The second time she decides instead to stay at one of Falwell’s maternity homes in Virginia and have the baby, with help from her supportive boyfriend. A negative *Los Angeles*

¹⁵ Bruce, *Protestant*, 47.

¹⁶ N. E. H. Hull and Peter Charles Hoffer, *Roe v. Wade: The Abortion Rights Controversy*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, [2001], 2010), 187-188.

¹⁷ Bruce, *Protestant*, 43, 176.

Times review of the book denounced Falwell's fundamental message, repeated in various ways across several media outlets, that "all's well that ends well if one comes over to Christianity."¹⁸

The abortion issue lured many previously apolitical evangelicals into Republican Party politics and formed the foundation of their pro-family platform. As they gained power in Washington, D.C in the 1970s, they aligned with other conservative organizations within the party, which together formed the "New Right." Early in the decade, conservative evangelicals established an important alliance with Phyllis Schlafly and her anti-feminist campaign to stop the Equal Rights Amendment. By 1980, they had coalesced as a powerful political lobby dedicated to tackling a growing number of "moral" issues, which, through their joint efforts, had expanded beyond abortion and feminism. Conservatives also named homosexuality, pedophilia, pornography, drug abuse, hitchhiking, teen pregnancy, welfare, and certain popular genres of music as dangerous and pressing social problems.¹⁹ Falwell's introduction in Richard A. Viguerie's 1980 text titled *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, lamented, "In the last several years, Americans have literally stood by and watched as godless, spineless leaders have brought our nation floundering to the brink of death."²⁰ These manifestations of an alleged "moral crisis" in America directly matched conservative evangelical interpretations of biblical sin, which they increasingly associated with the actions of liberal and radical social activists of the 1960s. Jerry Falwell and his cohorts specifically targeted groups like feminists, gay rights activists, hippies,

¹⁸ Daniel Callahan, "If I Should Die Before I Wake by Jerry Falwell," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1986, accessed March 25, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-03-30/books/bk-1476_1_jerry-falwell.

¹⁹ Ginger Strand, "Hitchhiking's Time Has Come Again," *The New York Times*, November 10, 2012, accessed September 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/opinion/sunday/hitchhikings-time-has-come-again.html?_r=0.

²⁰ Jerry Falwell, introduction to *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, Richard A. Viguerie (Falls Church, Virginia: The Viguerie Company, 1980).

and Black Power advocates, all of whom they believed exhibited the long list of depraved behaviors and activities deemed morally offensive. In a 1986 *New Republic* interview with Jerry Falwell, the liberal news magazine quoted Falwell as claiming that his life had been threatened by “[m]ilitant homosexuals, pornography peddlers, and abortionists,” as well as “communist terrorists.”²¹ When televangelists flooded television in the 1980s, their sermons reflected a broad conservative platform that incorporated the sixties backlash politics of several different groups.

At the center of conservative media messages in the 1970s and 1980s was an effort to reflect, shape, and conquer strands of the influential social movements of the 1960s. However, as they acquired media empires and political clout, evangelicals also played a major role in conceptualizing those movements, allowing them to aggressively react to their own negative representations. For example, Billy Graham’s popular evangelical publication *Christianity Today*, an important part of the preacher’s global media enterprise, included articles in the 1980s titled “Homosexual Marriage: Not a Christian Option,” “Black Youth Problems” and “Pro-Lifers Gear Up for Election Year Battle.”²² These opinion pieces both demonstrated and exacerbated conservative antagonism towards groups that seemed rooted in, or suggestive of, the radical social movements of the sixties. Richard A. Viguerie, a leader in the New Right’s direct mail campaign, was more straightforward, arguing in 1980 that liberals were responsible for all of America’s moral failings. He claimed “liberals” allowed “hardened criminals out on the street to kill, rape and rob again,” kept “kids from praying in school,” and forced American women to

²¹ Murray Waas, “Falwell’s New Name,” *New Republic* 194, no. 13 (1986), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014.

²² “Black Youth Problems,” *Christianity Today* 30, no. 13 (1986), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014; John R. W. Stott, “Homosexual Marriage: Not a Christian Option,” *Christianity Today* 29, no. 15 (1985), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014; “Pro-Lifers Gear Up for Election Year Battle,” *Christianity Today* 28, no. 9 (1984), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014.

“feel they are failures if they want to be wives and mothers.”²³ The observable resentments that comprised much of the evangelical conservative pro-family platform led one contemporary intellectual to publicly ridicule a fundamentalist as “an Evangelical who is angry about something.”²⁴

As contentious evangelical reactions to sixties liberalism became more visible in the media, they were accompanied by similarly hostile legislation. With abortion serving as one of the defining issues for evangelicals, many of the state and local laws sponsored by Republican politicians in the 1970s and 1980s aimed to control sexuality by denying community access to abortion, contraception, and sex education. Other laws attempted to eradicate the lingering reminders of sixties social experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, alternative religions or atheism, and free love. They successfully pushed to mandate prayer in schools, ban religious practices associated with cults, regulate recreational and medicinal drug use, remove evolution from textbooks, outlaw homosexual practices, and censor media condemned as explicit or obscene.²⁵

The conservative evangelical political platform had a critical bearing on the satanic panic. Not yet present for CAPTA’s 1973 congressional hearings, evangelicals played an active role in subsequent federal initiatives directed at protecting the nuclear family and children. In 1980, “feminists and moderates were taken by surprise by the ‘pro-family’ strength” at Jimmy Carter’s White House Conference on Families. Conservative delegates included anti-ERA advocates, members of the Catholic Church, and evangelicals, who stood in opposition to “abortion, the

²³ Richard A. Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, Virginia: The Viguerie Company, 1980), 5.

²⁴ Ostling et. al, “Crusade.”

²⁵ Ibid.

Equal Rights amendment to the US Constitution, and sex education.” In a prelude to the populist, anti-government rhetoric that defined Reagan’s presidency, pro-family groups at the conference criticized that the meeting had been called in the first place, rallying instead for decisions to be left to local and state governments. Despite the fact that they were amassing vast influence at the federal level, religious conservatives concealed their political strength by borrowing Reagan’s successful tactic of condemning state power while simultaneously planning to exploit, expand, and reprioritize it ²⁶ In every tier of government, through Republican Party politics, evangelicals increasingly helped counter the major social movements of the 1960s in the name of Christianity and their pro-family moral agenda. Coupled with their presence in the media, they wielded vast cultural influence by the time of the panic.

The panic pitted nuclear families in communities against a surrogate one who ran daycare centers, demonstrating that, by the 1980s, many individuals in suburban neighborhoods fundamentally accepted and upheld definitions of the family anchored in conservative evangelical religion. Televangelists like Jerry Falwell placed the nuclear unit at the core of their pro-family message, which anecdotes and biblical references made clear meant a man, his wife, and their children. As their media empires grew, they reintroduced earlier images of nuclear family life that in the late 1960s comprised a deliberately shrinking share of media space. Their representations reinvented the patriarchal, suburban landscape of 1950s television, where small, wholesome, white families like the Andersons of *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), the Nelsons of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966), the Cleavers of *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), the Mitchells of *Dennis the Menace* (1959-1963) and the Reeds of *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966), as well as those like the Kertzers, showcased in Judeo-Christian religious programs, resided. These

²⁶ Victoria Irwin, “Factions Seek Control of Family Conference,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1980, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0213/021317.html>.

programs were the first on television to introduce and shape ideals concerning community, neighborhood, work, and family in the suburban setting. Recreating conformist nuclear families of the 1950s made little sense after radical movements in the next decade successfully exposed that the country's disproportionate class structure and economic decline had begun to fundamentally reshape family life. But in the climate of conservative evangelical backlash, television suburbs of the 1950s were rebooted and once again given primacy, through sitcoms and religious shows, but also on tabloid television.

Televangelists did not control all of media in the 1980s, but owned several profitable television and radio networks, magazines, newspapers, book publishing and film companies. They promoted their consecrated vision of the 1950s nuclear family, itself born of Cold War Judeo-Christian ascendancy, on shows for worship, political discussion programs, cable networks, and tabloid television. In 1986, Pat Robertson introduced The Family Channel on cable, offering religious and political programs, as well as reruns of 1950s sitcoms.²⁷ That same year, media mogul Rupert Murdoch launched the FOX network. Although Murdoch was evasive about his Christian faith, he simultaneously became the world's largest publisher of Bibles through his publishing company, Zondervan. The deregulated economic climate of the 1980s made it possible for conservative evangelicals and those who allied themselves with their interests to exert a strong influence on the culture. Together, they exploited and helped solidify the interdependency of mass media, laws, politics, and finance in the Reagan era.

Representations of nuclear families from the 1950s and 1960s were reincarnated to comprise an expanding share of the 1980s television universe. They helped to reinforce and inform the simultaneous pro-family political agenda and laws that punished allegedly threatening behaviors associated with sixties liberalism. 1980s television revived and enhanced the prejudiced

²⁷ Harding, *Falwell*, 99-100.

underpinnings of suburbia that were critical to its early definition in the 1950s. After World War II, dozens of mass media outlets conveyed owning a private home in the manufactured landscapes outside of the city as the primary manifestation of the American Dream. Commercial culture employed suburban homeownership as a potent weapon in the fight against Soviet communism. Millions of Americans moved into the growing number of widespread mass-produced suburbs like Levittown, a trend that dramatically altered household dynamics more generally. While the “common household” in 1900 contained “seven or more people,” after 1940 it contained only two.²⁸ Suburban growth primarily accounted for the fact that the population of U.S. metropolitan areas rose from twenty-eight percent in 1910 to eighty percent in 2000. By the 1980s, the number of Americans living in suburbs continued to outpace the number in central cities, a trend whose origins were first visible in the 1940s.²⁹

Television in particular, which immediately wed itself to suburbia, shaped the prevailing media image of the latter, molding a place of exclusivity, privacy, conformity, and “whiteness,” despite significant ethnic differences among neighbors and neighborhoods. As tangible economic and social practices like redlining and the formation of Homeowners Associations (HOA) kept racial minorities out of suburban communities, real suburbs reinforced those shown on television and vice versa.³⁰ On popular sitcoms, those housed inside of it silently deferred to patriarchy and compounded early Cold War norms regarding politics, age, gender, race, social class, and sexuality. Visible patterns of residential segregation allowed suburban families, in

²⁸ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century: Census 2000 Special Reports*, United States Census Bureau, November 2002, 2, accessed September 26, 2014, www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf.

²⁹ Ibid., 7, 33.

³⁰ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 12, 196, 222, 257, 262.

reality and on television, to ignore the ripple effect of a mass exodus of resources and people from the once-thriving inner city.

In the 1980s, images of wholesome white suburban families once again dominated television. Many of the most popular sitcoms that aired on network primetime and in syndication on cable as the panic unfolded included *Family Ties* (1982-1989), *Silver Spoons* (1982-1987), *Webster* (1983-1989), *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), *Small Wonder* (1985-1989), *Mr. Belvedere* (1985-1990), *Growing Pains* (1985-1992), *Alf* (1986-1990), *Family Matters* (1986-1998), and *The Wonder Years* (1988-1993). These programs focused on small nuclear families reminiscent of the 1950s ideal, but slightly repackaged to accommodate and exploit contemporary media, technology, and society. For example, *The Cosby Show* revolved around the Huxtables, a financially comfortable nuclear family who also happened to be African-American. Consistently dominating all programming in its time slot throughout the decade, *The Cosby Show* was popular with black and white viewers, both an indication of, and a nod to, major shifts in the country's racial dynamics since the 1950s. However, while the show's all-black cast marked a departure from 1950s all-white family fare on television, it was criticized for its silence on the issue of race, as well as its general acceptance of prevailing ideals of wealth and success.³¹ Black characters and families like the Huxtables, but also adopted children on shows like *Webster* and *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-1986), often worked to reinforce the superiority and legitimacy of the white nuclear family. They either provided a point of fundamental contrast or erased heritage, culture, and political black consciousness. The popular show *Webster* revealed as its basic premise at the start of the series that Webster, an African-American character played by Emmanuel Lewis, had been taken in by his wealthy white godparents after his own were killed. As subsequent episodes

³¹ Greg Braxton, "Television: Where More Isn't Much Better" *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1992, accessed March 27, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-10-04/entertainment/ca-1112_1_cosby-show.

demonstrated, he immediately adopted their glamorous lifestyle, as a sports caster and socialite, at the expense of his own.

While the religious affiliation of television families was often made ambiguous, 1980s sitcoms offered a powerful media arena from which to display, cement, and expand on evangelical interpretations of the ideal American family. Television shows and texts were clearly influenced by conservative evangelicals who promoted the nuclear family as a bastion of traditionalism, where the confrontational politics of the 1960s and 1970s were rejected and erased. In the 1980s, families on television and in other media outlets were once again cast as heterosexual, patriarchal, fertile, financially comfortable, suburban, committed to sexual abstinence, and “white,” which meant non-ethnic. They were “pro-family, pro-moral, pro-life, and pro-American,” what Jerry Falwell called the “backbone of our country.” In Falwell’s *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, the family was also the primary social unit where Christ’s love could be “rediscovered.”³² Most notably, each member subscribed to contemporary evangelical conceptions of traditional gender roles, which always orbited around a strong, patriarchal father. Mirroring viewers seated on living room couches or at kitchen tables, television sitcom dads like Danny Tanner on *Full House* (1987-1995) and Cliff Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* frequently imparted advice to other family members, particularly children, the essential substance of which was comprised of a conservative pro-family message. On the first episode of *Full House*, which debuted in 1987, oldest daughter D.J. relocates her bedroom, which she shares with her sister, to the garage because she misses her deceased mother. However, she moves back into her shared room after her father, Danny Tanner, sternly reminds her of the importance of family. “DJ, we’re still a family and right now is when we really need to stick together,” he admonishes, “so it’s up to you: either you move back into the house or all five of us are moving into the garage,

³² Falwell, *Wake*, 148.

but nothing is going to break up this team.”³³ Although family dynamics varied between sitcom families on shows with different premises, the dominant representation was of a small patriarchal nuclear family unit, most often headed by a white father with at least three children, residing in a tree-lined residential neighborhood.

Other media sources and television genres in the 1980s helped bring together and shape the evangelical pro-family political agenda, demonstrating how far-reaching its influence had become. Movies like 1985’s blockbuster *Back to the Future* transported audiences to the fictional suburb of Hill Valley, located inside a Universal Studios lot in Santa Clarita, California, not far from Manhattan Beach.³⁴ The film remains one of Universal’s most successful movie franchises of all time. After the original film earned \$358 million at the box office, it was followed by two sequels, a ride at Universal Studio’s new theme park in Orlando, Florida, an animated television series, comic books, video games, and apparel.³⁵ When the second film was released in 1989, the *L.A. Times* reported that video rentals for the first film went up 2000 percent.³⁶ In the film, main protagonist Marty McFly, played by Michael J. Fox, one of the decade’s rising global celebrities, accidentally travels back from 1985 to 1955 in a time machine. The time machine was the creation of Marty’s friend Dr. Emmett Brown, played by Christopher Lloyd, an eccentric

³³ “Full House: Our Very First Show (1987),” *IMDb.com*, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0584188/quotes>.

³⁴ “Back to the Future (1985),” *IMDb.com*, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088763/>.

³⁵ Elaine Dutka, “‘Back to the Future’—Filming in Double Time,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1989, 1, accessed March 27, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-11-20/entertainment/ca-92_1_future-part-ii; “Back to the Future—The Complete Movie Trilogy,” *Backtothefuture.com*, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.bttf.com/movies/>.

³⁶ Dennis Hunt, “Renewed Interest in Renting ‘Back to the Future Video,’” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1989, accessed March 27, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-12-08/entertainment/ca-285_1_future-ii.

inventor whom Marty affectionately calls “Doc.” Doc houses the machine in a DeLorean, a car that symbolized both the appeal and excesses of 1980s commercialism. Earlier in the decade, their billionaire manufacturer, John DeLorean, declared bankruptcy and was indicted for fraud, tax violations, and drug trafficking. National network evening news programs reported on the story regularly from 1981 to 1985.³⁷ When Marty accidentally befriends his mother and diverts her necessary attentions from his future father by becoming the object of her affections, he enlists a young Doc to help him get his parents together and return to 1985. Marty spends a week in Hill Valley while Doc fixes the time machine, living like a “typical” fifties teenager in the early years of the Cold War. He hangs out in the school cafeteria, watches episodes of *The Honeymooners*, drinks milkshakes at the local diner, and confronts Biff Tannen, the school bully.³⁸ While the film made brief references to the era’s racial tensions, it overwhelmingly showcased a quaint, racially segregated ideal built on a Universal Studios lot. In the 1970s and 1980s, new multiplexes and megaplexes replaced older movie theaters and employed Dolby Surround sound, an advanced stereo technology that also became available for home use through audio cassettes, CDs, TV broadcasts, video games, and PC software.³⁹ In 1985, *Back to the Future* plunged audiences into powerful fictional visual manifestations of evangelical pro-family values. The film positioned the consummation of Marty’s nuclear family as its central plot device, resting the existence of Marty and his siblings on his parents’ first kiss at their high school dance.

Across their expanding media empires, televangelists insisted primarily on the superiority of white patriarchy and nuclear family life, which they correctly argued some sixties social

³⁷ Key Word Search of “John DeLorean”, *Vanderbilt Television Archives*, accessed September 27, 2014. The search yielded 72 results from October 1981 to October 1985.

³⁸ *Back to the Future*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (1985; Hollywood, California: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

³⁹ “Definition of: Dolby Surround,” *Pcmag.com*, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/41673/dolby-surround>.

movements had rebelled against. Hollywood movie studios supported and enhanced their view through films like *Back to the Future*, as Marty spent the duration of the film helping his young father become a better man, in turn gaining his own self-confidence and ambition. After Marty's father, George McFly, also stands up to Biff and wins over Marty's mother, Lorraine Bates, he is rewarded in the future with respect, wealth, and a successful career as an author. Marty returns to 1985 to find his father a competent, strong patriarch, qualities he once lacked and a reason Marty initially gravitated towards Doc, a single, childless old man. Marty's future existence rests on his father embracing patriarchy, heterosexuality, whiteness, suburbia and the nuclear family in 1955, which he presumably was unable to do the first time he lived through it. Advancing these dominant features of early Cold War conformity ultimately brings George financial success and allows him to impart its values to his son in the new 1985, an act symbolized by the expensive Jeep truck he buys Marty.

Throughout the decade, multiple media outlets became infused with evangelical representations of nuclear family life. While *Back to the Future* recognized class differences, as the McFly family started the film with low-income jobs and a shabby house and ended with successful professional careers and expensive furniture, it suggested, in unison with other conservative political voices of the decade, that white patriarchal incompetence was to blame for family strife. After George stands up to Biff in 1955 and wins the love of Lorraine, he earns the reward of a successful future. He confidently tells Marty towards the end of the film that he can accomplish anything he puts his mind to, a recurring refrain in the movie that Marty first attributes to Doc.

Charles Manson Media

At the core of the conservative evangelical agenda stood a fundamental rejection of scientific evidence and an embrace of mysticism, the existence of which, starting in the late 1960s, was convincingly corroborated on television through local and national news reports on UFO's, demon-worshipping serial killers, and exorcisms. The occult, as conservative evangelicals defined it, crept into most media genres and outlets over the next decade and invaded their equally as popular and pervasive conceptions of nuclear suburbia. The sixties liberals whom political conservatives believed posed immediate dangers to a resurgent nuclear family ideal were imagined as devils. They infiltrated suburban neighborhoods and homes to murder, rape, torture, haunt, stalk, and possess primarily white women and children, who comprised the center of nuclear family life. While demonic entities in the media occasionally appeared in cities, particularly Los Angeles, they were mostly confined to white suburbia as it was imagined in the 1980s.

Suburban demons operated within an overarching cultural narrative of bad mothering, an idea not exclusive to white suburbia but most visibly tangible there by the 1980s. In the late 1960s, Charles Manson became one of the first criminals to serve as a symbol of the dangerous consequences for depriving children of a safe, stable, suburban nuclear family environment. Manson, one of the first news media celebrities painted as an embodiment of the excesses of sixties liberalism, was not only represented as a rejection of the nuclear family but as one of the most destructive forces acting against it. Marking the onset of news media's turn towards sensationalized human-interest stories, local and national television news reports on Manson overlooked the role of a strong economy, from the individual level to the global one, in maintaining a nuclear family model. Figures like Manson instead continually took the blame for a real decline in suburban living standards

throughout the 1970s, which was tied to deindustrialization and policies of deregulation that also characterized the next decades. The “traditional” family unit invoked by evangelicals and modeled on the 1950s early Cold War image was, in reality, much harder for most Americans to achieve and sustain by the 1980s. Manson-types became cultural scapegoats. Their destructive, masculine personas, which were rooted in white suburbia, evolved with the expanding commercial climate to produce the media’s most extreme manifestations of sixties liberals set on destroying nuclear family life. During the 1980s, the media universe became more crowded with these demonic, Manson-esque icons of suburban terror, both real and fictional, which included Michael Myers, Jason Vorhees, Freddy Krueger, and Ray Buckey.

Suburbia as most media imagined it by the 1980s was built of both nightmares and dreamscapes, appropriately the title of a popular short story collection and subsequent television mini-series written by Stephen King, one of the era’s predominant horror genre novelists. Its shape, like that of the nuclear family, was heavily influenced by conservative evangelicals, who imagined it simultaneously as Hill Valley, the fictional suburban dreamscape in *Back to the Future*, and Twin Peaks, the small nightmarish community of the successful 1990 ABC mini-series of the same name. The show centered on FBI Agent Dale Cooper, played by Kyle Mclachlan, and his investigation into the murder of homecoming queen Laura Palmer in a secluded Washington community. Although it aired in 1990 as the panic was waning, the suburban neighborhood conceived by director David Lynch was the culmination of previous communities described in the media that subverted the ideal, like Manhattan Beach and Olympia, Washington, as tabloid television presented them. *Twin Peaks* wove paranormal visions, perverted fantasies, and demonic serial killers into the fabric of small town life, suggesting that a warm, close-knit community existed to hide its

antithesis, on which it also depended for survival. While other voices in society shaped suburbia throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the conservative evangelical agenda, intimately tied to the nation's media outlets and expanding corporate conglomerates, played a critical role in determining how it looked and who allegedly posed the greatest threats against it.

As a result, numerous movies, television shows, songs, books, magazines, and early video games of the 1980s immersed suburbia in a world of dark magic, invaded by paranormal activity and products of the supernatural, including demons, witches, ghosts, vampires, aliens, telekinesis, extrasensory perception, hypnosis, repressed memory, psychics, Ouija boards, and astrology. *Twin Peaks* was part of the widespread cultural appeal of unearthly phenomena as it was visualized in the era's media. The show was one of several that contributed to television's collective portrait of a surreal, mystical universe that flagrantly and fundamentally defied the laws of physics. Homecoming queen Laura Palmer, the murdered star of *Twin Peaks*, was the only daughter of white, middle-class parents in a town of many similar family units. Regardless of whether some representations were grounded in satire and designed to critique dominant idealistic images, as they frequently were in *Twin Peaks*, suburbia and the occult were often conceptualized and understood together. Their symbiotic relationships drove media images of nuclear family life further away from the era's reality of rapidly shifting and unstable social and economic conditions. The bizarre universe presented on fictional television shows was validated through infotainment, which sold it as "news."

Beginning in the late 1960s, local and national network news forayed into supernatural material that pressed the limits of sensationalism's plausibility as news and indicated the growing influence of Christian religious beliefs on American media. In 1969, the networks began airing national evening news stories in response to the official

conclusion of a two-year United States Air Force investigation that Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) were no longer worth exploring because evidence for their existence was sparse and generally unconvincing.⁴⁰ In subsequent months and years, several ABC, NBC and CBS news reports cast doubt on the findings of the study, performed in conjunction with researchers at the University of Colorado, by taking seriously dozens of UFO sightings in various regions of the country, including residential areas of Georgia, Ohio, Mississippi, and California. One specific 1973 report focused on Los Angeles. Airing with relative consistency throughout the 1970s, these stories included taped conversations from prominent politicians like Ohio governor John Gilligan, who described personal sightings of UFOs and encounters with aliens. Their testimony was supported by additional interviews with professional astronomers, pilots, radar trackers, and scientists.⁴¹ While once exclusively the terrain of science fiction, by the 1970s UFOs and aliens were convincingly transposed onto reality through the live network news camera lens. In the following years, sensational television news became one of the most important visual arenas for validating the existence of supernatural entities in suburbia.

As millions of viewers watched the first televised reports of UFOs in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were also exposed to unprecedented news segments on recent exorcisms performed by members of the Catholic Church. National programs showed clergymen descending on “tree-lined” neighborhoods to exorcise demons from individuals,

⁴⁰ “CBS Evening News for Thursday, Jan 09, 1969, Headline: UFO Study,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014; “NBC Evening News for Friday, Jan 10, 1968, Headline: Air Force Report/UFO’s/Report Challenged,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 2, 2014.

⁴¹ “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, October 17, 1973, Headline: UFO Sightings,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014; “NBC Evening News for Monday, October 15, 1973, Headline: UFO’s/Pascagoula, Mississippi,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014.

families, and homes. Although a variety of supernatural entities invaded suburbia in media images of the 1970s, receiving potent validation through tabloid television, demons and Satan figured most prominently. However, because their presence was harder to manufacture with existing technology, television news could only hint that they were real by reporting on activities related to the occult, like exorcisms and devil-worship. By the early 1980s, when the panic began, demons, Satan, and hell were pervasive cultural ideas. Conceptions of them at the time of the panic were most firmly anchored in immediate evangelical representations of suburbia, marking a notable shift in influence from representations of the occult in the 1970s. The latter were still mainly entrenched in Catholic lore, with priests and other members of the Catholic Church performing televised exorcisms and playing essential, yet often ineffective, roles in a spate of the decade's most popular horror movies like *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), and *The Amityville Horror* (1979), as well as their numerous sequels. Figures, ideas, and paraphernalia often associated with Catholicism, including nuns, crosses, crucifixes, stigmata, bibles, and biblical references were paraded through these and other films at a time when Catholic protest against birth control and abortion was frequently reported on in network nightly news programs.⁴²

However, demon-horror movies like 1973's *The Exorcist* generally rendered Catholic rituals impotent in the face of satanic evil, despite remaining essential for understanding how it worked. In the film, Father Damien Karras, a young priest grappling with his faith, fails to remove the demon Pazuzu from the possessed body of Regan MacNeil, an innocent twelve-year old girl. At the end of the film, Karras is able to convince Pazuzu to inhabit his own body, then throws himself from a window, destroying the entity himself after ritualized

⁴² Key word search of "Catholic Church," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014. The search yielded 308 results between 1970 and 1980.

practices had failed at the same task.⁴³ Although they served complex and controversial roles in these films, priests and other Catholic figures mostly disappeared from the successful horror movies of the late 1970s and 1980s. Popular films included *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), as well as their sequels, the number of which far surpassed those to earlier popular films of the expanding demon-horror genre like *The Exorcist*. The absence of Catholicism in the biggest horror movies of the years surrounding the panic ran alongside rising evangelical political and corporate influence on commercial media. The profitability of movies like 1978's *Halloween*, which grossed seventy-five million dollars on a modest budget of \$320,000, yielded dozens of imitators.⁴⁴ They cumulatively embedded representations of the occult in a white, financially comfortable suburban context that exactly mirrored evangelical ideals and further brought them to life. Supernatural activity in suburbia in the 1980s effectively wrote Catholicism out, suggesting its worldview and biblical interpretations were no longer essential to the contemporary conservative evangelical project of defining and eradicating the occult. The profitability of movies like *Halloween* guaranteed that the particular conceptions of Satan, hell, and suburbia they displayed were recycled and enhanced, announcing the cultural success of evangelical visions of nuclear family life through the nation's expanding media outlets.

The satanic panic of the 1980s both symbolized and reinforced a complicated and fragile partnership forged towards the end of the previous decade between demon-horror movies, evangelical pro-family ideas, and tabloid media. Regardless of the degree to which it was deliberate, the relationship was fostered in the era's atmosphere of expanding

⁴³ *The Exorcist*, directed by William Friedkin (1973; Burbank, California: Warner Home Video 2000), DVD.

⁴⁴ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 23.

conglomerates and relaxed federal regulations and helped to reinforce both. While Catholicism was essential to tabloid news and horror movies of the 1970s, it was no longer referenced in most genre movies after the success of *Halloween*. It was also absent from news reports on the panic, which avoided associating satanic ritual abuse with any one particular Judeo-Christian denomination. Despite the fact that media representations of demons and devil worshippers in the 1980s were born of earlier depictions intentionally rooted in Catholicism, evangelical cultural influence located them in its suburban ideal, where traditional gender roles were more firmly entrenched, whiteness was visibly stripped of any lingering ethnic identity, and innocent children and virginal adolescents had the strongest chance of survival. Although the horror genre, like science fiction, often provided a platform for social criticism and satire, sensational news stories on exorcisms, devil worship, and satanic ritual abuse did not. The evolution of representations of the occult from the early 1970s to the early 1980s contributed to the panic by yielding its vivid and persistent suburban context and coupling it to hell.

The panic was an extreme manifestation of media representations of paranormal activity in suburbia, an idea first corroborated through local and national news reports on UFOs and exorcisms. However, as these episodes were first reported, another news story with tremendous bearing on the panic's shape, particularly news media's depictions of Ray Buckey and other male defendants, was also reported. In 1969, network nightly news broke the story of the Manson family murders, which established a template for all subsequent reports on devil worship by relying on recent popular horror fiction for legitimacy and relevance. Satanic ritual abuse was both a version of the suburban demonic cult narrative that was first disseminated into the culture on a massive scale through the story of Charles Manson, as well as a more nuanced and detailed elaboration of it, made possible by the era's

increasingly unfettered commercial tabloid news media. In 1968, director Roman Polanski's box office hit *Rosemary's Baby* provided abundant material for the following year's news reports that members of Manson's cult had murdered actress Sharon Tate, who was Polanski's wife at the time of her death. Manson's group of Satan-worshipping followers as depicted in all news media conjured images of the ones shown in Polanski's film. The latter were an eccentric group who cavorted with the devil and enthusiastically watched as he raped and impregnated Rosemary Woodhouse, the movie's main character played by Mia Farrow. The earliest reports on Manson in nightly network news programs initially described his group as "pseudo-religious," but subsequently began to identify them exclusively with a satanic cult. On its second night of coverage, *NBC Evening News* ran an interview with a Los Angeles Police Department inspector who described the Manson family as a "hippie group," but explained that membership involved juvenile delinquency, sex crimes, black clothing, and homicidal violence.⁴⁵ ABC reports simultaneously explained that Manson interchangeably referred to himself as a "cult leader," "Jesus" and "Satan," and quoted an authoritative Catholic Bishop calling the murders the worst in California history.⁴⁶ The network news segments bore titles like "Tate Murders/Cult Indictment." Although reporters warned of the trial's sensationalism, heightened by Manson's association with Satan, they avoided any mention of their own contributions to its hysterical tone.

There were several overlapping themes, references, and individuals between *Rosemary's Baby* and the basic facts surrounding the Manson case that became tangled

⁴⁵ "NBC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec 02, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Manson Cult," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014.; "NBC Evening News for Wednesday, Dec 03, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Cult Leader," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014.

⁴⁶ "ABC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec 02, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Suspects," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed April 3, 2014.

together in news reports. Both Sharon Tate and Rosemary Woodhouse were white, blonde, pregnant newlyweds. Both were tortured by a cult. The head of the Church of Satan, with which Manson was affiliated, played the role of the devil in the rape scene in Polanski's film.⁴⁷ There were fundamental, irreconcilable differences between the film, the Manson case, and its representation in the news, but their striking resemblances to one another stemmed from shared and intimate ties to the same expanding commercial media enterprise, increasingly owned by the same corporations, even in the late 1960s. Manson's homicidal anger partly resulted from his frustrated ambitions in the music industry. After record producer Terry Melcher failed to honor a scheduled meeting with Manson and his followers, who hoped to record an album, Manson ordered his group to kill everyone at Melcher's old house, where Tate and Polanski, a powerful and recognizable Hollywood couple, resided.

The Manson murders demonstrated that similarities between reality and contemporary fiction were pliable, easily exploited, and profitable, especially when reported live on local and national news. Despite the fact that Manson was not present when his followers killed Tate and six others in her Hollywood Hills neighborhood, he became the living embodiment of evil, an example cited by emerging political pro-family groups, including evangelicals, of the hedonistic excesses of sixties liberalism. Manson was used as a means of reinstating early Cold War nuclear family values after young people began flagrantly rejecting them in the 1960s. As an eccentric cult leader remorselessly tied to brutal crimes, he served as an example of the devastating personal repercussions that came from straying beyond the limits of the 1950s middle-class suburban ideal in which he was raised. He also eventually supplied a means of testing one's Christian faith. In a tale of forgiveness that was an important component of the era's conservative evangelical doctrine, a 1989

⁴⁷ Adam Gorightly, *The Shadow over Santa Susanna: Black Magic, Mind Control & the Manson Family Mythos* (New York: Creation, 2009), 50.

Christianity Today article explained the process by which the daughter of two Manson family murder victims was able to forgive her parents' killer because she had converted to evangelical Christianity.⁴⁸ Such narratives were predicated on the idea that the forgiver was in a superior moral position to offer forgiveness. In the highly publicized case of Manson and his family, forgiving them required a complete rejection of the family's lifestyle, featured as depraved and violent in media representations.

Manson offered burgeoning tabloid media and pro-family religious conservatives alike a popular, real, and accessible anti-nuclear model from which to build credibility, power, and strength. An important difference between Polanski's film and his reality, however, was location. The Manson murders shifted the hub of satanic cult activity on screen from Manhattan, its location in *Rosemary's Baby*, to Los Angeles, also the headquarters of dozens of expanding corporate conglomerates and the birthplace of Pentecostalism, the denomination of evangelical Christianity practiced by many televangelists. Occult stories of the late 1970s and 1980s were most often set in neighborhoods similar to Tate and Polanski's, versions of their Hollywood Hills community, where the quiet complacency of suburban houses was tragically deceptive. Although Stephen King usually set his popular horror novels of the era in his hometown of Bangor, Maine, many of the successful Hollywood movie versions were filmed in suburban Los Angeles.

The idea of an occult presence in suburbia, which informed the panic, was first detectable on local and network news through reports on Manson, as well as simultaneous stories of UFO's and exorcisms. Throughout the 1970s, fictional movies and novels, mostly of the horror genre, enhanced visual depictions of violence, gore, and sex in stories loosely based on the Manson template. The Manson family murders supplied vivid imagery for

⁴⁸ J. Shaver, "Daughter of Manson Victim Finds Forgiveness," *Christianity Today* 33 no. 13 (1989), Academic Search Premier, accessed May 19, 2014.

news reports of situations that echoed it. The panic was one such story, as was the 1978 mass suicide of over 900 members of the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana, a cult that initially gained substantial followers in California through the efforts of its delusional Manson-esque founder, the Reverend Jim Jones.

A Nightmare on Elm Street

When the McMartin trial began in 1984, it was embedded in a society where fictional representations of the occult steadily fed news and vice versa. The Manson narrative in particular had been elaborated on for over a decade. While Ray Buckey was conceptualized as a bad surrogate mother, he also became a satanic figure crafted in Manson's image. The latter had been expanded on and supplemented through fictional patriarchs like George Lutz, the demonically-possessed father of 1979's *The Amityville Horror*, allegedly based on a true story, and Jack Torrance, a similarly disturbed parent played by Jack Nicholson in 1980's *The Shining*. Although Buckey was not a father, he served as a surrogate parent to children at his grandmother's daycare center. When CII interviews stated that Buckey had sexually assaulted children with knives and other sharp objects, their collective stories resembled scenarios in horror films where aggressive white men terrorized the children in their care. Dangerous patriarchs in horror movies shared demonic qualities first prescribed to Manson, with *Amityville*'s George Lutz, played by James Brolin, accurately aping Manson's physical appearance, including his dark unkempt locks and thick facial hair.

In the late 1970s, the Manson narrative again was transformed to fit and exploit the increasingly prolific commercial environment, as well as the encroaching conservative evangelical worldview, of which representations of supernatural entities in suburbia were becoming an essential part. Beginning in 1978, after the success of *Halloween*, Charles

Manson was envisioned as a demon from hell, mechanically yet violently murdering dozens of young, white suburban teenagers. His particular target was most often a virginal female, a woman like Sharon Tate, but not yet pregnant. He became more dangerous, a sociopath in its most extreme form, obsessed only with destroying nuclear family life. Manson-types of the 1970s operated in contexts not explicitly suburban, with *Amityville* and *The Shining's* Overlook Hotel cast as remote regions of the country, and still rife with Catholic imagery and symbolism. However, Michael Myers, Jason Vorhees, and Freddy Krueger, the popular commercial antiheroes of the 1980s, were firmly anchored in evangelical conceptions of the suburbs where almost everyone was white, financially comfortable, and violently disposed of by the killer if they failed to adhere to “pro-family” standards of sexual behavior and family life. Ray Buckey became one of several versions of an updated Charles Manson.

The commercial success of *Halloween* rendered Michael Myers one of the first major fictional demonic killers to pervade commercial media in the years leading up to the panic. Myers wore a maniacal mask, like Leatherface, the indestructible serial killer of the 1974 slasher film *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. However, he was a slightly different demonic entity because he stalked residents of sunny California suburbs rather than rural Texas, harking back to representations of Manson that remained culturally potent in the late 1970s. Both Charles Manson and Michael Myers similarly stood as deranged products of the suburban environments they intimidated and destroyed. Manson grew up in Los Feliz, California, an affluent suburb next to Hollywood.⁴⁹ Myers hailed from a fictional Midwestern town, actually located in South Pasadena, California, where the film was shot by Falcon International Productions, an independent company owned by Syrian immigrant

⁴⁹ Gorightly, *Shadow*, 263.

Moustapha Akkad.⁵⁰ Made on a modest budget, its box office success established the careers of starring actress Jamie Lee Curtis and director John Carpenter, and ensured that future serial killers in slasher films and the demon-horror genre were often deformed or masked Manson-types who continued to haunt sunny suburban neighborhoods in several sequels.⁵¹ The anonymous and remorseless masks worn by Michael Myers and Jason Vorhees, the central killer in the *Friday the 13th* franchise, allowed Judy Johnson, CII, and news sources to transpose Ray Buckey's face on their white surfaces when recounting stories of him slaughtering animals, sodomizing children, and forcing them to play naked games in neighborhood underground tunnels, car washes, movie theaters, and airports.

While Jason Vorhees of *Friday the 13th* bore a strong resemblance to his predecessor in *Halloween*, neither physically looked like the decade's most notorious demonic killer, Freddy Krueger. After Paramount released *Friday the 13th* in 1980 to absorb some of *Halloween's* success, independent film company New Line Cinema introduced Krueger, created by director Wes Craven as the central antagonist in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The film proved another enormous success for Craven after previous hit movies like *The Last House on the Left* (1972), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), and *Swamp Thing* (1982), as well as several in the adult film industry where his career began.⁵² Released in November of 1984, less than a year after the McMartin trial was first reported by Wayne Satz on ABC's Los Angeles

⁵⁰ Ahmad Abu-Zannad, "Moustapha Akkad Biography," *IMDb.com*, accessed April 9, 2014, http://imdb.com/name/nm0002160/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm; "Halloween," *IMDb.com*, accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077651/>.

⁵¹ "Halloween."

⁵² Jason Vorhees was not actually in the first film until the last scene. He did not make his debut as the star of the franchise until 1981's *Friday the 13th Part II*.

affiliate, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* acquainted audiences with Krueger, a convicted child murderer who stood as a novel variation of the Manson-type.⁵³

Unlike Myers and Vorhees, Krueger existed mostly in dreams, descending suburban teens of Elm Street into a nightmare where he sadistically tortured and executed them. He was not as physically strong, but his deformed face, striped sweater, dark top hat, and gloved hand made of razor blades became as iconic a symbol of terror in the 1980s as Vorhees' hockey mask and the face of human skin worn by Myers. Like his slasher film cohorts, Krueger was designed to represent social depravity in its most extreme form, which by 1984 had evolved into an indestructible child murderer from hell. Craven's decision to change the description of Krueger from child "molester" to child "murderer" to avoid any association with McMartin and the panic demonstrated that by the mid-1980s, child sexual abuse in suburbia was considered the ultimate embodiment of evil, at least among powerful segments of the population.⁵⁴ The film reveals that Krueger was burned to death by a lynch mob of community parents after a judge released him from prison, where he was serving charges for killing children. The teenagers he haunts are the children of the homicidal mob that murdered him.⁵⁵

Scholars of the slasher genre point out that Krueger, Myers, and Vorhees represented white male anger and revenge without limits, intersecting with, and contributing to, the era's culture of white masculine privilege and unrestrained commercial growth. They joined other male movie stars of the 1980s who exploited male physical strength. While not

⁵³ "A Nightmare on Elm Street," *IMDb.com*, accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087800/>;

⁵⁴ Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002), 151.

⁵⁵ *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, directed by Wes Craven (1984; Los Angeles, California: New Line Home Video, 1999), DVD.

all of these celebrities were “white,” as the concept was understood in the 1980s, they demonstrably made efforts to understate particular ethnic, regional, or racial differences that could potentially compromise their commercial value. Characters played by the biggest action stars of the 1980s--Arnold Schwarzenegger, John Claude Van Damme, Bruce Willis, Chuck Norris, Jackie Chan, Hulk Hogan, and Mr. T--were not unlike Krueger, Myers, and Vorhees in that they also relied on their physique to intimidate and succeed. They occasionally played antiheroes too, as when Schwarzenegger was cast as a robot sent from the future to execute his enemies and the film’s protagonists in 1984’s *The Terminator*. However, to a greater degree than these action heroes, Krueger, Myers, and Vorhees were symbols of a society steeped in conservative evangelical ideals of American suburbs and the nuclear family. Their respective movies reinforced pro-family values in a number of ways, most obviously by taking for granted the white, residential areas where they were shot.

Although *Friday the 13th* was filmed in rural New Jersey to more realistically portray a secluded summer camp, it assumed a nuclear norm. Like *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, which was filmed in Venice, California, dozens of horror movies of the 1980s displayed a world populated by white suburban teenagers of two-parent households, where central protagonists were assumed to be heterosexual and financially comfortable. Krueger, Myers, and Vorhees recklessly murdered young people who did not conform to conservative evangelical standards of moral behavior, killing anyone who engaged in premarital sex, used illegal drugs like marijuana and alcohol, or flagrantly disrespected adults. *Elm Street* was a supernatural environment as conservative evangelicals like Jerry Falwell envisioned it, a place that only appeared tranquil and secure because it masked the presence of demonic white serial killers.

Although these films had elements of parody and satire, a virginal white female was always the lone survivor, suggesting that evangelical ideas of suburbia were most specifically designed to articulate and destroy the threats against her.⁵⁶ Protestant conceptualizations of a sacred and vulnerable white womanhood were not new in the United States, but were often explicitly tied to race.⁵⁷ However, in the era of the panic, the Manson-type rivaled ethnic and racial enemies as the most dangerous adversary of white women and children. In *Halloween*, Jamie Lee Curtis played Laurie Strode, a high school student and neighborhood babysitter whose unique ability to outsmart and defeat Michael Myers positioned her as the savior of nuclear family life in white suburbia. Similar characters included Nancy Thompson, the protagonist in *Elm Street* played by Heather Langenkamp, and Alice Hardy, Adrienne King's character in *Friday the 13th*, who successfully escapes the wrath of the Vorhees family. While Judy Johnson was not fictional, she resided in a media-saturated culture that thrived on representations of wholesome young white women battling Manson-types in their suburban neighborhoods.

Halloween, *Friday the 13th*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* were enormously profitable at the box office. Suburban home theaters, often replete with VCRs and Dolby surround sound, allowed them to experience unprecedented commercial success for horror movies, a particularly notable feat because two of the three were first produced by companies independent of media conglomerates. However, such success all but guaranteed that franchises would quickly become tied to the expanding corporate enterprises of the 1980s. In the next ten years, New Line became a target of larger companies like Time Warner, which made the former a subsidiary in the 1990s and ultimately merged it with Warner

⁵⁶ Clover, *Saws*, 8.

⁵⁷ See Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Brothers. Moustapha Akkad's continued Hollywood success was mainly tied to his role as producer of movies in the *Halloween* franchise, the first of which broke all profit records for a film produced by an independent company. The immediate popularity of Krueger, Myers, and Vorhees spawned television shows, video games, action figures, trading cards, Halloween costumes, and dozens of sequels over the next three decades. The deepening relationship between sensational news, evangelical conceptions of suburbia, and the horror movie genre reached its apex with the panic, as Johnson became a version of Laurie Strode, Buckey of Freddy Krueger, and his family of the Manson cult.

The influence of this relationship was not relegated to the panic. Other media and tabloid stories also worked, often together, to expand the supernatural suburban universe. The demon-horror genre, which encompassed slasher films like *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, was particularly engaged in the process of introducing paranormal activity to residential neighborhoods. Campier, less successful imitators of the former movies included *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), *The House on Sorority Row* (1983), and *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), which also mostly focused on Manson-types stalking and murdering young suburban teenagers. The genre encompassed dozens of other movies in the 1980s that explored demonic possession of people and houses, which aided conservative evangelical ascendance by removing demonology from the jurisdiction of Catholic priests and injecting its practices with pseudo-science. *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Christine* (1983), *Cujo* (1983), *Children of the Corn* (1984), *Firestarter* (1984), *Hellraiser* (1987), *Child's Play* (1988), and *Pet Sematary* (1989), most of which were based on Stephen King novels, dealt with demonic possession and entities whose ties to hell were ambiguous and generally divorced from religion. While many horror movies in the 1970s explicitly called upon Catholic faith to combat demons, those of the 1980s employed pseudo-scientific practices that echoed the

prevailing language of contemporary science but was exclusively designed to counteract supernatural entities. In 1982's *Poltergeist*, for example, directed by Steven Spielberg, a suburban California family haunted by ghosts consults a spiritual medium rather than a priest. They employ the former to save their daughter, who has been abducted by what the medium describes as an inter-dimensional entity. Tangina, the medium, explains to the family, "there is no death. There is only a transition to a different sphere of consciousness." The haunted souls that have kidnapped the family's young daughter are "not aware that they have passed on," and instead "linger in a perpetual dreamstate," avoiding "the spectral light" that is their "salvation."⁵⁸ While Americans and other Westerners had experimented with telekinesis, extrasensory perception, and other paranormal phenomena earlier in the twentieth century, these trends experienced a pronounced resurgence starting in the 1970s.

Several movies in the 1980s outside the horror genre also dealt with demonic possession, continuing the replacement of priests and other Catholic signifiers with psychic mediums and "ghostbusters." They likewise cast pseudo-scientific occult "experts" as the most knowledgeable and competent source on harnessing or eradicating paranormal entities. Popular movies of the era like *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Ghostbusters II* (1989), *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Ghost* (1990) featured the encounters of "spiritual advisors" and scientists with the paranormal, who were in the frustrating position of comprehending the spirit world better than the other characters existing within, or directly affected by, it. They discussed the film's supernatural realm solely in terms of alternate dimensions and realities, concepts that could not be explicitly tied to the worldview embraced by conservative evangelicals. Demonic

⁵⁸ "Poltergeist (1982), Quotes," *IMDb.com*, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084516/quotes>.

entities in particular, images of which were explored in most of these films, were attributed to another universe that resembled hell, but was not acknowledged as such.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, allegedly real occult experts validated horror fiction by providing testimony on talk shows, tabloid documentary news programs, and national news. When the satanic panic first manifested in Manhattan Beach, fiction also consistently buttressed news stories, forging an expansive media universe that overlay reality because it appeared legitimate. Similar types of voices and individuals, including news reporters, talk show hosts, psychic mediums, and paranormal experts, paraded through fiction and news media, collapsing distinctions between genres that potentially deteriorated further when casts for big budget movies on paranormal activity were interviewed on tabloid television shows.

By the mid-1980s, tangible consequences of the panic included the arrests of Ray Buckey and his family, as well as of the Amiraaults and Fusters. However, major actions taken around the same time against the alleged societal presence of the occult demonstrated that the relationship between tabloid television, dominant evangelical ideals, and demon-horror fiction had affected many influential people not involved in the panic. In 1985, Tipper Gore established the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) to police sexual and violent content in music marketed to children, as well as coordinate Congressional efforts to impose parental advisory labeling on albums it felt were objectionable. Songs on its initial 1985 “Filthy Fifteen” list included Venom’s “Possessed” and Mercyful Fate’s “Into the Coven.” Both songs were produced in an increasingly popular heavy metal music genre that often dealt explicitly with the occult. “Into the Coven,” for example, beckoned listeners to “come into my coven and become Lucifer’s Child” and urged them to “say after me: My soul belongs to

Satan.”⁵⁹ While Gore’s efforts took time to gain significant national momentum, her organization’s urgent demands demonstrated a widespread belief that lyrics about the occult were as detrimental to a child’s behavior as material containing sex and violence. The same year as Gore’s organization formed, household goods manufacturer Procter & Gamble was forced to change their century-old logo because they had been inundated with consumer complaints of its satanic connotations. Allegedly, the beard of the illustrated face in the logo formed two devil horns and an inverted 666, a number many associated with Satan. Over the next three decades, the company persisted in their lawsuit against rival company Amway, which it claimed started the story.⁶⁰

By the late 1980s, a variety of print, network, and tabloid news sources continuously related estimates from cult experts that devil worshippers performed as many as 50,000 unreported human sacrifices a year, which included babies. Even if stories offered criticism of the overwhelmingly anecdotal evidence attached to such reports, which they increasingly did in print sources as the McMartin case collapsed, the controversial statistics were still highlighted. FBI Agent Kenneth Lanning, who was outspoken about child sexual abuse during the McMartin trial, made comments in a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article from 1989 that revealed a general lack of skepticism towards the idea of devil-worshippers in the United States: “[E]ither you believe Satanists are everywhere consuming our country or think it’s a

⁵⁹ “Mercyful Fate “Melissa,” Into the Coven,” *Kingdiamondcoven.com* accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.kingdiamondcoven.com/site/discography/mercyful-fate-melissa/>.

⁶⁰ Sean Alfano, “Procter & Gamble Wins Satanic Civil Suit,” *Cbsnews.com*, March 20, 2007, accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/procter-gamble-wins-satanic-civil-suit/>.

big joke,” Lanning prefaced, before authoritatively conceding “that a middle ground exists,” and “police officers need to be well-versed in the subject.”⁶¹

A suburban landscape overrun with Satan and his minions dominated American media over the course of the panic and continued after Buckey’s acquittal. Although televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and the Bakkers became embroiled in highly publicized scandals over sexual assault accusations and corporate finances, the conservative evangelical worldview that they helped to construct, which placed white suburban nuclear families at the center of society, remained intact, as did the powerful tabloid media universe that validated it. Jerry Falwell’s reputation, for example, did not suffer despite his initial allegiance with other controversial televangelists and consistent support for their efforts. On a 1988 episode of *The Morton Downey Jr. Show* dedicated to confronting the scandals plaguing televangelists, tabloid talk show host Downey Jr. told Falwell he both admired and respected what he had done “for Christianity in this country.” He concluded at the end of his show that, while he was distrustful of “self-righteousness,” he still liked “that man Falwell.”⁶² Downey Jr. had become a sensational tabloid story himself when he experienced an apparent mental breakdown in 1989.

Although satanic ritual abuse cases specifically involving daycare began to subside in the early 1990s, versions of its narrative persisted in news stories that also continued to reference images in popular demon-horror films. In 1988, before the end of the panic, in Jasper County Missouri, three teenagers were convicted of beating a classmate to death as part of satanic ritual. The young men were each sentenced to life in prison, the prosecution

⁶¹ Ellen Futterman, “Hints of Darkness: Satanism Reports Stir Worry,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 5, 1989, LexisNexis Academic, accessed April 11, 2014.

⁶² “Jerry Falwell and Morton Downey, Jr.,” 1988, *YouTube* video, 11:33, April 8, 2011, accessed April 3, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWJ5Wu1D_9I.

focusing on “their obsession with Satanism, drug use and the influence of heavy metal music with lyrics promoting sadistic behavior, devil worship, suicide and murder.”⁶³ In 1994, three teenagers in West Memphis, Arkansas, were tried for the death of three eight-year-old boys from the same area, also allegedly as part of satanic ritual. Known as the “West Memphis Three,” they became the subject of continued media attention until they were released from prison almost twenty years later, although their plea required an acknowledgement that the case’s initial evidence was satisfactory for their convictions. When two young white suburban teens killed a dozen students and a teacher at their high school in Columbine, Colorado in 1999, news outlets collectively placed part of the blame on the somber music of Marilyn Manson and a larger “Goth” culture, which involved black clothing and embraced elements of the occult. While televangelists became less visible in the wake of their respective scandals, their fundamental understanding of suburbia as a place of tranquil nuclear families, but also demonic Manson-types, simultaneously both Hill Valley and Twin Peaks, remained.

Blatantly tying crimes or alleged criminal activity like sex abuse to devil worship and the occult receded to a significant extent in all news media by the late 1990s, but demons continued to invade suburbia through various media outlets. While subsequent school shootings after Columbine raised questions about factors other than media content about Satan, such as the availability of guns, poor mental health in teens and adolescents, the proliferation of sensationalized fear through tabloid and news media, and the suburban context in which the shootings were consistently committed, the demon-horror film and fiction genre only expanded after the 1980s. Its popularity stemmed from the commercial appeal of its antiheroes, who immediately became global celebrities. Hollywood studios still

⁶³ Futterman, “Hints.”

fund big budget sequels to the most popular 1980s slasher movies and have introduced more profitable franchises, some of which continue to rely on deranged Manson-types. The 2004 horror film *Saw*, for example, introduced audiences to a white, male serial killer named Jigsaw who murders those he finds amoral. Others, like *Final Destination* (2000) and *Paranormal Activity* (2009), avoid Manson-types but perpetuate the link between suburbia and demonic activity. The reality genre spawned by tabloid television has also increasingly included dozens of pseudo-documentary shows on the occult like *Ghost Hunters* (2004-present), a successful franchise with several spin-off series, and *An American Haunting* (2013-present), which debuted in 2013. Both programs claim to capture visual evidence of paranormal entities invading suburban domestic spaces, suggesting that demon-horror fiction still feeds infotainment.

CHAPTER 4

“THEY’RE ALL GONNA LAUGH AT YOU!”: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND
CHILDHOOD IN THE 1980s

The Cult of Norma Bates

As the panic demonstrated, powerful conservative evangelicals had a substantial bearing on the culture by the 1980s. While other social groups influenced representations of family life in the decade’s mass media, televangelists in particular played an instrumental hand in shaping predominant conceptions of suburbia and the occult. They crowded out alternative portraits of home, community, and nation by expanding their media operations and partnering with other increasingly global conglomerates. Politicized evangelicals, along with other conservatives, placed their ideas of white patriarchy at the center of their movement, rooting its alleged superiority in biblical text. They successfully incorporated many of the major arguments of their pro-family platform, which had initially rested on rallying against abortion in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*, into federal and state legislation. While gaining a larger and more influential presence in Washington, D.C. in the 1970s, their increasingly powerful lobby overlapped with other mobilizing conservative efforts from neo-conservatives, economic conservatives, and libertarians. Together, they endorsed an ethos that identified itself as white, male-centered, anti-government, and populist. By using media and politics, these groups posed as a united front to wage a domestic war against the visible tenets of sixties liberalism that allegedly threatened their global dominance. The panic was a result of this war and an essential part of it, an indication that large segments of society had internalized conservative social views and a means of further entrenching them. The most pointed target of the panic’s conservative male hostility was white suburban women, although the panic was also a proxy war on homosexuals and children.

Tabloid media, as it promoted the panic, successfully pitted matriarchal, sexually deviant surrogate daycare families against “real” ones as part of the era’s conservative rejection of sixties liberalism, to which daycare had become tied.

The panic was an aggressive manifestation of a larger backlash against feminism that many scholars argue characterized the 1980s.¹ It was first detectable in the 1970s, when several conservative political groups began voicing virulent opposition to feminism. The strongest came from a partnership between televangelist organizations like Falwell’s Moral Majority and members of Phyllis Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign, many of whom identified themselves as evangelical stay-at-home moms. STOP ERA was a politically unified effort that brought together conservative women from a variety of backgrounds to halt state ratification of a proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA was designed to guarantee “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the state on account of sex.”² In articulating her objections to the ERA, Schlafly, a conservative organizer who first launched her public anti-feminist campaign in 1972, echoed and supplemented a rising number of conservative evangelical voices that promoted traditional gender roles within a stable nuclear unit. She and other vocal politicians and activists loudly condemned the ERA because it supposedly threatened to upset traditional American power structures that safeguarded white patriarchal supremacy. In her 1977 political monograph titled *The Power of the Positive Woman*,

¹ See Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991); Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Susan Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989); David Savran, *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

² Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 220, 225.

Schlafly argued that men and women bore essential and fundamental differences, a direct response to alleged feminist claims that the only disparity between them was sex organ type. She explained that women traditionally chose careers as teachers and nurses because they were “doing what comes naturally to the female psyche.”³

After the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that legalized abortion, some feminists advocated using ERA as a way to make access to abortion easier. Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign directly intersected with arguments from televangelists, who condemned abortion on religious grounds and championed the maternal role of all women. Schlafly consistently invoked “God” in *The Power of the Positive Woman* as she competently made claims about inherent gender roles. She stated with authority, “The overriding psychological need of a woman is to love something alive. A baby fulfills this need in the lives of most women.”⁴ She was joined by a chorus of conservative men who praised her efforts while disparaging any female activity outside the home. A 1977 article in *National Review*, a conservative magazine, quipped of the National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas, held that same year, it “demonstrated, if an heretical thought may be expressed, the unwisdom of ever teaching little girls to read.” Schlafly, however, “did her usual competent job on the equal rights amendment.”⁵ George Gilder, a conservative writer and economist who aggressively opposed feminism, compared Schlafly to Ronald Reagan, Barry Goldwater, and William Buckley, as a “leader who made a decisive and permanent difference.” Schlafly “changed the political landscape of her country,” Gilder argued, an achievement made all the more commendable given “the odds she

³ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New York: Jove Books, 1977), 17.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ James Jackson Kilpatrick, “Abortion, Equal Rights, and Robert’s Rules of Order,” *National Review* vol. 29, no. 50 (1977): 1483-1484, Academic Search Premier, accessed July 22, 2014.

faced and overcame.”⁶ Although Schlafly visibly undermined the conservative definition of women as stay-at-home moms, she verbally supported it, which made her a welcome exception. She was an outspoken woman who cast her lot with conservative men, particularly evangelicals like Jerry Falwell. When Falwell died in 2007, Schlafly stated in a news interview, “he was the leader and he made it respectable for the Christians to come out and be involved in politics.”⁷

Conservative religious groups and members of STOP ERA comprised the bulk of Washington, D.C.’s pro-family lobby by the early 1980s. While Schlafly folded the STOP ERA campaign into her Eagle Forum organization in 1982, after her efforts to halt ratification of the amendment were successful, she remained a strong presence in the media and politics. She continued to influence how arguments against feminism were expressed and framed. However, Phyllis Schlafly, George Gilder, and Jerry Falwell, as well as other prominent conservatives of the decade, were not simply reacting to their own articulations of feminism, which Schlafly summarized as “compulsively involved in the drive to make abortion and child-care centers for all women, regardless of religion or income, both socially acceptable and government-financed.”⁸ They were also responding to three related and intersecting trends that had an enormous bearing on America’s social composition: real and fundamental changes since World War II that made the suburban nuclear family unit ideal, yet elusive; published articulations by white suburban women that early Cold War gender roles were both unsatisfying and malleable; and substantial social, political, and economic gains that further empowered some of those women. Pro-family

⁶ George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), 101.

⁷ “Phyllis Remembers Rev. Jerry Falwell,” *YouTube* video, 1:31, May 22, 2007, accessed July 22, 2014, <http://m.youtube.com/watch?autoplay=1&v=DFKNTpjSrZ0>.

⁸ Schlafly, *Positive*, 10.

conservatives avoided explicitly acknowledging these changes by charging that a vague definition of “feminism” was the root of many of America’s problems.

When affordable mass housing outside of city limits became available after World War II, concepts of suburbia entered living rooms through the television set. Along with other media, it crafted a model that deliberately ignored the effects of deindustrialization on both urban and suburban communities. As “family fever swept the nation and affected all Americans,” the ideal remained unobtainable for many working families.⁹ Beginning in the 1950s, many suburban residents around the country, both male and female, began to enter volatile white-collar work within rapidly expanding corporate conglomerates, several of which moved their various operations outside of formerly industrial cities. Relaxed federal regulations in the 1970s allowed corporations to create exploitative and hazardous products and workplace conditions in newly erected suburban corporate centers and shopping malls. Many of these shifts were evident in the Sunbelt, an area of rising economic prominence stretching from Florida to Southern California. Suburban communities in the Sunbelt states were often superficial because they were tied only loosely, if at all, to a small, recently erected commercial downtown.¹⁰ Manhattan Beach, Dade County, Inverness, Florida, and a few other regions where the panic took place were located in the Sunbelt. Those suburban residents who continued to labor in blue-collar industrial jobs in the city faced longer commutes, which caused some employers to complain of “unusually high absentee and turnover rates.”¹¹

⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 3.

¹⁰ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2001), 108.

¹¹ Cohen, *Republic*, 202-204.

The personal and emotional impact of these shifts became harder for suburban employees to confront as they were shuffled into nonunion part-time work, steadily on the rise after 1979. These developments also often forced them to purchase expensive yet essential benefits from recently privatized insurance providers.¹² The movement towards privatization that began in the 1970s also extended into other suburban community services, like trash collection, police forces, and utility services.¹³ Women were forced to enter both the public and private workforce in substantial numbers through these decades to supplement the family economy, particularly as men's wages declined. Children likewise sought employment through jobs at retail stores, amusement parks, and restaurant chains.¹⁴ From the 1950s onwards, as nuclear family units moved to the suburbs, bought and watched television, and entered various rungs of America's growing corporate bureaucracy, they were immersed in a hybrid reality of media images and tangible consequences that suggested they had achieved the American Dream. Since they had to labor more intensively to maintain it, millions of wives and mothers became indispensable to keeping the dream afloat. It was up to them to come to terms with the fact that entering the workforce directly undermined prevailing images of nuclear domestic bliss.

Following World War II, the idea of women working outside of the suburban nuclear home became a contentious one in American culture. "After all," Elaine Tyler May explains, "suburban houses...were not built with single working women in mind."¹⁵ However, the issue

¹² Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 258; Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 11-13.

¹³ Schulman, *Seventies*, 246-247.

¹⁴ Cohen, *Republic*, 318-320; Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 347-348.

¹⁵ May, *Bound*, 170.

became more pronounced and problematic in the 1970s, when feminism brought direct public attention to the idea that many women wanted to work and enjoyed it, whether it was required or desired. In her 1989 text *The Second Shift*, which studied contemporary working women, Arlie Russell Hochschild remarked that the rise in the number of employed women since the 1950s “has been staggering.” In 1950, despite numerous television and media images of suburban mothers, “30 percent of American women were in the labor force.” Over the next fifty years, the percentage more than doubled.¹⁶ Despite several economic recessions in the 1970s and 1980s, over ten million women gained full-time employment. Between 1940 and 1990, the number of women managers grew from fifteen to forty percent.¹⁷ Women’s steady presence in the work force cut across ethnic and socioeconomic differences and included mothers, wives, and single women. It had the net effect of allowing some of them to amass real economic and political power. In 1963, for example, Betty Friedan launched feminism’s second wave by publishing *The Feminine Mystique*, a best-selling book on her experiences as an imprisoned suburban housewife. Friedan condemned her life as “a trap” that was bound by chains “made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts.” Her mockery of patriarchal expectations that women “could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity,” exposed how the availability, need, and desire for work was helping some women to assert a stronger political voice. Although Friedan also worked as a journalist, in subsequent years she remained adamant about her status as a

¹⁶ Arlie Russell Hochschild with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), xiv, 2.

¹⁷ “Women in the Workforce,” *United States Census Bureau: Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplements*, accessed May 28, 2014, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/women_workforce_slides.pdf.

housewife when she wrote the book.¹⁸ In the book's final chapter, she urged all women to find "a job that she can take seriously as part of a life plan, work in which she can grow as a part of society."¹⁹

Friedan's book sold around three million copies in its first few years in print, imparting to its readers an influential statement about a woman's right to be employed in fulfilling work. At the core of her argument was an interpretation of gender as a social construction, rather than an essential biological one. Although Friedan spoke for a shrinking number of financially privileged white women who demanded the right to make a public contribution to society, along with every other American woman she was fed millions of images that painted public life as anathema to femininity. The shifting definition of the latter term was always represented as a woman's most desirable trait. Friedan made clear to her millions of readers that a woman's essential nature did not prevent her from working, whether she needed the job or simply wanted it. As framed by Friedan, the nation's second major feminist movement denounced the impossible pressures placed on all women who needed or wanted to work in a society that often punished them mentally and economically if they did. Critics attacked second-wave feminism for privileging white suburban women over others, or for ignoring the fact that gender role constraints could be equally as oppressive for men, but the attention it called to the dilemma over work applied to every female in America.²⁰

¹⁸ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000) 15.

¹⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 15, 31, 472.

²⁰ May, *Bound*, 202.

The publication and subsequent popularity of Friedan's blatant dissatisfaction with prevailing Cold War gender norms, many of which were guided by television, was one of several signs that white suburban women were accumulating unprecedented social and political power in the United States. The economic conditions that rendered suburban life unstable for many families also provided some women with opportunities to gain public respect and financial independence. Betty Friedan, for example, earned national attention, acclaim, and political clout throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While Friedan's position provided an effective means of breaking through barriers imposed by gender, many women also experienced a slightly more understated liberation through services like daycare centers, which had existed in urban and suburban communities since before World War II. They slowly proliferated in the growing number of post-war suburbs, allowing community women to tend to pursuits and responsibilities besides their own children. The number of child-care establishments grew from roughly thirty thousand in 1980 to more than fifty-one thousand by 1992.²¹ Reagan's administration recognized their growing popularity and necessity by making it easier for the middle and upper classes to own, work at, or utilize them. They increased tax incentives for employee-operated daycares and provided income tax breaks based on the cost of childcare.²² Daycare centers were also a way for families, particularly female members, to own a business. During the panic, centers like McMartin, Little Rascals, and Wee Care were some of the few

²¹ "Growth in the Child Care Industry, 1977-1992,"

<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0021/fig01.gif>; Lynne M. Casper and Martin O'Connell, "State Estimates of Organized Child Care Facilities, Figure 1," *United States Census Bureau*, March 1998, last modified October 31, 2011, accessed July 31, 2014, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0021/twps0021.html>.

²² Sonya Michel, "The History of Child Care in the U.S.," *Socialwelfarehistory.com*, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/programs/child-care-the-american-history/>.

remaining family-owned businesses left in communities invaded by big box stores and shopping malls.

The freedom that daycare centers offered to some suburban women was supplemented by several Supreme Court decisions and state laws enacted in the 1960s and 1970s that gave women full control over reproductive rights, as well as more social agency. In 1965, the Court ruled in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that women could take previously illegal birth control medications because a “zone of privacy” that the state could not penetrate existed around a married couple. In 1967, the Court struck down Virginia’s law that prohibited interracial marriage in its landmark *Loving v. Virginia* case. Women and men were subsequently permitted to marry across racial boundaries in all states. The 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, responsible for the political activism of evangelicals like Jerry Falwell, gave women legal access to abortion. The practice, common in the culture for centuries, had been marginalized and criminalized in the nineteenth century through the efforts of the male-dominated American Medical Association (AMA).²³ The decision was monumental because it opened up another accessible reproductive option for women.

Several laws were also enacted at the state and federal level addressing women’s personal economy. The federal government passed the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which collectively provided women with economic protections as both employees and consumers. These laws were followed by the 1968 Consumer Credit Protection Act, which made credit available to married women, who had previously been denied access to it. Around the same time, states began to enact no-fault divorce laws, first introduced in California in 1969. No-fault divorce made it easier for men and women to obtain legal separation and divorce

²³ Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 10-11, 237.

without proof of spousal malfeasance. Subsequently, the divorce rate rose substantially, doubling between 1960 and 1980. While only around twenty percent of married couples got divorced in 1950, by 1970 the percentage climbed to fifty.²⁴ The growing number of single women who gave birth over the same decades were aided by a 1973 Supreme Court ruling that entitled illegitimate children to child support from their fathers. The decision guaranteed the same financial protections to children born out of wedlock as to those who were considered legitimate.²⁵ Feminists simultaneously began to call attention to rape and domestic abuse, which extended to children, and appeared to be successfully rallying for the ERA until Schlafly's efforts overwhelmed them. The outcome of these actions was to provide financially comfortable white women, the most direct beneficiaries of each law, significant new power over, and protection within, the Cold War domestic environment. Betty Friedan provided a voice for women like her, caught in a climate of rapidly changing gender dynamics that had an impact on every tier of society. *The Feminine Mystique* revealed both the depths of their oppression and how far white suburban women had come. Friedan exemplified a society in flux, successfully finding a powerful voice through her publication of a book on her lack of power.

These fundamental changes were at the heart of the backlash against feminism, which began burning with more noticeable intensity in the mid-1970s, following America's defeat in Vietnam. Conservative reactions to feminism were magnified when coupled with other perceived threats to their power, both domestically, through sixties liberal movements, and globally, through Vietnam. Michael Sherry explains in *The Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* that the paramilitary culture of the 1980s, promoted in action movies like *First Blood*

²⁴ Bradford Wilcox, "The Evolution of Divorce," *National Affairs* 1 (2009), accessed May 27, 2013, <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-evolution-of-divorce>.

²⁵ Ibid.

(1982) and its sequel *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), imagined “a ‘New War’ to reverse America’s humiliation in Vietnam and redeem its manhood.”²⁶ Fictional machine gun-toting heroes were a means of bringing America’s global militarization into local theaters and living rooms. Characters like Rambo conferred a sense of power to white American men who believed that other groups, both at home and abroad, were challenging their dominance.²⁷ However, conservative feminist backlash also became noticeably more aggressive because the loss in Vietnam was only one indication that other regions of the globe were increasingly competitive with the United States in military, political, economic, and cultural arenas. In the late 1970s, Japanese commercial conglomerates like Sony and Toyota introduced innovative ways to broker deals with, and market products to, foreign investors and consumers. Although they had borrowed techniques from U.S. companies, they made Japan the world’s second-largest economy in the 1980s. Japanese products flooded the American market and became household names. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the Chinese and American economies similarly intertwined. The former had grown “over 9 percent a year for almost thirty years, the fastest rate for a major economy in recorded history.” It became a major manufacturing base for American consumer products.²⁸ Along with an oil embargo imposed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in the early 1970s and Reagan’s inflammatory anti-Soviet rhetoric throughout the 1980s, the era’s international trends seemed to directly support the white, male conservative view that America’s global hegemony was threatened.

²⁶ Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 453.

²⁷ Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1980], 2011), 281-290.

²⁸ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 2, 20, 89.

According to influential white male conservatives, their power appeared to be in decline on a worldwide scale after the 1960s. However, instead of acknowledging that many people domestically and around the globe were exploiting, fighting off, or rejecting their style of leadership, they adamantly proclaimed that America was in a state of unprecedented moral collapse. The American system, explained George Gilder in 1986, was “under perpetual assault from the forces of decadence and decline, protectionism and sloth.”²⁹ They imposed laws and infiltrated the media in order to more strongly assert their authority. Since they were mostly white men, their agenda primarily involved heavily policing cultural arenas and institutions that were designed to affirm white patriarchy, like suburbia. The gains that women made in the 1960s and 1970s were not fully reversed, but states passed subsequent legislation designed to limit access to abortion, birth control, and divorce. In several Supreme Court decisions in 1977, for example, states were given the right to refuse abortion services in public hospitals, or to use Medicaid or other funds to cover their costs “when the life of the mother is not endangered.”³⁰

The “Reagan Revolution” that began in 1980 successfully brought together various strands of white, male angst over major cultural changes that the most powerful among them had played an instrumental role in shaping. Since they refused to accept any blame for America’s alleged demise, they instead blamed feminists. To punish the latter, they set about cutting federal funding to dozens of programs like CAPTA, which were designed to aid families, particularly women and children. They further destabilized the nuclear family unit while decrying its potential demise at the hands of empowered women. During a 1986 national radio address, Reagan exposed the rationale behind the logic that gutting family programs ultimately

²⁹ Gilder, *Men*, 112.

³⁰ “Aborting Abortion?” *National Review* 29, no. 26 (1977): 766, Academic Search Premier, accessed July 22, 2014.

helped families. He explained, the welfare system offered so much money to a non-working single mother that it “paid for her to quit work.”³¹ Paring down welfare benefits for such a woman might potentially convince her to marry. His tirade revealed the extent to which conservative ideas of feminism drove their assertions of power. It was part of a movement to position welfare, daycare, equal pay, working women, and abortion as products of feminism and exclusive targets of the media. At the time of Ray Buckey’s arrest in 1983, they all served as potent negative symbols of feminism and its consequences.

The panic was partly an extension of unflattering, anti-feminist representations of women in the media, including sensational tabloid news, which extended to daycare centers, portrayed as breeding grounds for delinquency and disease. Even as the panic unfolded, articles in *Newsweek*, for example, included headlines like “What Price Day Care?” The article’s subheading added, “The demand for child-care programs is soaring, but parents face serious questions about quality and cost.” While the exposé briefly mentioned McMartin, it discussed the case as one of several problems plaguing the nation’s daycare centers.³² The panic helped continue to propel daycare into an arena for conservatives to wage their political war on women’s power, both real and imagined. Simultaneously, in the same spirit of feminist backlash, the media yoked ideals of femininity and motherhood to recycled representations of mothers taken from 1950s sitcoms. Women who remained home all day caring for houses, husbands, and children, like June Cleaver, once again emerged as the ideal in the 1980s. In the 1987

³¹ Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform,” February 15, 1986, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36875>.

³² Russell Watson, Vincent Coppola, Penelope Wang, Ron Moreau, Jeff Copeland, Diane M. Cardwell, Dianne H. McDonald, Richard Sandza, Tracey Robinson, Barbara Burgower, and Elizabeth Bailey, “What Price Day Care?” *Newsweek*, September 10, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 20, 2013.

romantic comedy *Overboard*, for example, Goldie Hawn plays Joanna Stayton, a rich heiress with no children. When Stayton gets amnesia, Dean Proffitt, one of her mistreated hired carpenters played by Kurt Russell, gets revenge by convincing her that she is his wife and the mother of his children. Despite her confusion over the situation, she soon falls in love with Proffitt and his children. She ultimately exchanges her life of wealth, power, and luxury for one of modest comfort and motherhood, providing both an embodiment, and endorsement, of the decade's revamped June Cleaver ideal.³³ Ronald Reagan reinforced the necessity of such women in countering the dangerous rise in children born out of wedlock, or "children born to children," which contributed to the nation's "deepening cycle of futility, hopelessness, and despair."³⁴

However, while the media of the 1970s and 1980s offered an update of the 1950s maternal archetype, it more often demonized those who strayed from it. Occasionally it martyred them by killing them off completely. On the popular sitcom *Full House* (1987-1995), for example, a father, uncle, and family friend care for three children after the latter lose their fictional mother before the start of the series. A similar storyline supplied the premise of *My Two Dads* (1987-1990), a show about two single men who raise a young girl together after her mom dies. Although they once competed with one another for the affections of the girls' mother, the two potential dads quickly put aside their differences in order to raise their new daughter together. Otherwise, missing moms were usually vilified for rejecting maternal responsibilities. Not present to defend themselves, their abandoned children provided the tragic evidence of their reckless, anti-June Cleaver impulses. The sitcom *Punky Brewster* (1984-1988) begins when a young homeless girl named Punky is deserted by her mother in a supermarket.

³³ "Overboard (1987), *IMDb.com*, accessed September 29, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093693/>.

³⁴ Reagan, "Address."

Punky is rescued when a grumpy old widower named Henry Warnimont discovers her living in an empty apartment across from his, and subsequently befriends and adopts her.³⁵ While Henry becomes a surrogate father, Punky's life remains void of a maternal influence. The show used humor to paint the problem as an unfortunate one, particularly as Punky matured. In the 1986 film *Pretty in Pink*, directed by John Hughes, rising starlet Molly Ringwald played Andie Walsh, a smart, young high school student who lives in relative poverty compared to her rich classmates. After her mother "walked out" on the family, Andie appeals to her father, played by Harry Dean Stanton, for advice on dating and popularity, dictated in the film by economic status. Despite their close relationship, both Andie and her father struggle with the absence of a maternal figure in the house. During one scene, they both break down crying as Andie earnestly tries to comfort her wounded father over the fact that her mother left. "Well, I loved her too, you know, she just didn't love us back," Andie emotionally insists.³⁶ The similarly popular teen film *Say Anything* (1989), also directed by Hughes and starring John Cusack in an early role, also focused on a father and daughter unit who strive for emotional stability after a mother deserts them. The media universe of the era was populated with hundreds of bad mothers, including women who denied their natural maternity to pursue other interests. Those interests were always understood as less worthy than the humble daughters and disoriented fathers left behind. The selfish mothers of 1980s media were the opposite of June Cleaver in every respect.

Although absentee moms were often disparaged, they were portrayed as less problematic than women who worked. Judy Johnson, who had a job in a department store to help care for her two children, one of whom she sent to McMartin, did so in a culture where stories of unsafe

³⁵ "Punky Brewster (1984-1988)," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086787/>.

³⁶ *Pretty in Pink*, directed by John Hughes (1986; Hollywood, California: Paramount Home Video, 2002), DVD; "Pretty in Pink-Dialogue Transcript," *Script-o-rama.com*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086787/>.

daycare centers ran regularly on the news alongside media images of cold-hearted working mothers. Popular movies surrounding the panic like *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), *Mommie Dearest* (1981), *Mr. Mom* (1983), *Baby Boom* (1987), and *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), showed the negative impact on children, friendships, and marriages when women put careers ahead of their nuclear families. In 1981's commercially successful film *Mommie Dearest*, for example, based on a best-selling memoir by the adopted daughter of Joan Crawford, the actress is scathingly portrayed by Faye Dunaway as sexually promiscuous, opportunistic, emotionally distant, and physically abusive to her children.³⁷ Women who chose ambitious careers over having any family at all were also shown as menacing villains in movies like *Fatal Attraction* (1987), the second highest-grossing film of 1987 and an Academy Award nominee for Best Picture. The film's main antagonist is a female publishing editor named Alex Forrest, played by Glenn Close. Alex violently stalks the family of Dan Gallagher, a married man played by Michael Douglas, with whom she has a brief affair. She provides a stark physical and emotional contrast Dan's wife in the film, played by Ann Archer. While Beth Gallagher supplies a clean home for her husband and devotedly watches the couples' daughter, Alex relentlessly pines for Dan's attention. Her wild blond hair becomes increasingly unkempt as she fakes a pregnancy, slits her wrists, breaks into one of the family's homes, and boils their daughter's pet rabbit. At the end of the film, Dan handles his mistake by shooting and killing Alex, an act portrayed as heroic and justified. He is able to move on with a more stable, compliant woman.³⁸ Movies like *Mommie Dearest* and *Fatal Attraction* revealed a feminist backlash by rendering all women who rejected the suburban nuclear ideal as suitable for tragic fates, including death. Johnson and other mothers who sent their

³⁷ "Mommie Dearest (1981)," *IMDb.com*, accessed March 3, 2014, www.imdb.com/title/tt0082766/.

³⁸ Faludi, *Backlash*, 126-144; *Fatal Attraction*, directed by Adrian Lyne (1987; Hollywood, California: Paramount Home Video, 2002), DVD.

children to daycare became bad working mothers. They were consequently punished as they learned that center operators had allegedly sexually abused their children. The devil-worshipping bad surrogate moms in charge of those children were also penalized, legally, socially, and economically.

The idealized role of women as mothers was not new to conservative evangelicalism in the 1980s. At various points in America's past, women had successfully used their appointed status as mothers to gain a public, political voice. They argued that their essential domestic role as nurturers in the private sphere could be effectively utilized in the public realm. At the turn of the century, for example, civic-minded women committed to cleaning up local city streets argued that their role as "housekeepers" made them well-equipped to "mother" their respective municipalities.³⁹ However, after feminists in the 1960s and 1970s criticized persistent cultural efforts to portray all women as mothers and relegate them to the home, backlash conservatives influenced media outlets to aggressively revitalize those portrayals. The latter embraced ideas about "parenting," by which experts generally meant "mothering," that were first widely articulated during the early Cold War era. Books, magazine articles, television shows, movies, and advertisements on "parenthood" from the 1940s and 1950s explicitly singled out mothers as the most essential parent for raising children. Fathers were discussed as serving an equal, if not more important, function as breadwinners and role models. In 1946, pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock published his best-selling text on parenting titled *Baby and Child Care*. Spock worked from the core belief that "the life of the child can be harmed by improper mothering."⁴⁰ He updated

³⁹ Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 23.

⁴⁰ Nancy Pottishman Weiss, "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 5, (1977): 532, JSTOR, accessed February 25, 2014.

his 1976 edition to accommodate feminists, acknowledging that in previous editions he falsely assumed “that the parent taking the greater share of the care of young children (and of the home) would be the mother, whether or not she wanted an outside career.” However, he consistently addressed and referred to mothers in the newer version, arguing, for example, that the best gift a mother can give her child is love.⁴¹ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, parenting was still a concept designed to admonish and correct bad mothering, as the abuse literature that informed CAPTA also demonstrated. Ironically, male authority figures like Spock believed it required his own paternal guidance to be handled correctly.

While absent and working moms made for horrifying parents in 1980s media, and contributed to ideas that fueled the panic, the most atrocious mothers were presented as those who cared for their children but parented badly. They reinvented Norma Bates, the terrifying matriarch in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1955 hit film *Psycho*. Norma had allegedly tormented and abused her son, Norman, in his childhood, which apparently explains why the latter terrorizes and kills innocent women in adulthood. Norman is so maladjusted he keeps his dead mother in the basement and regularly impersonates her while alone in his house. Although Norma only appears at the end of the film as a corpse, her influence on Norman’s psychosis is discernable throughout. In the 1970s, successful movies like *Carrie* once again delivered Norma Bates-types to audiences. They provided a prolonged view of how Norma Bates may have behaved when she was alive. *Carrie* was released in 1976 and combined representations of bad mothers, the demon-horror genre, and conservative evangelical conceptions of the occult in suburbia. In the film, Carrie, played by Sissy Spacek, is raised alone by her mother, a deeply troubled woman named Margaret White. Actress Piper Laurie received an Academy Award nomination for her

⁴¹ Dr. Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, 4th ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), xix.

portrayal of the role. Margaret's passionate Catholic faith has driven her husband away and clouded her ability to appropriately raise her daughter. It causes her to neglect Carrie's comfort and care, which brings Carrie grief from her peers. The latter is relentlessly teased in the locker room one day because she fails to understand that she is menstruating. Her mother's religious fanaticism has prevented her from imparting to Carrie vital information about a woman's biological development.

During the film, Margaret hysterically taunts Carrie, which directly contributes to her social isolation at school. Although Carrie is invited to the prom, Margaret shouts at her beforehand that everyone there will make fun of her. "They're all gonna laugh at you," she contemptuously repeats. Her ritualistic mocking culminates in a dramatic attempt to kill Carrie near the end of the film. She stabs her in the back while simultaneously calling her a witch. Carrie exacts a final revenge for the years of physical and emotional torment she withstood from both her mother and peers, ultimately killing them all. She also kills herself, indicating that bad mothering potentially pushed a child to complete self-destruction.⁴² *Carrie* was part of a cultural resurgence of bad mothers defined by their deranged maternity, like Norma Bates. It preceded films like *Mother's Day* (1980), a low-budget independent movie in which a sadistic mom relentlessly commands her two sons to rape and torture three women camping nearby.⁴³ The first film in the *Friday the 13th* franchise, released in 1980, focused on Pamela Voorhees, the mother of horror icon Jason Voorhees. Although the film does not reveal details about the relationship between Mrs. Voorhees and her deceased son, the former kills dozens of innocent

⁴² *Carrie*, directed by Kimberly Pierce (1976; Beverly Hills, California: MGM Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD; "Carrie (1976)," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 3, 2013, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074285/>.

⁴³ "Mother's Day (1980)," *IMDb.com*, accessed May 4, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081186/>.

camp counselors on Jason's behalf. Her blood lust in his name marks their dynamic as highly unstable. In all of the sequels, Jason replaces his mom as the primary serial murderer, suggesting that her bad parenting spawned a dangerous and evil son. Norma Bates-types were not relegated to horror, as demonstrated by the 1985 commercial hit film *The Goonies* (1985). The movie's main antagonists are a criminal family comprised of Mama Fratelli and her three adult sons, one of whom is deformed and kept in chains. The dysfunctional clan remains in pursuit of the film's heroes, a band of young kids searching for buried treasure in order to save their suburban homes from demolition.⁴⁴

Representations of Ray Buckey mimicked white male suburban predators like Charles Manson and Michael Myers, but also exposed him as a bad mother. Buckey was a daycare center employee tasked with helping to care for neighborhood children. He subverted the evangelical ideal of nuclear family life because he was a surrogate mother, rather than a biological one, who harmed the children he looked after. However, the subsequent targeting of the women in his family, a circumstance that was repeated almost identically in the case of Gerald Amirault, provided the strongest evidence that media ideas of bad suburban moms were informing reality. The earliest panic cases began with allegations against white men that quickly extended to their female family members. Mothers, wives, and sisters were dragged in through supposed revelations made by children in interviews with CII and other social workers. Gerald Amirault's mother and sister were also accused of satanic ritual abuse. Like Peggy and Virginia McMartin, Ray Buckey's mother and grandmother, they spent substantial time in prison. Over the next few years, indictments against Margaret Kelly Michaels and Ileana Fuster were leveled

⁴⁴ "The Goonies (1985)," *IMDb.com*, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089218/>.

without an earlier male defendant present, revealing that fictional notions of bad mothers continued to sustain the panic.

The panic was America's commercial news media transposing Norma Bates, Margaret White, Joan Crawford, and Pamela Voorhees onto real men and women operating daycare centers or police units. McMartin and other cases helped render fictional visual media legitimate and realize the darkest fears of evangelical conservatives contributing to its shape. Although the panic waned in the early 1990s, terrible stay-at-home moms in particular continued to parade through television and film. Audiences were introduced, for example, to Beverly Sutphin, a fictional suburban wife and mother in 1994's dark comedy *Serial Mom*. Sutphin, played by Kathleen Turner, kills friends and neighbors for violating basic rules of social conduct in suburbia, like wearing white after Labor Day or stealing saved parking spaces.⁴⁵ The feminist movement influenced a few movies that directly took on the Norma Bates trope, like 1975's *The Stepford Wives*. The film presented a critique of the negative ways in which women were treated in a culture where they were solely identified with motherhood. The message was pronounced and fleeting, however, as the deregulated commercial environment in the next decade pushed Norma Bates back into the culture. Through the panic, she was actually brought to life.

Repressed Memory Syndrome

Potent cultural ideas of bad mothers were not confined to media images because another concept also entered the lives of many suburban women and potentially made abuse a legitimate experience for them. The phenomenon, known as "repressed memory syndrome," was predicated on ideas of bad mothering, as well as evangelical views of suburbia and the occult. In

⁴⁵ "Serial Mom (1984)," *IMDb.com*, accessed July 23, 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111127/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

the 1980s, repressed memory became both a highly controversial, and widely accepted, idea. The science behind it was vague and often impossible to prove because adults generally claimed to remember events that took place in childhood. Corroborating physical evidence was simply not available in those circumstances. Despite potential issues with its scientific legitimacy, repressed memory became the exclusive purview of therapists and social workers in the 1970s. Both careers rapidly expanded over the decade as part of a larger trend of women earning degrees in higher education or for professional purposes.⁴⁶ Therapy and social work were popular choices for women, particularly as CAPTA was enacted and feminists worked to call attention to issues like abuse, rape, incest, and inequality. Social worker Kee MacFarlane, for example, was a lobbyist for the feminist-oriented National Organization for Women (NOW) and a grant evaluator for NCCAN, which was created through CAPTA, before joining CII.⁴⁷ Despite working in a context of backlash, women like MacFarlane amassed substantial cultural power in the 1980s through their legal expertise on both child abuse and repressed memory. MacFarlane, who was given full authority to conduct interviews for the McMartin case, used techniques that became problematic for jurors because they were driven from a fundamental belief in the legitimacy of repressed memory, although the phenomenon was accepted as credible in most of the other major panic cases. Repressed memory was a means by which families engaged in the panic further blurred the boundaries between real and imagined, already worn thin from tabloid media.

Cognitive therapists and neuroscientists who engaged in scientific studies on human memory immediately questioned the validity of repressed memory, but their conclusions were

⁴⁶ “Women in the Workforce.”

⁴⁷ Mary De Young, *The Day Care Ritual Abuse Moral Panic*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2004), 28-8; Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 13.

not published at the time of the panic. Elizabeth F. Loftus, a university professor of Social Ecology, Law, and Cognitive Science, was one of the most vocal critics, publishing dozens of papers in the early 1990s in journals like *American Psychologist* and *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*. Loftus was shortly thereafter described as a “leading psychologist in the study of memory” and testified in several high-profile court cases, including trials for the Menendez brothers and Oliver North.⁴⁸ Loftus stated in a 1993 paper that while the detailed information outlined in some alleged repressed memories was difficult to entirely disprove, it was more likely derived from “internal and external sources” such as media reports, popular books, and the suggestions of therapists. She cautioned “psychotherapists, counselors, social service agencies, and law enforcement personnel” to be “circumspect regarding uncorroborated repressed memories that return.”⁴⁹ Her articles, however, did not appear until the early 1990s. At that time, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) was also formed to better understand repressed memory and aid families affected by it.⁵⁰ Until then, social workers and therapists like Kee MacFarlane and Lawrence Pazdar authoritatively insisted, without much criticism, that repressed memories were always authentic. Through his popular book *Michelle Remembers*, published in 1980, Pazdar had helped make unearthing repressed memories a standard practice for many women engaged in private therapy. He and MacFarlane were supported into the next decade by tabloid media, scholarly texts like *Repressed Memory: A Journey to Recovery from Sexual*

⁴⁸ Nick Zagorski, “Profile of Elizabeth F. Loftus,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102, no. 39 (2005): 13721, accessed July 23, 2014, <http://www.pnas.org/content/102/39/13721.full>.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Loftus, “The reality of repressed memories,” *American Psychologist* 48, no. 5, (1993), accessed July 23, 2014, <http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/lof93.htm>; “Elizabeth F. Loftus,” *UC Irvine School of Social Ecology*, accessed May 29, 2014, <http://socialecology.uci.edu/faculty/eloftus>.

⁵⁰ “About FMSF-Introduction,” *False Memory Syndrome Foundation*, last modified November 26, 2013, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.fmsfonline.org/?about=Intro>.

Abuse, published in 1992 by Renee Frederickson, Ph.D., and several books marketed to young children, like *Don't Make Me Go Back, Mommy: A Child's Book about Satanic Ritual Abuse*, from 1990.

Repressed memories were not only legally accepted in most panic cases, but deemed sufficient evidence to indict and convict dozens of individuals of satanic ritual abuse.⁵¹ McMartin was the primary exception, finally concluding when Buckey was acquitted for a second time. Anita Schuler of Citrus Day Care was also acquitted, although after a much shorter trial, and Edward Clark had his charges dropped. The judicial acceptance of repressed memory lent social workers like MacFarlane substantial power because they could assume the guilt of the accused outside the scope of the legal system, already in disarray over the handling of child abuse victims in court.⁵² Therapists and social workers were allowed to independently determine the absolute guilt or innocence of a person based solely on the word of their client. In the case of McMartin, law enforcement and social workers alike took seriously Judy Johnson's story of son Matthew's alleged abuse, despite her history of mental illness. Johnson's schizophrenic condition was not disclosed at any time during any of the trials. Her stories were used as the legitimate basis for CII's interviews because Kee MacFarlane supported them. The era's conservative backlash against working women did not apply to MacFarlane and others like her because the concepts of sexual abuse, cults, bad mothering, and repressed memory that defined their careers reinforced an influential evangelical worldview. MacFarlane was also able to project repressed memory onto children, which fueled implausible stories that fit the demands of a sensationalizing news media.

⁵¹ Loftus, "Reality."

⁵² Mertens, "California."

When CII first brought McMartin children in for questioning, they all initially responded that Buckey had not molested them.⁵³ Social workers interpreted their constant negative responses as “denial,” which, in practice, appeared identical to repressed memory. Projecting denial onto young children also substantiated a common belief among social workers and other professionals at the time that children never lie. MacFarlane explained that she used anatomically correct dolls to help with her interrogation methods because children were “clamming up” about their experiences. Her job was to “uncork the bottle” because children “had not been able to describe things, before they came to me.”⁵⁴ Throughout the 1980s, repressed memory and denial narratives among children in panic cases, as well as those of many adults in therapy, strongly resembled one another. The story usually revolved around a satanic cult that had somehow brainwashed victims into forgetting their forced participation in cult activities. Social workers and therapists working with alleged cult victims were not simply questioning their patients, but attempting to override the cult’s mind control techniques.

In 1988, Paul Ingram’s case best revealed the degree to which the panic’s satanic ritual abuse cult narratives were tied to the repressed memory phenomenon. After they returned home from a church retreat in 1987, Ingram’s two daughters accused their father, who had not been on the trip, of molesting them. They claimed the practice had gone on for several years when they were young girls. As their interviews with law enforcement conjured memories of the abuse as part of satanic rituals involving other members of the Olympia, Washington community, their broken silence appeared to confirm the idea that cults brainwashed victims

⁵³ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 73.

⁵⁴ Douglas Linder, “Testimony by Kee MacFarlane, Director of Children’s Institute International (Witness for the Prosecution)” *University of Missouri-Kansas City Faculty Projects*, August 8, 1988, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mcmartin/macfarlanetestimony.html>.

into complicity. However, in a strange twist, Ingram himself also reinforced the relationship between repressed memory and ritual abuse when he claimed to remember committing all of the crimes he had been accused of by his daughters. According to journalist Lawrence Wright, police hesitantly came up with the theory that for Ingram, “the cult had interfered with the ordinary process of memory formation, through drugs or chronic abuse.” When University of California, Berkeley psychology professor Dr. Richard Ofshe visited Ingram in Olympia to investigate the validity of his memories, he concluded that Ingram was “a highly suggestible individual with a tendency to float in and out of trance states and a patent and rather dangerous eagerness to please authority.” Ingram remained in prison until 2003 despite Ofshe’s conclusions because the former confessed to his alleged crimes. His testimony took place in a climate where claiming an idea as a “memory” could render it entirely valid. Ingram’s admission of guilt seemed to supply continuing evidence that repressed memories were real and the product of ritualistic cults. The same year as Ingram’s trial, a task force put together by the Los Angeles County Commission for Women published a report claiming that cults employed ritual “to intimidate victims into silence.”⁵⁵

As dozens of individuals involved in the panic retrieved repressed memories of experiencing, or committing, abuse, many of them became convinced that these past events were legitimate. Only later did some admit to fabricating their stories, as Kyle Zirpolo did in his *Los Angeles Times* apology. When Dr. Ofshe came to Olympia, he interviewed Paul Ingram’s wife, Sandy, who also began dredging up repressed memories of abuse involving her husband shortly after her daughters did the same. When describing her memories, Sandy told Ofshe they were “different” from her other “normal” memories. She then began to tremble, roll her eyes, talk in a “high, quaking voice,” and contort her face as she recounted these “different”

⁵⁵ Wright, *Satan*, 23-24, 84, 136, 146.

memories. One lawyer described his conversation with her as “one of the most rattling experiences of his life.” Whether or not interviewees were sometimes in a trance-like state, as Ofshe suspected, their stories still came to life in interviews and interrogation sessions. The stories were always intensely sexual and violent, although the level of graphic detail often depended on the age of alleged victims. Wright’s book on Ingram, *Remembering Satan: A Case of Recovered Memory and the Shattering of an American Family*, provided direct quotes of Dr. Ofshe’s interviews with Sandy. Sandy vividly recalled having her clothes ripped off with a knife, being strapped down to a table where she was repeatedly fondled and raped, and watching friends and neighbors engage in sexual activity. Children in various panic cases told stunted versions of the same stories. Sandy Ingram insisted the memories were real because she felt the cult members “touching me, holding me,” and “could smell them, feel them, and hear them.”⁵⁶ To those recalling “memories” of ritual abuse, they were not immersed in a nationwide panic fueled by sensational tabloid media but emotionally conjuring sexually charged encounters. By taking their memories seriously, law enforcement and tabloid media unquestioningly verified that the phenomenon existed.

Repressed memories were compelling partly because they potentially seemed real, but also because they put sex and violence at the center of their narratives. The influence of feminism on the culture was apparent in stories where masculine aggressors sexually terrorized women and children. They conveyed concepts of rape and domestic abuse that the women’s movement had only recently brought attention to as a political issue. Many accusations were successfully aimed at white men, including powerful figures in the community like Paul Ingram. They demonstrated that women had gained some cultural authority regarding these issues. More noticeable, however, was the climate of backlash, as women and children became victims of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 140-143.

their own false memories. Judy Johnson, for example, who vicariously experienced memories of her son's alleged abuse, spent time in a psychiatric facility and died in 1987 of liver failure due to alcoholism.⁵⁷ Families and communities were paralyzed by sexually potent repressed memories. They were forced to endure the material consequences of pervasive media representations of bad mothering.

Killer Clowns

Repressed memories brought to life the anti-feminist bad mothering narrative, but they also became a means of demonizing gay rights. Like feminists, gay rights activists became a particular target of conservative backlash. In response to criticism in the late 1960s of oppressive sexual norms, conservative groups revived early Cold War efforts to conflate homosexuality and pedophilia. They proclaimed that both posed a similar threat to the sanctity of the nuclear family, much like feminists who supported access to abortion. Religious conservatives repeatedly quoted biblical passages to justify the inherent sin of sexual behaviors that undercut their suburban family ideal. Anti-pornography and child sex abuse laws became two of their most powerful weapons against “sex offenders,” an idea increasingly conveyed through tabloid media and overtly linked to men like Ray Buckey. His supposed interest in young Matthew Johnson made Buckey a terrifying example of what non-heterosexual impulses looked like in a culture influenced by conservative groups. Tying homosexuality to pedophilia in a suburban context, whether devil-worship was involved or not, encouraged a cultural fixation with the white children who resided there. It also inflated the scale and importance of childhood, an idea that became sacred in the 1980s.

⁵⁷ Nathan and Snedecker, *Silence*, 92.

Many gay rights activists credit the 1969 riot at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, as igniting their personal politicization. Rather than surrender, gay bar patrons at Stonewall had decided to fight back against police during a routine raid. By the early 1970s, roughly four hundred gay and lesbian organizations had formed nationwide to fight discrimination. Local and national news reported on their protests, which included staging “kiss-ins,” inaugurating citywide gay pride parades, introducing state anti-discrimination legislation, electing openly gay politicians, publicly applying for marriage licenses, and occasionally interrupting on-air news broadcasts. At one point during the decade, an activist interrupted Walter Cronkite on the *CBS Evening News* to display a sign that read “Gays Protest CBS Prejudice.”⁵⁸ However, while early reports on gay activism like the Stonewall riots were generally unsympathetic to protestors, their tone began to noticeably shift as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, hubs of the commercial news and entertainment industry, became epicenters of gay advocacy. A 1977 *NBC News Special Report* on the gay rights movement highlighted the battle between gay rights groups in Dade County, Miami, where Frank and Ileana Fuster operated County Walk Daycare, and evangelical anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant, who had a short-lived music career and served as a TV ad spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission. The report included interviews that were sensitive to activists like former Air Force sergeant Leonard Matlovich, who denounced the military for dismissing him based on his sexual orientation after he had served in Vietnam. It also called attention to the contradictions between Bryant’s message of bigotry and her professed Christian love.⁵⁹ In 1978, former San Francisco supervisor Dan White assassinated Harvey Milk, the first openly gay member of the city’s Board of Supervisors. The story ran on network evening news

⁵⁸ Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 121-122; Schulman, *Seventies*, 180.

⁵⁹ “NBC Evening News for Thursday, June 02, 1977, Headline: Special (Gay Rights),” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed May 29, 2014.

programs twenty-nine times between Milk's death and White's suicide seven years later. The assassination of Milk, like many other news stories of the era, potentially received more attention as it collided with those on cults and Charles Manson-types. For example, ABC's first news report on Milk, who was killed along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, dismissed alleged rumors that the shootings were related to the mass suicide at Jim Jones' Peoples Temple earlier that year. Moscone had recently attended the funeral of Representative Leo Ryan, who was killed trying to help cult members escape Jones' compound in Guyana.⁶⁰

As certain facets of the gay rights movement received more favorable treatment in television news and print sources, the entertainment industry, to which network news was becoming increasingly tied, began introducing audiences to openly gay characters. Network television shows like *All in the Family* (1971-1979), *Three's Company* (1977-1984), and *All My Children* (1970-2011) were the first to introduce gay characters and plotlines that examined homosexuality.⁶¹ PBS's children's program *Sesame Street* (1969-present) included two adult male puppets named Bert and Ernie who shared a bedroom, although they slept in separate beds. In 1970, Cinema Center Films, the film division of CBS, released *The Boys in the Band*, the first Hollywood production that dealt exclusively with gay characters and their sexual identity. It was followed with commercial successes like *Cabaret* (1972) and *Ode to Billy Joe* (1976). While conservatives reacted to real gains made by homosexual advocates in local politics, they were also responding to the growing number of gay people in the media. The latter appeared on network shows and in movies, but also entered the culture through the pornography and music

⁶⁰ "ABC Evening News for Monday, November 27, 1978, Headline: San Francisco/Moscone-Milk Murders," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed May 20, 2014.

⁶¹ Christine Sparta, "TV: Emergence from the Closet," *USA Today*, March 11, 2002, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/television/2002/2002-03-11-coming-out-timeline.htm>

industries. It was in those arenas that they offered some of the most assertive and visible rejections of Cold War-era sexual conformity and expanding evangelical conceptions of nuclear family life. At disco clubs like New York City's Studio 54, androgynous musicians like David Bowie socialized with gay models, actors, and adult film stars, images of which were displayed in tabloid newspapers like *Star* and *The National Enquirer*. For conservatives, it was disco in particular, a dominant pop music trend in the 1970s, that pulled together the most distasteful elements of sixties liberalism. Disco was a "cosmopolitan, cross-cultural music fad" that fused "black pride, female sexual assertion, [and] gay liberation."⁶² Both Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell openly denounced disco in front of crowds of thousands. They helped make it unappealing enough for some radio advertisers that they no longer wanted to sponsor it. ABC radio, for example, had to sell them instead on contemporary rock, which supposedly "offered wholesome family fare." In a speech he gave at the end of the decade to an audience of his followers, Falwell listed disco as an immediate cultural threat, along with "president Carter, homosexuality, pornography, television comedy, abortion," and sex education.⁶³

The controversial issue of pornography in the 1970s received an unprecedented amount of media attention that helped to aggravate the backlash against gays and lesbians. State anti-obscenity laws that were passed and reformed after 1973, when the Supreme Court ruled that defining obscene material should be determined at the state and local level, sparked heated conversation over civil liberties that played out on national and local news. The reports revealed that powerful segments of the population considered pornography, conveyed as an increasingly conspicuous feature of American commercial culture, an urgent social problem. In 1974, as state

⁶² Schulman, *Seventies*, 73.

⁶³ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 205.

anti-pornography vice squads began to raid the venues where obscene material was sold, produced, or distributed, the extent of hysteria was exposed when the Supreme Court ruled that the official government report on pornography was itself pornographic.⁶⁴ Network news reports displayed bitter conflicts in states with laws considered particularly repressive. In Virginia, for example, Charlottesville city officials wanted stores to remove *Playboy* and *Penthouse* because they found images of naked women offensive.⁶⁵ The major news story to emerge from debates over anti-pornography legislation, however, focused on FBI undercover sting operations to break up pornography rings. After harsher laws were passed in 1977, subsequent raids that same year led to the indictment of fifty-four people, who were portrayed as ominous, shadowy figures with dangerous sexual preferences.⁶⁶

Representations of pornographers were increasingly tied to pedophiles. A 1982 *Newsweek* article on the trial of child pornographer Catherine Wilson described unwelcome individuals who came to the prosecution's screening of the pornographic film *Randy Lolitas* as "a seedy, raincoat-clad male audience." Although Wilson, labeled the "child-porn queen of the West," allegedly went into business with her five thousand customers "for the money," the article emphasized the claims of leading experts that most "do it for sport." They "photograph their own exploits and circulate them through a sordid underground," where they are "traded

⁶⁴ "NBC Evening News for Monday, Jun 24, 1974, Headline: Supreme Court/Obscenity," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014.

⁶⁵ "CBS Evening News for Thursday, Jul 05, 1973, Headline: Pornography," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014.

⁶⁶ "NBC Evening News for Thursday, Feb 14, 1980, Headline: Pornography Raids," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014.

like baseball cards.” Judy Johnson accused Ray Buckey of molesting her son at the same time as Wilson, who resided in a “ritzy Los Angeles neighborhood,” was on trial.⁶⁷

The pronounced homosexual backlash of the 1970s primarily manifested as conservative attempts to equate homosexuality and pedophilia through the issue of child pornography.⁶⁸ Throughout the decade, congress passed conservative-backed anti-pornography and child sex abuse legislation that was periodically tightened at the state and local level.⁶⁹ These laws disproportionately targeted men with sexual proclivities that appeared to undermine suburbia’s heterosexual norms. Homosexual men were considered especially threatening to children, who needed to be raised in an exclusively heterosexual environment for the conservative family model to survive. While children in the media of previous decades were often deliberately sexualized, like the sultry young teenager in Vladimir Nabokov’s 1955 novel *Lolita*, made into a film directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1962, their image changed radically as pro-family conservatives gained political momentum and media control. A 1977 *New Republic* article scrutinized representations of children in movies that had been commercially and critically successful a few years earlier, including those of the demon-horror genre like *The Exorcist*. The article focused on media depictions of the “sexual interaction between children and adults,” a

⁶⁷ “NBC Evening News for Saturday, May 08, 1982, Headline: Child Pornography,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014; Aric Press and Janet Huck, “The Mother of Kiddie Porn?” *Newsweek*, January 23, 1984, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 20, 2013.

⁶⁸ Jenkins, *Panic*, 124-135.

⁶⁹ “NBC Evening News for Thursday, Jun 21, 1973, Headline: Supreme Court/Obscenity Ruling,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014. The Supreme Court ruled in 1973 to leave definitions of pornography up to the states, a story that was covered in the national news.

circumstance that was increasingly viewed as not only inappropriate but illegal.⁷⁰ Although age-of-consent laws varied by state, the general cultural consensus by the late 1970s held that all young people under the age of eighteen were sexually incompetent. They were unable to make decisions regarding their undeveloped sexuality, which also prevented them from voluntarily engaging in such activity with peers or adults. Despite the fact that network news reported in the early 1970s that many people considered pornography “all right if expensive,” and felt that “cheaper pornography should also be granted equal protection” under the first amendment, such stories ran alongside a growing number on police raids of child pornography rings.⁷¹

One of the most significant news stories of the late 1970s and early 1980s that reinforced conservative anti-pornography efforts to link homosexuality and pedophilia was that of serial killer John Wayne Gacy, Jr. In 1980, Gacy was charged with “more murders than any person in United States history.” He confessed to Chicago-area police a few years prior that he had sexually assaulted and killed dozens of young boys in his home in Des Plaines, Illinois.⁷² After he was found guilty of murdering thirty-three people in 1980, Gacy was sentenced to death and executed in 1994. In the interim, he provided news sources with tales of his homosexual depravity. Like Manson, Gacy became a cultural icon. He apparently received “100 fan letters a week” and served as the subject of numerous other books, articles, and movies, including a 1992

⁷⁰ Roger Rosenblatt, “The Children’s Hour it Isn’t,” *New Republic* 177, no. 21 (1977), 40, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 13, 2013.

⁷¹ Keyword Search of “Child Pornography,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 2, 2014. The search yielded 34 results between 1968 and 1990, with reports on the subject starting in 1977. Some of the reports in the 1980s dealt exclusively with McMartin.

⁷² “NBC Evening News for Monday, Jan 28, 1980, Headline: Gacy Trial,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 2, 2014.

TV mini-series that aired on the WGN network.⁷³ In 1998, four years after his execution, Gacy still held cultural sway as news sources reported that Chicago police were investigating claims of potential bodies buried at Gacy's mother's house, four miles from his own.⁷⁴ He was described in initial news reports as both a "sex offender" and "admitted homosexual," labels that only further intertwined as his media identity evolved.⁷⁵ The standard narrative on Gacy consistently depicted him luring young boys into his house, sexually assaulting and murdering them, and sleeping with the dead bodies before disposing of them. Ray Buckey and other panic defendants were Gacy-types, especially since Gacy also embodied a fundamental contradiction like the daycare owners who ritually abused the children in their care. Gacy had a side job as a "registered clown," making him both an entertainer, and murderer, of children.⁷⁶ Arnold Friedman, who was tried in 1988, also worked as clown, linking his case most directly to Gacy's. Gacy continued to paint and sell pictures of clowns in prison, becoming nationally known as "the killer clown."

Gacy was also an important backlash story because his victims were described in reports as possessing several features instrumental to conservative views of children. Endangered

⁷³ Sinara O'Donnell and Donald Jordan, "John Wayne Gacy," *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1994, accessed June 2, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1994-03-31/local/me-40366_1_john-wayne-gacy-disabled-children-victims-families; Susan King, "How to Catch a Mass Murderer: Miniseries about John Wayne Gacy is told from the Perspective of his Unrelenting Captor," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1992, accessed June 2, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-05-10/news/tv-2158_1_john-wayne-gacy.

⁷⁴ John McCormick, "Digging Up the Past," *Newsweek*, November 23, 1998, 40. Academic Search Premier, accessed June 2, 2014.

⁷⁵ "ABC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec 26, 1978, Headline: Chicago Area Murders," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 2, 2014; "NBC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec 26, 1978, Headline: Chicago Area Murders," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 2, 2014.

⁷⁶ Terry Sullivan, *Killer Clown: The John Wayne Gacy Murders* (New York: Pinnacle, 2011), 89.

children were understood in news stories to be white, suburban, middle-class, and sexually innocent. A *Los Angeles Times* article, for example, explicitly mentioned that white, fifteen-year-old victim Rob Priest was “not a runaway,” but “an honor student from a good family.”⁷⁷ Most importantly for the panic, however, was that Gacy’s victims appeared young. Many were described as “boys,” even though some were in their twenties, revealing an essential component of prosecuting and demonizing ideas of pornography, pedophilia, and homosexuality. To be cast as deviant and related, these three concepts had to be positioned as presenting similar threats to common ideas about “childhood.” By the early 1980s, childhood, increasingly shaped by conservative evangelicals and embedded within their white, suburban ideal, was portrayed as a time of complete sexual purity. Horror movies supplemented that view by portraying a young, white virginal female, like Laurie Strode in *Halloween*, as the most effective weapon against suburbia’s adversaries. As people became invested in the fight against child sexual abuse and pornography, they determined these were some of the worst fates that could ever befall a child. They almost exclusively meant, however, white, suburban children who were allegedly asexual.

Sexual purity was implied in media representations of white suburban children in a number of ways. One obvious device was to make the main character abstinent, like Laurie Strode, in direct contrast to other sexual characters, who then became victims of terrible fates. Another was to depict children raptly engaging with entertaining and “wholesome” consumer goods, like candy, toys, clothes, and television. In places like toy stores, amusement parks, and shopping malls, the sexual exploitation inherent in many aspects of commercial capitalism was distant and easy to ignore. The news media’s most persistent tactic was to consistently juxtapose sexually innocent child victims with menacing homosexual adults, like Gacy. A major news story before the panic broke reported on the debates in California over whether homosexuals

⁷⁷ King, “Murderer.”

should be allowed to teach in public schools. Proposition 6, a failed initiative on the election ballot in 1978, would have prohibited them from doing so. Harvey Milk was active in the campaign against it before his assassination, while Anita Bryant remained a vocal proponent. However, the public debate over Prop 6 guided the news media towards stories of white, middle-class children who became victims of horrible fates at the hands of homosexual pedophiles. During the 1980s, suburban kids were exposed to tales of men like Gacy and Ray Buckey. They were cautioned against “strangers,” which primarily came to imply pornographers, sexual predators, molesters, kidnappers, and pedophiles. Horror movies reinforced and supplemented news stories encouraging children to be terrified of looming sexual threats. Although sexual abuse and pedophilia remained a real problem throughout American society, the bigger issue for many young people living in suburbia was that they always seemed to be lurking somewhere nearby. One did not need to interact with faceless strangers to be terrified of them.

The panic demonstrated and exacerbated the extent to which children were infantilized and made into victims during the 1980s. The 1984 Missing Children’s Assistance Act enhanced the trend by focusing on the idea that missing children were often abducted by pedophiles, pornographers, and cults, rather than running away or being kidnapped as part of a child custody battle.⁷⁸ Conservative fears about childhood dangers, however, subjected children in the suburbs to the same climate of heavy regulation that penalized homosexual pedophiles, laden with rules regarding behavior and conduct.⁷⁹ Children conformed to adult-imposed restrictions under the notion that they provided safety and protection. Despite being consistently portrayed in the

⁷⁸ Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, *Missing and Exploited Children: Background, Policies, and Issues*, August 1, 2014, 11-12, accessed September 29, 2014, fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34050.pdf.

⁷⁹ Mintz, *Raft*, 359, 369.

media as innocent, many suburban children suffered under punitive laws regarding drugs, shoplifting, and theft. This was particularly the case with young white men, who were hypothetically tasked with carrying on the white patriarchal nuclear family tradition. The number of incarcerated youth of all races serving sentences in adult prisons began to escalate substantially, climbing from around 4,000 in 1985 to a peak of 15,000 in 1997.⁸⁰ While some state juvenile facilities experienced relatively stable incarceration rates, many county facilities saw numbers dramatically begin to rise in the late 1980s.⁸¹ A 1987 survey of young people in America's juvenile detention centers revealed that ninety-three percent were male, fifty-three percent were white, and many were imprisoned for offenses involving property, drugs, and public conduct. More than eighty percent reported that they were illegal drug users.⁸² Conservative notions of childhood in the 1980s, and the panic that helped define them, also inadvertently privileged many qualities that conservatives believed were antithetical to the earliest years of a person's life. It put supposedly asexual children at the center of graphic stories of rape

⁸⁰ "Number of Youth Held in Adult Prisons and Jails, 1985-2011," *The Sentencing Project*, 6, accessed September 29, 2014, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsentencingproject.org%2Fdoc%2Fpublications%2Finc_Trends_in_Corrections_Fact_sheet.pdf&ei=TO2mVJm5J9imyASrkoLYAw&usg=AFQjCNHqU_r7Es-oq4jfErltnDUe3lOyXg&bvm=bv.82001339,d.aWw.

⁸¹ "The Criminal Justice System in Washington State: Incarceration Rates, Taxpayer Costs, Crime Rates, and Prison Economics," *Washington State Institute for Public Policy*, January 2003, 2, accessed September 29, 2014, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wsipp.wa.gov%2FReportFile%2F824%2FWsipp_The-Criminal-Justice-System-in-Washington-State-Incarceration-Rates-Taxpayer-Costs-Crime-Rates-and-Prison-Economics_Full-Report.pdf&ei=mO2mVOyUCIGKyASv64GgAw&usg=AFQjCNFkjLgTMcJsyzEzNGF3O3bw0SCSHA&bvm=bv.82001339,d.aWw.

⁸² Allen Beck, Ph.d., Lawrence Greenfield, and Susan Kline, "Survey of Youth in Custody, 1987," *Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics*, September 1, 1988, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=3723>.

and abuse. The panic was a concrete manifestation of backlash politics, and as such helped expose the flawed logic behind them. Ironically, while conservatives were painting feminists and gay rights advocates as dangerous to children, their ideology and policies would inflict some of the most devastating harm on young people.

CHAPTER 5

“HELL IN THE CITY OF ANGELS”: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE IN RITUAL
ABUSE CASES

Black Cities/White Suburbs

While the panic was part of a backlash against changing notions of sexuality and gender, it was also an exercise in solidifying racial difference. As a product of tabloid media, the panic characterized race as one of the most essential components of personal identity, reinforcing the genre’s fundamentally divisive black/white racial divide. The panic occurred mostly in communities that appeared identical to those in many media outlets where residents appeared “white,” an indication that the sentiments of powerful political conservatives, who reacted to racial diversity with vocal antagonism, were effective. Conservatives openly rejected the racial and ethnic tolerance that various social movements of the 1960s had embraced. In particular, they attacked the policies enacted to enhance diversity in various American institutions throughout the 1970s and 1980s, like busing to integrate school systems and affirmative action in hiring.¹ Conservative political interests found their views validated through the voices of prominent intellectuals like Allan Bloom, a University of Chicago professor who authored the “backlash classic,” *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987. Bloom and his cohorts built on the earlier work of men like politician and sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who in 1965 published the landmark race study, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. In it, Moynihan referred to the black family as “a tangled web of pathology,” although he attributed their

¹ Viguerie, *Right*, 5.

dysfunction to racial discrimination at work.”² After the success of Moynihan’s report, prominent conservative intellectuals increasingly supplied scholarly justification for their racism. As Bloom and others picked up the mantle in the 1980s, they cloaked white supremacy in academic language. They pushed the assertion that “whiteness” was both socially privileged, and in peril, to the center of the nation’s political arena.³ They revealed and strengthened the dominant conservative view that “black” and “white” were the only recognizable or important racial designations. In a section on race, for example, Bloom suggests that affirmative action programs since the late 1960s have caused the inherent integrity of “whiteness” to decline. At Cornell, where Bloom once taught, the consequence of higher enrollments of blacks was that “standards of admission had silently and drastically been altered.” “The fact is that the average black student’s achievements do not equal those of the average white student in the good universities, and everybody knows it,” Bloom concludes.⁴ As Bloom’s popularity among conservatives indicates, it was white individuals in positions of power that still primarily determined those categories.

During the 1980s, prominent conservative ideas about race were broadcast across the nation and to various parts of the world. Through their strong influence on tabloid television and other media outlets, they successfully conveyed a white identity that was evangelical,

² Jimmie L. Reeves, “Re-Covering Racism: Crack Mothers, Reaganism, and the Network News,” in *In Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, ed., Sasha Torres (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 102-103; Hodgson, *Time*, 264, 267.

³ John Gabriel, *Whitewash: Racialized Politics and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1998), 69-71.

⁴ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1987), 94, 96.

heterosexual, masculine, patriarchal, and populist.⁵ It mostly depended “on defining others for its own self-definition.”⁶ Its most essential quality, however, was that it directly opposed and feared ideas of “blackness,” or a black identity, by which conservatives like Bloom clarified to mean black people “from inner cities,” rather than “privileged blacks.”⁷ Although conservatives in the 1980s were not the first powerful political group to craft white identity as “the coin of African American exclusion,” their narrative of white male victimization was uniquely shaped through the era’s expanding commercial media outlets, rendering it more widespread and available than in the past.⁸ The panic was a part of conservative efforts to manufacture their ideas of race through the media, but also an unfortunate consequence of them. It demonstrated that creating antagonistic black/white racial dichotomies through the media in a society configured by high levels of residential segregation could backfire, encouraging white suburban residents to turn against one another. The menacing urban black faces on screen were not visible in places like Manhattan Beach, prompting the fear they encouraged to partly manifest as the panic. White suburbia seemed to offer refuge from urban black criminals, but could not offer protection from fear, which proved to be a more destructive force. Hysterical paranoia of implausible, vaguely supernatural scenarios was arguably made possible because African-Americans from the inner city were not present amid the relative homogeneity and financial comfort of many panic communities.

⁵ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 17.

⁶ Gabriel, *Whitewash*, 61.

⁷ Bloom, *Mind*, 94.

⁸ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 21-22.

As numerous scholars have demonstrated, representations of black Americans in the nation's dominant media sources were controversial and limited throughout its history. During the 1970s and 1980s, as many outspoken conservatives sharpened their narrative of white male victimization, local news and other tabloid media outlets enhanced it by providing representations of dangerous African Americans inhabiting crumbling urban landscapes. Their black identity ranged "from menace on one end to immorality on the other, with irresponsibility located somewhere in the middle."⁹ The predominant type to emerge in the news was one Donald Bogle refers to as the "brutal black buck," a masculine black man depicted as "subhuman and feral." First evident in D. W. Griffith's controversial 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, the buck was always "on a rampage full of black rage."¹⁰ While versions of the type had existed in American media for centuries, it once again triumphed in the decades following urban riots and black political activism in the late 1960s. Its most recent incarnation differed from past representations, however, in that the buck's violent identity was fundamentally tied to the declining inner city. Like other black stereotypes, he possessed the quality of being "a lower class or 'under' class individual of little economic attainment or status," but was permanently relocated to impoverished city slums, far from the rural setting that defined earlier depictions of the character.¹¹ The buck arose as a prevalent media type amid the proliferation of television news in the 1970s, which included longer national programs, more local news during the day, and the introduction of tabloid shows like *Donahue*.

⁹ Gray, *Struggle*, 17.

¹⁰ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th ed., (New York: Continuum, 2002), 13.

¹¹ Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 53.

Tabloid media's widespread dissemination of urban black bucks is traceable to 1965, when race riots broke out in urban black communities around the country and Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued his report on the African American family—although his report as a policy paper was not in response to the riots. The riots of the 1960s were novel in that the rioters were African American, rather than white men, since the latter had generally instigated race riots in the past. After a 1943 “race riot” in Detroit, for example, *Life* magazine included a photo spread that “depicted a kind of social drama of white violence and black victimization.”¹² However, despite the fact that a major riot in Newark in 1967 had the same death toll as the earlier Detroit riot, reports portrayed it, as well as other riots of the decade, as a national epidemic and argued they were the worst in America's history.¹³ Over the next few years, as riots broke out in America's cities, particularly older industrial ones like Cleveland, Baltimore, Chicago, and Detroit, news reports suggested activities were part of a full-scale race war. These violent episodes contributed to a simplistic media view of the inner city as a powder keg of misplaced rage, stripped of any political context. According to a *Saturday Evening Post* article, the Watts riot in 1965, which had initially triggered the decade's wave of rioting, demonstrated that “the racial problem in this country is wholly insoluble.” It continued to fester “like some incurable disease, with which both whites and Negroes must learn to live in pain, all the days of our lives.”¹⁴ A *New Republic* article critical of riot coverage revealed the extent to which reports on Watts had reinvigorated the stereotype of the dangerous black buck. The article singled out television because it was “dependent upon action” and ran “the risk of being manipulated far

¹² Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 153.

¹³ Hodgson, *Time*, 264; Ibid.

¹⁴ Stewart Alsop, “Watts: the fire next time,” *Saturday Evening Post* 238, no. 22 (1965), 20, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 4, 2014.

more than the other news media.” In the case of the riots, it created a “spurious reality of its own.” Reporters acted on false rumors and compared rioters to animals “on station after station,” the article disparaged. One African American was quoted as telling a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, “ ‘they called everybody rioting a hoodlum. Like everything bad that was happening was happening to the police. Watts is really trying to come up. And all TV could talk about was ‘Hell in the City of Angels.’ ”¹⁵

The New York Times and a few other print sources ran lengthy headlines after Watts, including one that read, “Sociologist Say Latest Riots Differ From Those of the Past: Some Doubt Racial Hostility is Motive—Many Feel Negro Reacts in Despair Over New Hopes He Can’t Fulfill.” Such headlines demonstrated that they viewed riot conditions as nuanced and complex. Most, however, joined television in painting the riots as acts of misplaced aggression.¹⁶ Television also occasionally made concessions to a more complicated view after the official government report on the riots was released in 1967. The report outlined environmental factors that had contributed to rioting. It concluded that, while riots often resulted from a confrontation between white cops and black citizens, the “trivial” incident that catalyzed them was merely “the breaking point” for African Americans after months of “mounting tension.”¹⁷ In a 1971 segment, *NBC Evening News*, for example, quoted the head of the federal commission that issued the report, Otto Kerner, explaining that the “seeds of racial violence are racial prejudice in [the]

¹⁵ John Gregory Dunne, “TV’s Riot Squad,” *New Republic* 153, no. 11 (1965): 28, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 4, 2014.

¹⁶ Sydney H. Schanberg, “Sociologist Say Latest Riots Differ From Those of the Past: Some Doubt Racial Hostility is Motive—Many Feel Negro Reacts in Despair Over New Hopes He Can’t Fulfill,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 1965, 17, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1965/08/17/96713921.html>.

¹⁷ “National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (The Kerner Report), 1967,” *Blackpast.org*, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.blackpast.org/primary/national-advisory-commission-civil-disorders-kerter-report-1967>.

suburbs.”¹⁸ However, television news mostly portrayed the riots as reprehensible episodes of anarchy and chaos. Reports focused mainly on African Americans and reduced “their public protest” to “little more than criminal activity.”¹⁹ It provided visual and audio evidence of *Time* magazine’s assertion in 1965 that “Negroes” could be “divided into two groups: a prospering level, committed to integration,” and “a slum level, mired in deepening ignorance, immorality and irresponsibility.”²⁰

According to the *New Republic*’s critique, “one channel went so far as to score its riot footage with movie ‘chase’ music.”²¹ A 1968 *CBS Evening News* segment quoted black “militants” arguing that they would “shoot at any cop, no matter what color.” It also highlighted the number of policemen who had been killed in shootouts with “well-armed snipers,” a designation given to many rioters that implied an organized rebellion. An officer interviewed in Cleveland boasted that he had bought his own personal gun with the “fire power of 3 police” because he no longer felt safe patrolling city streets with the standard gun he had been issued.²² With few exceptions, mass media of the late 1960s attempted to make the fear of a ghetto war palpable. White audiences were asked to feel terror on behalf of white cops and shudder at the words of anonymously quoted African Americans who threatened to “kill every goddam white

¹⁸ “NBC Evening News for Tuesday, May 25, 1971, Headline: Kerner/Racial Violence,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 27, 2014.

¹⁹ Mumford, *Riots*, 144.

²⁰ “The Negro After Watts,” *Time* 86, no. 9 (1965), Academic Search Premier, accessed August 5, 2014.

²¹ Dunne, “Squad.”

²² “CBS Evening News for Thursday, Sep 12, 1968, Headline: Police Behavior/Snipers/Weapons,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 5, 2014.

capitalist.”²³ Some sources went so far as to claim the riots threatened to spill over into nearby suburbs. A 1967 Universal newsreel on the Newark riots warned that in four “nearby suburban towns,” guns had been stolen, a policeman had been beaten to death, and “violence and looting are reported.”²⁴ Driven by television news, distorted representations of the desperate actions taken by those residing at America’s “slum level” made them all into brutal black bucks.

The riots intersected with media images of the Black Power movement, which emerged in the late 1960s. Since members of the movement were outspoken against integration policies, sometimes carried guns in city streets, and occasionally participated in riot activities, news sources portrayed them as riot leaders. Rioters, in turn, were described as “growingly enamored of a chauvinistic, equal-but-separate kind of segregation.”²⁵ News reports quoted the “outbursts” of intellectual Black Power activists like Leroi Jones, who later changed his name to Amiri Baraka, as they addressed crowds about the riots. In 1969, national television news also covered Baraka’s trial for weapons charges and disorderly conduct during the 1967 Newark riots.²⁶ The overall effect was to make America’s inner cities appear as black holes of senseless rage. Although the riots quieted in the next decade, the spectacular coverage they received in the news left a permanent imprint on American media. They influenced most subsequent representations of the inner city, particularly on television. Throughout the 1970s, popular music genres like disco, funk, and rap helped to keep urban black culture as a media focal point. The cult popularity of “blaxploitation” films like *Shaft* (1971), *Superfly* (1972), and *Foxy Brown* (1974)

²³ Alsop, “Fire,” 20.

²⁴ Newark New Jersey Civil Right Riots July 1967,” *YouTube* video, 02:02, Aug 17, 2012, accessed June 25, 2014, <http://youtu.be/O6RXBTswx-g>.

²⁵ “Watts.”

²⁶ Ibid.; “NBC Evening News for Wednesday, Jul 02, 1969, Headline: Jones/Newark Riots,” *Vanderbilt*, accessed August 5, 2014.

did the same. However, as they were absorbed into commercial entertainment, the brutal black bucks that dominated representations of the riots were temporarily rendered impotent. The backdrop of a decaying city remained a regular media presence, but was instead populated by African Americans who embraced their roles as consumers and encountered the same circumstances as most of their fictional white counterparts. This was especially true of television sitcoms like *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), *Good Times* (1974-1979), and *What's Happening!!* (1976-1979). These shows were set in Watts and inner-city Chicago, but their location was the only significant feature that connected them to the riots. *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), the other major television show of the decade with a predominantly black cast, was alternatively set in an affluent New York neighborhood. Along with the some of the decade's other popular media, like the many movies starring popular African-American comedian Richard Pryor, including *Car Wash* (1976), *Which Way is Up?* (1977), *Blue Collar* (1978), and *The Wiz* (1978), commercial media kept the once-rioting city prominent. Audiences were briefly invited to sympathize with black characters who inhabited the same urban spaces as rioters.

As the panic neared, media images of black urban spaces remained visible, but continued to evolve as various conservative groups gained power. The influence of the latter was detectable by the mid-1970s, when coverage of looting during the 1975 blackouts in New York City once again turned black participants into brutal bucks. News reports joined a shift in entertainment content that increasingly situated characters, particularly black city dwellers, within a conservative evangelical value system. In a 1978 episode of *What's Happening!!*, which centered on three working-class black teens in Watts, one of the characters joins a strange religious cult that worships a head of lettuce. Freddy Stubbs, known on the show as "Rerun," begins to spend all of his time and hard-earned money supporting the cult, and can only be helped through the

intervention of other characters.²⁷ On shows featuring African-American characters in the next decade, like *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-1986) and *Webster* (1983-1989), young black male stars were uprooted from their urban black neighborhoods to live with wealthy white families. Removed entirely from backdrops that hinted at African American discontent, these shows focused even more exclusively on problems articulated by political conservatives of the 1980s. In a 1983 two-part episode of *Diff'rent Strokes* titled "The Bicycle Man," Arnold, the younger Jackson brother played by Gary Coleman, encounters a dangerous pedophile named Mr. Horton. Mr. Horton owns a bicycle shop where Mr. Drummond, the white father who adopts Arnold and Willis, is getting his bike fixed. As Mr. Horton becomes friends with Mr. Drummond, the latter makes repeated, and increasingly aggressive, attempts to seduce Arnold. He lures Arnold and his friend with ice cream, wine, and comic books, and introduces them to pornography. Coinciding with the earliest manifestations of the panic in Manhattan Beach, Mr. Horton also tells the kids about naked games they can play with their clothes off. The first part of the episode aired on February 5, three days after Los Angeles reporter Wayne Satz first broke the McMartin story, which eventually included stories of "naked games."²⁸ Arnold is ultimately able to alert Mr. Drummond, who tells the police.²⁹ The show also visited the issue of kidnapping in an episode

²⁷ "What's Happening Season 2 Episode 18 Rerun Sees the Light," *YouTube* video, 22:44, December 13, 2014, accessed June 25, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI7D2eZC00U>.

²⁸ "Diff'rent Strokes, The Bicycle Man: Part 1 (5 Feb. 1983)," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0560049/>; "Diff'rent Strokes, The Bicycle Man: Part 2 (12 Feb. 1983)," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0560050/>; Reinhold, "Longest."

²⁹ "Diff'rent Strokes The Bicycle Man (part 1)," 1983, *Dailymotion.com*, 23:53, December 31, 2011, accessed August 5, 2014, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xndc5b_diff-rent-strokes-the-bicycle-man-part-1_fun; "Diff'rent Strokes The Bicycle Man (part 2)," 1983, *Dailymotion.com*, 24:54, December 31, 2011, accessed August 5, 2014, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xndc5d_diff-rent-strokes-the-bicycle-man-part-2_fun.

titled “Sam’s Missing.” During the episode, a psychotic family abducts Arnold’s new stepbrother, Sam, after the former lost their own son. Eventually Mr. Drummond rescues Sam, but spends a week searching for him and offering a substantial reward for his return.³⁰ Episodes of urban black sitcoms in the 1980s, like their white suburban counterparts, also dealt with dating, relationships, and the importance of family.

After a short-lived hiatus in the 1970s, representations of African Americans in the media of the 1980s once again adhered to the two dominant types earlier conveyed during press reports on the riots of the 1960s. They were portrayed either as “privileged,” embracing a spirit of consumerism that rioters and activists had openly rejected, or as urban black bucks residing at the “slum level.”³¹ When *Sanford and Son*, *Good Times*, and *What’s Happening* ended as the 1970s came to a close, their likeable urban black characters were not replicated on television in subsequent years. The gulf between media portraits of urban black characters and suburban white ones widened to a point that became nearly impossible to bridge. Unlike Richard Pryor and other black stars of the 1970s, most African-American celebrities in the 1980s avoided any association with the black inner city because it was once again portrayed as the jurisdiction of violent criminals. Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Eddie Murphy, Whitney Houston, and Mr. T were examples of the most famous celebrities who appeared to embrace wealth and money. Characters like Arnold and Willis Jackson were fictional embodiments of the same trend. The inner city as it was imagined in the 1980s ended its brief role as backdrop for consumer-oriented residents like Rerun. The change also coincided with

³⁰ Nick Nafpliotis, “5 Inexplicably Horrifying Episodes of Classic Comedies,” *Cracked*, September 9, 2011, accessed August 5, 2014, http://www.cracked.com/article_19401_5-inexplicably-horrifying-episodes-classic-comedies.html.

³¹ Entman and Rojecki, *Mind*, 53.

the decade's rapid proliferation of tabloid television, which revived and accelerated the media practice, evidenced during the riots, of depicting "racially marked bodies" as "the sites of dangerous impulses and destructive appetites for a variety of bodily satisfactions."³²

As tabloid television pushed all news to become more sensational, stories of urban destruction rivaling the riots cemented the media's fundamental separation of black and white. Local and national news in the 1980s supplemented reports on black criminals, a regular occurrence since the riots, with heavily discussed stories that echoed the urgent sense of rebellion captured during the riots. News segments on cop killers, rapists, "black male gang members, black male criminality, crumbling black families, black welfare cheats, black female crack users, and black teenage pregnancy" joined major reports that ran for several consecutive nights on episodes of mass urban destruction.³³ In 1985, national news carried the story of a fatal confrontation between mostly white police and an African-American cult in Philadelphia, known as MOVE, for six nights in a row. Despite a controversial conclusion in which police dropped a bomb on the cult's communal city home, killing eleven members, including five children, negative images of eccentric leader John Africa and his followers abounded.³⁴ An ABC report quoted a former prosecutor claiming that MOVE was a "terrorist organization committed

³² Glynn, *Tabloid*, 42.

³³ "CBS Evening News for Saturday, Dec 06, 1986, Headline: New York City/Fugitive Captured," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 26, 2014; Gray, *Struggle*, 17.

³⁴ Key Word Search of "MOVE," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 26, 2014. The story was reported on a total of twenty times by all three networks between March 13, 1985 and March 19, 1985; Martha T. Moore, "1985 bombing in Philadelphia still unsettled," *USA Today*, May 12, 2005, accessed June 26, 2014, usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-05-11-philadelphia-bombing_x.htm.

to armed confrontation with police.”³⁵ Many segments detailed previous issues between police, MOVE, and their middle-class black neighbors, who complained of garbage piled around the house and various other strange disturbances. Reports also cited the fact that gunfire had already been exchanged between cops and cult members in 1978, leading to the arrest of eight people for the death of a police officer.

While few stories of black urban tumult matched the intensity of MOVE, in which the bomb fire destroyed sixty-one homes, they were a regular feature of all news media throughout the 1980s.³⁶ Others that came close included the story of the Central Park jogger and the case of Bernhard Goetz, a white man whom many praised after he shot four black men for allegedly trying to rob him in a New York City subway.³⁷ Towards the end of the decade, “reality” shows like *Cops* and its less successful imitators brought documentary footage of crimes-in-progress, like high-speed car chases and prostitution, many of them located in urban black neighborhoods.³⁸ *America’s Most Wanted* delivered some of the city’s most black hardened criminals, wanted for rape, murder, robbery, or drug possession. As the panic unfolded, tabloid television played an instrumental role in reigniting a media portrait of America’s inner cities as black ghetto wastelands crawling with violent criminals.

The panic spread through communities that adhered to media images of white suburbs as they increased their representational distance from black cities. News and tabloid reports on the panic reinforced that satanic ritual abuse at daycare in such neighborhoods was “shocking.”

³⁵ “ABC Evening News for Tuesday, May 14, 1985, Headline: Philadelphia/Move Shoot-Out Aftermath,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 26, 2014.

³⁶ Moore, “bombing.”

³⁷ Gray, *Struggle*, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

Hosts and reporters often described panic participants and their respective communities in positive terms. “How could this happen here? To a nice boy from a good Catholic school and a fine middle-class family?” Geraldo Rivera asked of one alleged victim of satanic ritual abuse on his 1988 special, “Devil Worship.”³⁹ The assumption that suburbia, mostly inhabited by people who were not African-American, was a place of inherent goodness rested on its juxtaposition to violent cities. The credibility of news stories like MOVE were potentially enhanced through fictional images in film and on television that consistently contrasted sprawling, wealthy suburbs with crowded, impoverished cities. Suburbia’s *mise-en-scène* usually included bright colors, sunny streets, trimmed lawns, and the sounds of birds chirping or children playing and laughing. Actors with light skin, hair, and eyes often played its fictional residents. The most successful suburban sitcom stars of the era were light-haired actors and actresses like Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael J. Fox, Ricky Schroeder, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Kirk and Candace Cameron, and Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen. There were some popular exceptions, but they were usually exclusive to male stars. Female and child cast members were most often blonde.

Conversely, cities were signaled on screen through the presence of darkened alleys, bums, prostitutes, carjackers, cheap motels, drug dens, caged windows, flickering neon lights, and the sounds of gunshots, dogs barking, and police sirens. Dozens of the decade’s most popular movies presented such images of urban chaos and destruction. Across several different genres, films like *Escape from New York* (1981), *Blade Runner* (1982), *National Lampoon’s Vacation* (1983), *Trading Places* (1983), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *The Toxic Avenger* (1984), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987), *Lethal Weapon* (1987), *RoboCop* (1987), *Running Man* (1987), *Big* (1988), *Colors* (1988), *Die Hard* (1988), *They Live* (1988), and *Back to the Future Part II* (1989) focused on white protagonists attempting to navigate the city’s depraved inhabitants, many of

³⁹ Geraldo, “Devil.”

whom were African American. Most of the films took place in sections of Los Angeles, although others were located in older industrial cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. The rapid decline of the last was more extreme than others because the American car companies that built it had downsized and outsourced over the past decades, in part due to competition from foreign manufacturers. A significant population of impoverished black inner city residents were left to fend for themselves, denied adequate jobs and housing. They were cordoned off on one side of the city's Eight Mile road, further alienating them from their wealthier white neighbors on the other side.⁴⁰ In *Beverly Hills Cop*, starring Eddie Murphy in an early successful film role, scenes of Detroit present the city as desolate and poor, populated by gamblers and thieves. They are contrasted in the movie with scenes of the film's central location, Los Angeles. Along with New York, Los Angeles was just as likely to be portrayed in the media as rich and opulent, but only in the context of wealthy white neighborhoods like Bel-Air and Beverly Hills. Murphy, as Detective Axel Foley, temporarily relocates to the latter in order to investigate the murder of his friend back in Detroit. In Los Angeles, he stays in a posh hotel, dines on room service, and flirts with his blonde female friend, who works for an upscale art gallery. The movie's brief glimpses into his life in Detroit, however, reveal that he lives alone in a small apartment surrounded by violent crime. The contrast was stark as one city symbolized success, the other, failure. In 1992, the terror potentially invoked by black cityscapes reached an apex when a crime-ridden Chicago became the location of the commercially successful horror film *Candyman*. The movie cast African-American actor Tony Todd as a demonic serial killer with a hooked hand who haunts Cabrini-Green, a black public housing development.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Sugrue, *Origins*, 13, 40, 70.

⁴¹ "Candyman (1992)," *IMDb.com*, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103919/>.

An essential component of sensational media depictions of black urban crime, and one that seemed to justify the exaggerated rift between black and white identities, was the decade's state and federal legislation that resulted in a real rise in the number of African American criminals, especially black men. Local, state, and national police logs that served tabloid media, particularly local news, gave viewers the impression that an unprecedented number of African Americans were breaking the law. Reporters did not discuss the fact that federal statutes like the Gun Control Act of 1968, the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, the Drug Abuse Prevention Treatment Act of 1978, the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1986, and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 often targeted poorer regions of the country, which included black neighborhoods and urban public housing projects.⁴² Each subsequent law was designed to enact harsher penalties for felons, particularly repeat offenders, carrying illegal weapons or drugs that plagued impoverished neighborhoods. Simultaneous Supreme Court decisions made it easier for police to search random vehicles and persons at will.⁴³ By 1998, drug offenders constituted the largest proportion of prison admissions. Between 1980 and 1989, "the number of drug arrests nationwide increased from 471,000...to 1,247,000."⁴⁴ The overall state and federal prison population collectively grew from just over 300,000 in 1980 to nearly 800,000 in 1990, averaging an increase of 5,900 federal inmates per year.⁴⁵ That black men were disproportionately

⁴² "Race and the Drug War," *Drug Policy Alliance*, 2014, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/race-and-drug-war>; Reeves, "Re-Covering," 100; William J. Stuntz, "Race, Class, and Drugs," *Columbia Law Review* 98, no. 7 (1998): 1798, JSTOR, accessed June 11, 2014.

⁴³ James A. Chambers, *Blacks and Crime: A Function of Class*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 309-310.

⁴⁴ Reeves, "Re-Covering," 100.

⁴⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 6-7; Nathan James, "The Federal Prison Population Buildup: Overview, Policy Changes, Issues, and Options," *National Institute of Corrections*,

incarcerated was evident by the end of the 1990s. Although African Americans totaled only thirteen percent of the U.S. population, they made up half of all federal and state prisoners.⁴⁶ They were also disproportionately under control of the U.S. Corrections system through parole and probation.⁴⁷ High arrest and conviction rates for black Americans, many of them living in urban areas, supplied tabloid media and Hollywood movies with images of real black criminals. Many of them may not have committed violent offenses, but they were severely punished under the new laws. Decaying conditions in urban centers were also compounded throughout the 1980s by the expanding numbers of homeless people that flooded in as runaways, jobless veterans, and mental patients from closed state facilities.⁴⁸

At the heart of the 1980s racial divide stood exaggerated fears of black male sexuality, a common trope in America's white racist ideology.⁴⁹ Beginning in the 1970s, special national news segments on crime became a regular occurrence and consistently highlighted rape, emphasizing that it was on the rise. Statistics regarding who was committing the rape and where

April 15, 2004, 1, 4, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://nicic.gov/library/027084>; "The Punishing Decade: Prison and Jail Estimates at the Millennium," *Justice Policy Institute*, May 2000, 5, accessed June 27, 2014, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.justicepolicy.org%2Fimages%2Fupload%2F00-05_rep_punishingdecade_ac.pdf&ei=IHWnVIiI8eegwS484PwBw&usq=AFQjCNEsPswt2L4HW8GMALurAY5lqX01Qg&bvm=bv.82001339,d.eXY; Reeves, "Re-Covering," 100; Stuntz, "Drugs," 1795.

⁴⁶ Reeves, "Re-Covering," 100.

⁴⁷ Stuntz, "drugs," 1795.

⁴⁸ Kusmer, *Down and Out, On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 244-245; Richard D. Lyons, "How Release of Mental Patients Began," *The New York Times*, October 30, 1984, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/30/science/how-release-of-mental-patients-began.html>.

⁴⁹ See Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 207; Hale, *Whiteness*, 79.

were sometimes unclear as reporters employed hyperbole to convey urgency about the problem. In 1971, for example, a story on the dangers of hitchhiking argued that rape was reported to occur “almost daily.”⁵⁰ A 1972 CBS report explained that rape statistics were up across the country because more women were willing to report incidents of sexual assault, but also because “ghetto-dwellers” were “moving out into general society more than before.”⁵¹ Conversations about rape in the news increasingly linked it to African Americans and suggested that it moved outward from the inner city.⁵² By 1976, stories of riots started to yield to those on urban gang violence, which highlighted that the “usual complaints, like unemployment,” were not an excuse for “theft, riots and rape.”⁵³

Despite feminist support for the Supreme Court’s 1977 decision to strike down the death penalty in rape cases because the punishment was too extreme, the years preceding the panic were rife with reports of murder and rape crime waves in various American cities.⁵⁴ This was especially the case after the 1978 arrest and conviction of serial rapist and killer Ted Bundy in Florida. Despite the fact that Bundy was a wealthy white male, his capture invited comparisons between him and other contemporary killers, a few of whom were black. News segments examined the careers of rapists and killers like Carlton Gary, an African-American

⁵⁰ “CBS Evening News for Sunday, Jul 18, 1971, Headline: Hitchhiking,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 27, 2014.

⁵¹ “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, Dec 27, 1972, Headline: Crime,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 27, 2014.

⁵² Gray, *Struggle*, 23.

⁵³ “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, Aug 18, 1976, Headline: Detroit/Youth Gangs,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014.

⁵⁴ “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, Jun 29, 1977, Headline: Supreme Court/Rape and Death Penalty/Busing,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014; “CBS Evening News for Tuesday, Nov 29, 1977, Headline: Los Angeles/Murders,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014.

male from Columbus, Georgia, known in the media as the “stocking strangler.”⁵⁵ Gary was sentenced to death in 1986. Bundy, however, was portrayed as a rare sociopath, in direct contrast to black rapists, who seemed to naturally possess a propensity for sexual aggression. In an extreme example of the tendency to conflate black men with rape, national evening news reported at the end of the decade on charges brought against Tommy Lee Hines. Hines, a mentally handicapped African-American man from Cullman, Alabama, stood accused of rape despite his physical inability to commit the crime.⁵⁶ As the 1970s came to a close, news media was filled with tales of rape involving prison inmates, young children, wives, and college students that mostly seemed to involve black men.⁵⁷

Communities where the panic took place were exposed to media images and personalities increasingly recognizable as either safe, white, and suburban, or dangerous, black, and urban. Even Ted Bundy, who resided and operated in suburbia, was compared to black criminals because he was violent and threatening. Ray Buckey was partly cast as a Bundy-type, joining the growing population of white male criminals and rapists who reportedly preyed on innocent suburbanites, particularly around Los Angeles. The panic came a few years after other episodes of white crime, including the “skid row stabbings” and the murders committed by the

⁵⁵ “ABC Evening News for Friday, Feb 17, 1978, Headline: Crimes/Chowchilla Kidnappers/Accused Sex-Slayer Capture,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014.

⁵⁶ “ABC Evening News for Monday, Oct 02, 1978, Headline: Courts and Trials/Supreme Court Cases/Alabama Rape Trial,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 13, 2014; “CBS Evening News for Monday, Oct 02, 1978, Headline: Courts and Trials/Supreme Court Docket/Alabama Rape Trial,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 13, 2014.

⁵⁷ Key Word Search of “Rape,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014. The search yielded 50 results between 1970 and 2000, although some stories involved the rape of foreign refugees and other non-Americans. Several reports on crime in America were labeled “special segment.”

Hillside Strangler, had terrorized some of the city's inhabitants.⁵⁸ However, he was also part of a society that was crafting a white identity in stark opposition to a black one. It was a dichotomy that the media, especially tabloid television, increasingly depended on for its content to make sense. Although media representations sometimes only assumed or implied a division, white suburbs could no longer be understood without black slums. This antithetical relationship was entirely divorced from the reality of most Americans because the media's urban black identities were virtually absent from the actual white neighborhoods that relied on them for self-definition. In some cases, the absence was deliberate. Suburban communities in the United States were often the product of "white flight," in which white residents left old neighborhoods once African Americans began to move in.⁵⁹ Between 1970 and 1990, in some regions of the country, "it was easier for middle-class Mexican Americans to move into predominantly middle-class white neighborhoods than it was for African Americans."⁶⁰ Manhattan Beach was a wealthy white suburb of Los Angeles.⁶¹ Its population was not subject to any significant changes as the panic unfolded, and it continued to include as its most visible minority a small Hispanic population.⁶² As of 2010, the town's African American population stood at only 0.8 percent.⁶³

⁵⁸ "CBS Evening News for Friday, Feb 15, 1980, Headline: Los Angeles/Murders," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 28, 2014.

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Republic*, 219.

⁶⁰ Matthew C. Whitaker, "Great Expectation: African American and Latino Relations in Phoenix since World War II," in *African American Urban History since World War II*, eds., Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 93.

⁶¹ "State & County QuickFacts, Manhattan Beach (city), California," *United States Census Bureau*, last modified December 4, 2014, accessed June 28, 2014, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0645400.html>: Between 2008 and 2012, the median household income was \$134,445.

⁶² "Table."

⁶³ "QuickFacts."

The city of Olympia, Washington, where Paul Ingram was indicted, had only a slightly larger black population. As of 2010, the United States Census Bureau listed the number of black-owned businesses as unable to meet “publication standards.”⁶⁴ Miami-Dade County, where Frank Fuster was imprisoned, had an African-American population that stood at roughly twenty percent in 2010, the highest of any community where a major panic case took place.⁶⁵ Fuster’s case was one of the few in which an individual from a minority group stood as a defendant.

With few obvious manifestations of black urban identity present in their reality, white suburban communities like Manhattan Beach, as well as local and national media covering satanic ritual abuse cases, instead looked to Ray Buckey and other allegedly devil-worshipping daycare center workers to serve as their polar opposite. He arguably supplied an effective substitute, the same way that paranormal phenomena in movies of the 1980s sometimes also acted as a replacement for black men. Ed Guerrero explains that the film *Little Shop of Horrors*, released in 1986, revolves around a “flesh-eating giant green plant from outer space with huge red lips and the black, bass soul voice of Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops.” When the plant, named Audrey II, sings, “I’m a mean, green mother from outer space and I’m bad,” he played on the racial anxieties of “white suburbanites.” The film closes when the white protagonists, Seymour and Audrey, finally get together and move into a modest suburban house. However, unbeknownst to them, a baby Audrey II grows outside in the flowerbed. The extra-terrestrial plant with an urban black identity, according to Guerrero, “has taken root,” in the white

⁶⁴ “State and County Quickfacts, Olympia (city), Washington,” *United States Census Bureau*, last modified December 4, 2014, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53/5351300.html>: Olympia’s African-American population stood at 2.0 percent in 2010.

⁶⁵ “State and County Quickfacts, Miami-Dade County, Florida,” *United States Census Bureau*, last modified December 4, 2014, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12/12086.html>.

suburbs, “and will proliferate.”⁶⁶ Guerrero also discusses films like *Gremlins* (1984) and *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (1990), in which small creatures from Chinatown, called mogwai’s, transform into violent black creatures that deliberately destroy white suburbia when they get wet. The gremlin leader, Stripe, displays a “militant consciousness” and roams the streets at night with his “insurgent mob of black and brown monsters.”⁶⁷

However, while urban black cities and their residents as displayed in most commercial media were meant to strengthen white suburbia’s identity by existing as its clear opposite, targeting Buckey and others as its enemy contributed to its near-total self-destruction. Members of the community turned on one another, leveling accusations at dozens of people, most of whom were not ultimately charged but still suffered emotional and sometimes financial consequences. Representations of Buckey and others raping and sodomizing children echoed media sentiments that, at the time, were mostly reserved for urban black men. While their descriptions also matched those of white serial killers like Charles Manson, John Wayne Gacy, and Ted Bundy, throughout the 1980s they were also conveyed in ways that mimicked representations of black male criminals. Buckey and others became suburbia’s resident “others,” no longer a part of the community but existing outside of it, as an external threat to it. White suburban consumers were not meant to relate to, or identify with, anything about them, despite potentially living in similar-looking neighborhoods. Although Ray Buckey had worked for his grandmother’s daycare center for years, articles and reports rendered him strange and shadowy. He was quoted as being a “dim mama’s boy” who returned to the school between arrests just so

⁶⁶ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 58-62.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

he could molest more children.⁶⁸ Buckey had become a brutal black buck, victimizing white children with reckless abandon. He and his family were insatiable as they tied “children to chairs in an S&M version of cowboys-and-Indians.”⁶⁹ Other reports of ritual abusers highlighted accusations that they were molesters, murderers, and cannibals.⁷⁰ Like stories of black rioters, such crimes in the context of cult activity implied unjustified violence, as well as a level of cooperation between criminals.

By the late 1980s, there was very little that separated representations of Buckey and other defendants like Paul Ingram and Gerald Amirault from one of the decade’s most notorious black criminals, Willie Horton. Horton was the subject of a 1988 political ad that ran as part of George H.W. Bush’s election campaign. The Horton ad, produced by an outside political action committee, met heavy criticism because it claimed “a black convicted murderer” enjoyed better protection under “a liberal criminal justice system” than his victims.⁷¹ The goal of the ad was to cast Bush’s opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, as “soft” on crime because he did not support the death penalty and allowed weekend furloughs for prisoners in his home state. The ad used Horton, a convicted first-degree murderer, to convey the consequences of Dukakis’ negligence. The ad explained that Horton had reportedly kidnapped a couple, “stabbing the man and repeatedly raping his girlfriend.”⁷² Horton’s mug shot was flashed across the screen, revealing an African-American man with thick facial hair. The ad insisted Horton’s

⁶⁸ Green, “Nightmare.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Givens and Huck, “Deeds.”

⁷¹ “Historical Timeline, 1988 Video,” *Wisconsin Public Television*, accessed June 28, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate/timeline/years/1988.html>; Gray, *Struggle*, 23.

⁷² “Willie Horton political ad 1988,” *YouTube* video, 00:30, October 27, 2006, accessed June 28, 2014, <http://youtu.be/EC9j6Wfdq3o>.

was the face of crime in America and implied that his actions were the inevitable result of a weak governor who regularly allowed weekend passes for violent inmates. According to a *New Republic* article published in the wake of the ad's broadcast, "Hortonism taps into a particularly thick vein of racial paranoia that is a quarter-inch below the surface of the white American consciousness." The author found it hard to believe that campaign strategists involved with the ad "were unaware of the special power of the image of a black man raping a white woman," although they continued to deny such accusations.

The furlough issue became a way to "symbolize something larger."⁷³ It reminded white suburban viewers of their need to protect themselves from men like Willie Horton. It also implied that white men were divorced from such a heinous act. Buckey and other male defendants during the panic effectively supported the idea because they were part of a trend that rendered white pedophiles increasingly like urban black bucks. During Buckey's trial, news sources even highlighted one "incredibly long and unnecessary" cross-examination" that lasted several weeks over charges that Buckey had "molested children while going through a car wash." Lawyers and witnesses spent much of the time discussing "how a car wash operates."⁷⁴ During the previous decade, a Los Angeles car wash had been the site of a popular movie starring Richard Pryor and several other black actors. Buckey's alleged crimes allowed the media to make him like Willie Horton, standing in as everything that tranquil white suburbia was not. Ultimately, however, inverting the identity of a white suburban male was unsustainable, as the defendants in all major cases were eventually acquitted or released from prison. The exceptions

⁷³ Entman and Rojecki, *Mind*, 92.; "Pandora's Box," *New Republic* 199, no. 20 (1988): 4, 45, Academic Search Premier, accessed June 28, 2014.

⁷⁴ Reinhold, "Amok."

were Arnold Friedman, who committed suicide, and Frank Fuster, who was Cuban. Fuster remains the only defendant still serving out his term.

Mavericks

While the panic was a part of the media's efforts to firmly separate a black identity from a white one, it also intersected with renewed attempts to conflate representations of whiteness with patriotism. The panic emerged as a part of America's global media enterprise in a world undergoing rapid political, technological, and economic change. The United States was not only a direct contributor to these changes, but remained vulnerable to their complicated effects. It remained the world's dominant superpower in the 1980s, but its industrial position had experienced a relative decline, a fact that burdened many conservative politicians. Its downturn was not insignificant, but in the 1980s it did not appear to have any negative impact on the operations of those in power. Prominent "neoconservatives," or "neocons," a branch of conservatism that was increasingly interested in foreign policy, instead successfully exploited the decline to dictate legislation that benefited the wealthiest Americans. The neoconservatives began to emerge in 1980s politics as "preachers of military intervention." Although they did not make foreign policy their exclusive preoccupation until the 1990s, they became more heavily invested in the previous decade under Reagan.

Like other conservatives of the era, neoconservatives gained political momentum in the 1970s. They soon closed ranks with evangelicals and economic conservatives by exhibiting a similar rejection of sixties liberalism. They added, however, their own unique concerns over America's fading military power and the threat of "Finlandization," which referred to the Soviet Union's influence over neighboring Finland during the Cold War. This view marked a transition from earlier strands of neo-conservatism that were more sensitive "to the fragile cultural

prerequisites of democracy.”⁷⁵ In the 1980s, several neoconservatives cemented their power by assuming important roles in Reagan’s government, as advisors or in the Defense Department. In 1981, a group of American and European neoconservatives founded an influential organization called the Committee for the Free World in Washington, D.C to help inform state and federal politics.⁷⁶ Working alongside religious and economic conservatives, many began to adopt the “pro-family” messages of the former and the ethos of government deregulation and free market capitalism embraced by the latter. They “took advantage of the hospitable environments and generous funding that business provided,” and were generally unwilling “to spurn the voting strength of the Religious Right, even while keeping their distance from born-again rhetoric.”⁷⁷ As neocons articulated an expanding number of global threats, they did so in terms that reflected the successful convergence of several conservative movements. Neoconservative ideology and policy had a direct bearing on the panic because the FBI considered Ray Buckey and some of the other defendants in panic cases enemies of the state. They became a direct target of the FBI’s mission “to protect and defend the United States against terrorist and foreign intelligence threats and to enforce the criminal laws of the United States,” which encouraged representational comparisons with foreign enemies who likewise seemed to threaten the country.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement: With a New Foreword, From Dissent to Political Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979, foreword 2013), xi-xiv, xvi-xvii, xx, xxvii.

⁷⁶ C.K., “Washington Diarist,” *New Republic* 190, no. 21 (1984), 43, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 5, 2014.

⁷⁷ Steinfels, *Neoconservatives*, xi-xiv, xvi-xvii, xx, xxvii.

⁷⁸ “What We Investigate,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed January 3, 2015, http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/what_we_investigate.

Neoconservatives were able to convincingly place much of the blame for America's industrial decline on foreign threats because the relative global superiority of the former did diminish after the 1960s. There were a variety of reasons for its degraded position relative to other nations, but many were rooted in domestic policies. Decades of exorbitant war spending in Vietnam helped catalyze and exacerbate spiraling inflation. The U.S. economy in the 1970s was plagued by several recessions as the currency lost value, unemployment rates rose, wages stagnated, and the federal government failed to adequately address the inflation problem.⁷⁹ The American economy simultaneously made itself more heavily dependent on foreign economies than ever before, through developments like growing trade deficits with China, Mexico, Japan, and Canada, and expanding global supply chains, in which domestic products were manufactured and produced all over the world. As commercial conglomerates began to outsource manufacturing jobs away from American cities, to regions where labor was cheaper and less regulated, including the American South, Asia, and South America, the family economy of many American suburbanites became less secure.

Although the national economy in the 1980s appeared to be thriving through rising per capita GDP, a booming stock market, and millions of new jobs, especially in contrast to the previous decade, these developments were deceiving because America's share of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) was sliding. Between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, it fell significantly, from "25 percent to less than 17."⁸⁰ Most of the new domestic jobs were relegated to low-level service sector employment, on average paying "one-third less than factory jobs,"

⁷⁹ Anthony S. Campagna, *The Economy in the Reagan Years: The Economic Consequences of the Reagan Administrations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 4-5.

⁸⁰ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The De-Industrialization of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5

also on the decline.⁸¹ Americans worked longer hours than citizens of other industrial nations, experienced stagnating incomes, dwindling savings accounts, and an increasingly precarious middle-class status. From World War II to 1975, the top ten percent of income earners made twenty times as much as the bottom ninety percent. After 1975, the gap widened substantially. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, it had risen to over seventy times as much. Most of Reagan's policies directly benefited the nation's wealthiest citizens, like his 1986 Tax Reform Act, which further reduced the tax rate for the richest Americans from 28 percent to 15%.⁸² Throughout the 1980s, the United States had to make room for countries like Brazil, China, and India that were successfully expanding their markets.

Neoconservatives in the 1970s and 1980s had "cultivated a new pessimism about the fragility of democracy," but not because of deindustrialization, inflation, and policies that only served the richest citizens. Instead, they had done so because of events abroad, allegedly watching in horror as Vietnam reunified under Communist rule, Marxist guerrilla insurgencies erupted in Latin America, anti-American Islamic fundamentalists came to power in Iran, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an oil embargo. By 1980, OPEC had substantially grown in size to include Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Qatar, Indonesia, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Nigeria, Ecuador, and Gabon.⁸³ Conservative politicians and media outlets never made transparent the real extent to which the parts of the globe they called attention to were

⁸¹ Alfred E. Eckes, *The Contemporary Global Economy: A History Since 1980* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 50.

⁸² Campagna, *Economy*, 4-5; Troy, *Morning*, 207-208; Lois M. Plunkett, "The 1980's: a decade of job growth and industry shifts," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1990, 3, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/mlr/1990/09/art1full.pdf>.

⁸³ "Member Countries," *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, accessed June 11, 2014, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/25.htm.

problematic or even mattered to the domestic economy. They encouraged military, political, and commercial endeavors that often further destabilized the foreign regions they targeted. If violence ensued, it seemed to justify their anxieties, as did the negative representatives of allegedly dangerous foreign powers that were persistently conveyed through the media of the decade.

Shady characters from other areas of the world, particularly Russia and the Middle East, but also East Asia and Latin America, proliferated in 1980s movies, news, and television. Many of them were rooted in previous media stereotypes of different cultural groups but were predominantly shaped by the immediate conservative environment.⁸⁴ They embodied a black identity that often shared the same anarchism, recklessness, incompetence, greed, and arrogance projected onto African Americans from the inner city. Characters possessing foreign blackness likewise challenged the tranquility of white, suburban life. However, they were also noticeably distinct from urban black characters because they were tied to a different nationality and usually exhibited effeminate, asexual qualities. These traits, indicating weakness and incompetence, allowed American protagonists to exist as their polar opposite. The “good guys” of movies and film possessed an exaggerated masculinity and heterosexuality that was indicative of their patriotism. The stars of fictional entertainment of the decade, like Bruce Willis, as Detective John McClane in the *Die Hard* series, and Tom Selleck, as Thomas Magnum in *Magnum, P.I.*, won over women in part because they remorselessly defeated threats from other countries. Although dozens of other central male characters in past commercial media were similarly cast as confident womanizers, those of the 1980s were portrayed as the “real American heroes,” also

⁸⁴ Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 29.

the subtitle of various *G.I. Joe* cartoon shows that ran throughout the decade.⁸⁵ Like Sylvester Stallone as John Rambo in *First Blood*, strong, white, gun-slinging American men became the only force capable of stopping persistent foreign enemies. When the FBI, the nation's highest domestic security apparatus, came to search the McMartin Preschool, they exposed that powerful interests perceived Ray Buckey not simply as a threat to his suburban community, but as someone who was an enemy of the United States. To the FBI, Buckey and other defendants were allegedly part of a nationwide conspiracy, which potentially spread overseas, that was destroying their respective neighborhoods. FBI Agent Kenneth Lanning, who began working in the Behavioral Science Unit in 1981, spent over a decade investigating satanic ritual abuse, lending it credibility through published articles and reports, as well as regular commentary in tabloid sources. The media often represented ritual abusers as possessing elements similar to those of foreign blackness, which rendered them community outsiders rather than life-long residents. Cast as homosexual pedophiles, they also seemed to have rejected the heterosexuality and masculinity necessary to be a true American patriot, or a "real American hero."

In the 1980s, embodiments of foreign black identity in the media primarily mirrored the concerns of neoconservatives over America's allegedly declining power.⁸⁶ Antagonists, both real and fictional, hailed from OPEC countries and other regions of the world that remained unstable after tumult in the previous decade. News and entertainment made as their particular focus individuals from Iran and Iraq, which were embroiled in an eight-year war that began in 1980; Libya, Palestine, and Lebanon, which were the various sites of United States military

⁸⁵ *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* was a 1983 mini-series affiliated with the cartoon show, which aired from 1985-1986. A revival of the animated series that ran from 1989-1991 was also titled *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*.

⁸⁶ Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945*, 3rd ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Preager, 2002), 143.

intervention and affiliated with several contemporary plane hijackings; China and Japan, whose economies were rapidly expanding; and Russia, America's reliable Cold War foe.⁸⁷

Representations in some of the decade's most successful movies effectively demonstrated the extent to which conservative movements were continuing to overlap and gain cultural power. In 1982, former body builder Arnold Schwarzenegger was cast in his first starring role as Conan the Barbarian. Set in an ancient, mythical land, the plot centers on Conan's journey to avenge the death of his parents at the hands of an evil wizard, named Thulsa Doom. In a dramatic scene without any dialogue, the dark-skinned Doom, played by African-American actor James Earl Jones, unemotionally beheads Conan's blue-eyed, blond-haired mother. As the ruthless foreign leader of a snake-worshipping cult, Doom represented the clear intersection of neoconservative ideology with conservative evangelicalism. Doom is dark-skinned and resides in a desolate, desert-like environment. He proudly displays his long, thick black hair and wears dark robes, a more elaborate version of the plain white fabric worn by his followers, who also cover their heads. He can manipulate his cult members into obeying his every command, coaxing one to commit suicide in front of Conan. In one of his many speeches, Doom tells Conan with condescension, "steel isn't strong, boy. Flesh is stronger." His explanation, that "real power is the power of flesh," borrowed rhetoric from biblical passages on sin.⁸⁸ His repeated references to the inferiority of steel also suggested a dismissive attitude towards an industrial technology once associated exclusively with the United States. The following scene cuts to Conan being crucified on a rock, which paints him as a Christ-like figure. While Doom came from a fictional

⁸⁷ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 199.

⁸⁸ *Conan the Barbarian*, directed by John Milius (1982; Los Angeles, California: Universal Studio Home Video, 2000), DVD; "The Riddle of Steel from Conan," *YouTube* video, 2:02, July 18, 2010, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://youtu.be/wgN1sLcAQnw>.

world, he portrayed an amalgam of negative stereotypes that were being paraded through the culture across dozens of media outlets.

Doom's prescribed ethnic differences were clouded by the thick British accent of actor James Earl Jones. His character was also reflective of the media's superficial interest in Africa throughout the 1970s and 1980s. South Africa remained the steady focal point of evening news reports as the country waged a border war against Angola and Namibia from 1966 to 1989, and experienced continuous racial clashes due to its entrenched system of apartheid.⁸⁹ News stories coincided with popular movies that simplistically, superficially, and often comically dealt with African culture and society. *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980) and *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989), for example, depicted caricatured versions of violent South African guerilla warfare. 1988's *Coming to America* centered on a mythical African king from the fictional nation of Zamunda.⁹⁰ However, while Doom embodied, and contributed to, facets of these types, he mostly served as a potent harbinger of the terrorist trope that was introduced to audiences throughout the decade.

Terrorist-types of the 1980s were generally always men who resided in deserts, wore robed clothing and headdresses, displayed thick, dark hair, moustaches, and beards, and surrounded themselves with semi-nude women whom they failed to display much interest in. They all appeared, or were labeled, "Middle-Eastern," "Muslim," or "Arab," regardless of where they actually resided.⁹¹ Terrorist-types sometimes hailed from African countries, like Libya, and non-Arab countries that belonged to OPEC, like Iran. They were almost always portrayed as

⁸⁹ Key Word Search of "Africa," *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*, accessed July 6, 2014. The search yielded 231 results between 1975 and 1995. The vast majority of reports are on South Africa.

⁹⁰ "Coming to America (1988)," *IMDb.com*, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094898/>.

⁹¹ Alsultany, *Arabs*, 29.

ruthless and violent, even though many depictions were meant to be humorous. As Melani McAlister argues, “terrorism, hostage taking, and captivity worked to construct the United States as a nation of innocents, a family under siege by outside threats.”⁹² Arab terrorist-types memorably appeared in many of the decade’s movies, including *Dune* (1984), *Back to the Future* (1985), *The Jewel of the Nile* (1985), *Hell Squad* (1985), *Delta Force* (1986), *Iron Eagle* (1986), and *Ishtar* (1987), as well as the television miniseries *On Wings of Eagles* (1986).⁹³ As Doom demonstrated, a key component of terrorist-types were their clannish, cult-like features. They roved in bands or packs and often participated in strange rituals. Only a handful of characters explicitly worshipped Satan or snakes, like Doom, but that several did testified to overlapping neoconservative and evangelical political agendas.

Other commercially successful movies throughout the decade centered on demonic cults led by characters with foreign black identities, indicating that conservative ideologies continued to fuse through media. Those identities were often associated with Arab terrorist-types, but also included characters from regions of the world that practiced a religion other than Christianity. In 1984’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, released as a prequel to the 1981 film *Raiders’ of the Lost Ark*, Harrison Ford reprised his successful role as archeologist Indiana Jones, known throughout the franchise as “Indy.” In *Temple of Doom*, Indy rescues a sacred stone and local village children, who are kidnapped for mining, from the Thugee cult. The Thugees inhabit an isolated palace in a remote region of Northern India where they engage in human sacrifices to worship their Hindu goddess, Kali. They force palace guests to drink a red liquid known as the “blood of Kali,” which hypnotizes imbibers into obeying the Thugee high priest, Mola Ram.

⁹² McAlister, *Encounters*, 200, 201.

⁹³ Ibid., 226-229; Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Villifies a People* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, [2001], 2009), 8, 20-21,

Although Indy's eleven-year old sidekick, Short Round, is from Shanghai, he wears a Yankees baseball cap to show his firm allegiance to the United States. His wardrobe clearly separates his ethnic identity from that of the Hindu Thugees, who conversely wear headdresses made of skulls and horns.

Two years later, in 1986's cult classic *Big Trouble in Little China*, the villain is David Lo Pan, a sorcerer and head of an ancient Chinese society known as the Wing Kong. Lo Pan kidnaps women and attempts to sacrifice the main female protagonist in order to end an ancient curse that has been placed on him. Aspects of his powers and appearance resembled those of Emperor Ming the Merciless, the antagonist from the 1980 cult film *Flash Gordon*, which was coupled with a soundtrack performed by Queen.⁹⁴ 1988's *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, directed by Wes Craven, centered on Voudou-practicing Haitian's who can create zombies. Occasionally, foreign black enemies came from Central America, the site of violent political instability during the decade. The 1987 film *Predator* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger featured a gang of aliens who roamed the jungles in search of human prey. They sported dreadlocks and possessed superior weapons technologies that made them capable of displaying inhuman feats. Throughout the decade, there was also a shrinking line separating cults from terrorist groups. In 1982, the G.I. Joe cartoon series introduced Cobra Command, a terrorist organization headed by Serpentor, a clone from the DNA of past military leaders who possessed supernatural abilities.⁹⁵ Members of cults and terrorist groups were always portrayed as self-destructive in their quest for resources and power. They desired insatiable quantities that often involved bargains with, and sacrifices to, evil spirits. They dabbled in a variety of corrupt practices like manufacturing and

⁹⁴ "Big Trouble in Little China (1986)," *IMDb.com*, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090728/>; "Flash Gordon (1980)," *IMDb.com*, accessed March 3, 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0080745/?ref=nm_sr_1.

⁹⁵ "Serpentor (RAH)," *Gijoe.wikia*, accessed June 9, 2014, http://gijoe.wikia.com/wiki/Serpentor_%28RAH%29.

distributing illegal weapons and drugs, running brothels, or attempting world domination. Ray Buckey was the alleged ringleader in his family's satanic cult, which conjured images of Thugees, the Wing Kong, and Cobra Command, enemies of both suburbia and the state.

While the panic supplemented and corroborated fictional images of cults both foreign and domestic, some of its participants positioned themselves as heroes who not only destroyed the cult ring, but also saved the world. The panic was a means by which the faces of tabloid television could tout their alleged fearlessness and become patriotic heroes. They became the fundamental opposite of anarchist African-Americans and black foreign identities. Across dozens of international and domestic media outlets, men like Ronald Reagan, Jerry Falwell, Indiana Jones, John McClane, and Thomas Magnum all took the same uncompromising stance against a host of enemies from around the world. Wayne Satz, Geraldo Rivera, and other men fueling the panic arguably did the same. Satz even added a love interest to his exploits, entering into a relationship with Kee MacFarlane as he battled nationwide satanic cult rings. In the 1980s, heroes with a white, masculine, patriotic identity were shown as the only force capable of stopping cultish, supernatural foreign opponents. They embraced conservative conceptions of the major global threats to white, suburban patriarchy. Even Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was born in Austria, was able to publicly convey a white identity because he did not, with the exception of his accent, exhibit qualities that tied him to his home country.

However, the conservative war against foreign threats was twofold because it also exposed the failures of the United States government to prevent the atrocities committed. While white male heroes were sometimes tied to law enforcement, as mavericks they suggested that conventional methods of identifying and mitigating enemies were ineffective. In the film *Iron Eagle*, for example, Air Force Pilot Colonel Ted Masters is shot down by a fictional Arab state in the Middle East. The United States government, however, has bungled its efforts to find him.

Doug Masters, the pilot's son, played by Jason Gedrick, also flies planes and makes the decision to take matters into his own hands. He enlists his friend, Charles "Chappy" Sinclair, played by African-American actor Louis Gosset, Jr., to access military intelligence so they can plan their own rescue mission, which they subsequently execute. However, an Air Force judiciary committee, who wish to avoid exposing the government's embarrassing inability to rescue its own men, ultimately pardon the pair for their rash behavior, which included engaging enemy combatants and blowing up an oil refinery.⁹⁶ Mavericks who succeeded where the government had failed were not confined to movies with foreign black identities, but were featured as the central character in dozens of other media sources including television shows and comic books. Implicit in the panic was a similar sense of bureaucratic failure because satanic cults had infiltrated America's suburbs without detection. It was up to reporters and talk show hosts to stop them, to do what the government could not and become real American heroes. In a climate that encouraged such headstrong action towards perceived threats, the arrests and imprisonment of dozens of innocent people became inevitable. The irony was that the situation might have been preventable with stronger government regulation of commercial media.

At their core, conservative images of dangerous global religious and ethnic groups were a reaction to the nation's real economic decline since the late 1960s. From the perspective of neoconservatives and evangelicals, this decline was catastrophic and seemed to manifest as an apparent collapse in essential cultural values. Communists and Muslims appeared to represent an expanding, fundamentally opposing force against America's global corporate dominance. The conservative view was consistently reinforced through media outlets they heavily influenced. Different conservative political agendas fed one another, building up certain threats while

⁹⁶ *Iron Eagle*, directed by Sidney J. Furie (1986; Culver City, California: Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1998) DVD; "Iron Eagle (1986)," *IMDb.com*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091278/>.

continuing to ignore others, like global poverty. Those involved failed to see that they were confronting problems that they had helped to shape. This became particularly problematic as proposed conservative solutions were sometimes aimed at the media representations partly of their own creation, rather than the reality of global dynamics. One of the decade's clearest indications that responses were rooted in the media universe was Ronald Reagan's 1983 proposal for a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), also known as "Star Wars," an "implausible scheme" that critics considered as fantastic as the Hollywood film. The technology behind SDI, which would create an umbrella of missile defense systems, was scientifically impossible. Its plan seemed to come straight from a movie. Gary Wills points out that in the 1940 film *Murder in the Air*, Reagan's character actually "protected the secret of a wonder weapon against those who would steal it from America—an 'inertia projector' that would bring down enemy airplanes by knocking out their electrical systems."⁹⁷ SDI seemed to respond directly to the decade's cinematic representations of the Soviet threat. Rejecting the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), which had guided Soviet diplomacy for decades, Reagan intensified the Cold War amid a decade of movies that did the same. His 1983 proposal for SDI came a year after NBC's 1982 miniseries *World War III*, in which Soviet troops invade Alaska. It coincided with *The Day After*, a made-for-TV movie that was viewed by a hundred million people when it aired, making it the highest-rated television film in history. The film focused on residents of small towns in the Midwest during a nuclear war with the Soviets.⁹⁸ In reality, the Soviet economy had stagnated and was headed towards collapse, rendering SDI unnecessary.

⁹⁷ Wills, *Innocents*, 424, 427-428.

⁹⁸ Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 805.

Cultural responses to satanic cults, which were heavily influenced by the conservative agenda, similarly targeted media dangers, rather than real ones. Nationwide satanic cult rings were never proven to really exist, rendering the actual laws, resources, and personnel employed to combat them another example, like SDI, of enacting tangible consequences for a fictional problem. It was difficult for citizens to argue with state and federal responses to threats that seemed real through television and other media. Blackness and foreign blackness were not evident in white suburbs but appeared present because they were delivered into living rooms through television and other media sources, like tabloid magazines. Ray Buckey and other panic defendants did not possess these identities, but became caught up in the media's practice of identifying all of suburbia's gravest threats and fusing them together. They were also casualties of the real judicial consequences that followed accusations of satanic ritual abuse. Like Willie Horton and Mola Ram, satanic ritual abusers preyed on innocent white victims, and needed to be dealt with accordingly by patriotic white heroes who worked as reporters, television hosts, social workers, lawyers, and a host of other professions. Their attitude mimicked the response of Conan the Barbarian's when he is asked, "what is best in life?" "To crush your enemies," he states.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ "Conan the Barbarian: Quotes," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0082198/quotes?qt=qt0446925>.

CHAPTER 6

DENOUEMENT AND TRIUMPH: THE PANIC AND ITS LEGACIES IN THE 1990s

Mansons with Machine Guns

The panic receded dramatically after 1990, when Ray Buckey was acquitted of all charges in a third criminal trial against him. In the immediate aftermath, several high-profile print sources, as well as PBS, condemned the panic as a witch-hunt. Exposés published in papers like *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* hastened the release of every major panic defendant over the course of the next two decades except for Frank Fuster and Arnold Friedman, who committed suicide in prison. Many journalists and lawyers viewed satanic ritual abuse at suburban daycare centers as an episode of national hysteria. While ideas of devil-worship still plagued a few subsequent national criminal cases in the 1990s like the West Memphis Three, the mostly young male defendants in these trials were not tied to daycare centers and, most importantly, they faced charges for real crimes that had been committed. The changing climate indicated that the conservative influence on media and culture was evolving. As it became more open to scrutiny, criticism, and ridicule, particularly in the wake of highly publicized televangelist scandals, it also became more deeply entrenched.

Despite devastating scandals involving sexual infidelity and fraud that ruined their peers, the reputations and media empires of conservative evangelicals like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Billy Graham remained essentially intact. Along with prominent neoconservatives like Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and Paul Wolfowitz, they continued to exert powerful political influence as Reagan's vice president, George H. W. Bush, took office in 1988, followed by Bill Clinton in 1992. Although Clinton was a Democrat, he "coopted Republican positions on

family values, crime, welfare reform, and a balanced budget.”¹ He expanded Reagan’s deregulatory policies that benefited conservatives by signing the Telecommunications Act in 1996, for example. The law allowed the radio broadcast industry to further monopolize by lifting a forty-station ownership cap. Viacom’s Infinity network and Clear Channel Communications bought hundreds of stations, eventually earning the latter over a hundred million listeners each week.² Although it was uncoupled from daycare, satanic ritual abuse, an idea dependent on prevailing evangelical notions of suburban nuclear family life, also remained a national issue into the mid 1990s. In 1993, the National Conference on Crimes Against Children, held in Washington, D.C., addressed it as a “major concern.”³ It was simultaneously criminalized in state laws passed in Idaho, Illinois, and California.⁴ Sequels to the demon-horror slasher movies of the 1980s continued to be released and experience commercial success, and white suburban nuclear families remained a staple of network primetime programming. Popular new sitcoms in the 1990s about family life included *Blossom* (1990-1995), *Step by Step* (1991-1998), *The Nanny* (1993-1999), *Boy Meets World* (1993-2000) and *7th Heaven* (1996-2007). As mothers were still cast negatively in a host of movies, the lingering conservative influence on American culture and society was apparent, a circumstance partly made possible by the panic.

News stories in the 1990s also demonstrated that conservative ideology remained pervasive. The profitability and ongoing expansion of tabloid television continued to push the

¹ Berman, *Turn*, 192.

² “Media Regulation Timeline.”

³ James Randall Noblitt and Pamela Sue Perskin, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), xv.

⁴ “Ritual Abuse Legislation passed by U.S. state legislatures,” *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*, last modified March 20, 2001, accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.religioustolerance.org/ra_law.htm.

direction of news towards live sensationalism. Networks added more talk shows, actuality programs, rolling news networks, and local news, and introduced judge shows like *The People's Court* (1997-present), which taped regular citizens battling over finances and other personal disputes in a court of law. An increasing number of shows also went into syndication, allowing them to air on cable channels several times a day. However, while supernatural material had been a major feature of several news stories in the 1980s, it gave way to stories more grounded in tangible events as the panic declined. Dozens of major news reports in the 1990s centered on a variety of circumstances that firmly reinforced the conservative worldview. They also took place in an environment of even more aggressive media saturation than the 1980s, as Americans bought more sets that displayed sharper, higher-resolution images.

Some of the decade's earliest news stories once again portrayed American cities as embroiled in a full-scale race war. Clinton's 1992 election coincided with reports of urban destruction that were reminiscent of riot coverage in the late 1960s. On May 1, 1992, CNN broke the story that African-American residents of Los Angeles were rioting. The riots, which lasted several days, came in response to the acquittal of four police officers in the videotaped beating of an African-American citizen named Rodney King. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, 77 percent of households in the city had tuned into local news of the verdict by primetime.⁵ Quickly joined by national news, coverage of rioting by its second day depicted a city in chaos. Reporters were stationed live as the National Guard arrived, thousands were arrested, and the death toll climbed to thirty-seven.⁶ A 2007 *Time* article revisiting the riots fifteen years later singled them out as "the worst single episode of urban unrest in American

⁵ Darnell M. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles 'Riots': Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35.

⁶ "CNN Evening News for Friday, May 01, 1992, Headline: Los Angeles Riots," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 19, 2014.

history,” echoing conclusions drawn after the 1960s riots.⁷ The statement demonstrated that both sets of riots were conveyed similarly, with apocalyptic urgency and relative regularity. An interview subject for an academic study on the 1992 riots in their aftermath even suggested that the local “sensationalistic” coverage of the riots had helped incite them. The subject recalled, for example, that reporters interviewed only the loudest participants and ignored those who were “singing peacefully.”⁸ National network television news sources reported on the riots, which spread to several other cities, nearly every day for a month. They continued to include regular segments until December 1994, when two black rioters were convicted of beating Reginald Denny, a white truck driver, in another videotaped incident.⁹

The riots seemed to bring to life the depraved urban landscapes of 1980s films like *Escape from New York*, *Running Man*, and *Beverly Hills Cop*. News viewers saw live footage of burning buildings, “violence, looting, and police reclamation of looted goods” that also resembled riot images from the 1960s.¹⁰ While the 1992 riots prompted a short-lived discussion about racism and urban poverty, their depiction in the news mostly supported media images of the inner city that were shaped by conservatives over the previous decade. Racial violence in Los Angeles and the other cities that experienced riots after the King verdict similarly implied a

⁷ Madison Gray, “The L.A. Riots: 15 Years After Rodney King,” *Time*, 2007, accessed June 19, 2014, http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/la_riot/article/0,28804,1614117_1614084_1614831,00.html.

⁸ Hunt, *Screening*, 58.

⁹ “ABC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec 07, 1993, Headline: Los Angeles, California/Denny Beating Trial/Sentencing,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 19, 2014.

¹⁰ “NBC Evening News for Tuesday, May 05, 1992, Headline: Los Angeles, California/Violence/Police/National Guard/Campaign ’92,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 19, 2014.

safe, white, suburban community as their opposite. The riots also seemed to support the previous decade's conservative legislation. The riots appeared to confirm earlier anti-drug and weapons laws that claimed to target and quell dangerous urban conditions. While the sheer act of rioting attested to the fact that decades of conservative policies had driven essential resources out of inner cities, leaving only black residents to be regularly patrolled by militarized police forces, news reports did not generally recognize negligence and poverty as factors. Many viewers concluded that urban landscapes as shown on television news were threatening, and the rioters often unjustified in their actions.¹¹

The riots accompanied other stories of the 1990s that rendered the world as conservatives under Reagan had imagined it. They built on themes evident in the panic, like the fear of foreign threats. After a decade of news reports on military involvement in the Middle East, the United States declared war on Iraq in 1991, when the latter invaded neighboring Kuwait. The Persian Gulf War included two military initiatives, labeled Operation Desert Shield, involving the buildup of troops in the region, and Operation Desert Storm, which included roughly a month of fighting alongside coalition forces. The entire effort lasted less than a year, but its regular coverage on the news better acquainted viewers with Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. His image was overhauled from how it appeared in the 1980s, when the United States had assisted Iraq in its eight-year war against Iran. For example, in a rare 1982 interview he gave with two correspondents from *Time* magazine, Hussein was described as “a commanding presence” who looked “very fit.”¹² National television news reports of the earlier conflict also emphasized Iraq's calls for a cease-fire, making it appear the less aggressive of the

¹¹ Hunt, *Screening*, 67-68.

¹² Dean Breilis and Murray J. Gart, “An Interview with Saddam Hussein,” *Time* 120, no. 3 (1982), Academic Search Premier, accessed August 23, 2014.

two countries.¹³ During the Gulf War, however, Hussein was recast as a figure like Thulsa Doom or Thugee high priest Mola Ram. He became an exotic, cultish leader who exhibited a combination of “terrorism, fascism, and greed.”¹⁴ Reports described him as merciless, particularly amid accusations that he had starved and tortured Kurdish children. They also alleged that military supplies smuggled into Iraq had come from Libya, more closely linking media representation of Hussein and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. During the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, it was the former that was linked to Libya. An NBC evening news report from 1980 floated the possibility that the Libyan leader was “supplying Iran via Turkey and Pakistan.”¹⁵ Linking regions of the Middle East with Libya made them seem more dangerous since Libya served as a recognizable face of 1980s news reports on terrorism.¹⁶ Like the riots, reports on the Gulf War successfully realized, normalized, supported, and expanded conservative ideals shaped through the media, particularly infotainment, in the previous decade. At what he claimed was the end of the war in February of 1991, George Bush’s approval rating stood at 89 percent, the highest of any president since the Gallup poll was first introduced in the 1930s. The same survey found that 63 percent of Americans agreed that the situation in the

¹³ “CBS Evening News for Thursday, Jun 10, 1982, Headline: Iran-Iraq War,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 23, 2014; “NBC Evening News for Thursday, Jun 10, 1982, Headline: Iran-Iraq War,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 23, 2014.

¹⁴ McAlister, *Encounters*, 258.

¹⁵ “NBC Evening News for Sunday, Oct 05, 1980, Headline: Iran-Iraq War,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 23, 2014.

¹⁶ “CBS Evening News for Friday, Aug 24, 1990, Headline: Iraq Invasion of Kuwait/Kuwait Embassy/Jordan/US Troops/United States Reserves,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 20, 2014.

Gulf warranted the war and 52 said that they would favor sending back troops to dispose of Saddam Hussein, who remained in power.¹⁷

As foreign leaders of the 1990s like Saddam Hussein became living embodiments of Thulsa Doom, residents of the United States, including the black urban rioters in Los Angeles, seemed to confirm that the exaggerated, sometimes fictional threats to American suburbs articulated throughout the 1980s were expanding in number and scope. The Manson-type in particular, which Ray Buckey and other defendants perpetuated, continued its prominence. In 1993, the leader of an isolated sect of Seventh Day Adventists, known as the Branch Davidians, emerged as an updated version of Charles Manson. The cult compound, headed by David Koresh, burned to the ground at the end of a fifty-one day siege undertaken by federal law enforcement officers. Television news related the standoff between cult members and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) throughout all of March and April. Stories were replete with descriptions of Koresh, who was killed along with most of his cult followers in the fire, as “violent and megalomaniacal,” a “cheap thug” who hoarded weapons.¹⁸ They also portrayed him as “charismatic,” a natural leader who, like Charles Manson, allegedly using religion to control cult members. Koresh, however, insisted that he was Jesus Christ, rather than Satan.¹⁹ Network news accentuated reports on the cult with footage of gun arsenals, occasionally zeroing in on a banner draped on one compound building that read “Rodney King

¹⁷ David W. Moore, “Americans Believe U.S. Participation in Gulf War a Decade Ago Worthwhile,” *Gallup News Service*, February 26, 2001, accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1963/amer...orthwhile.aspx>.

¹⁸ Chris Wood and Virgil Grandfield, “A prophet of doom,” *Maclean's* 106, no. 11 (1993), Academic Search Premier, accessed August 23, 2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

We Understand.”²⁰ The banner suggested a connection between urban rioters and the Branch Davidians.

While the issue of gun control surfaced during some news reports, since the compound was in possession of dozens of sophisticated weapons, it was generally drowned out by conversation over Koresh’s deluded and unstable personality, and the subsequent coverage of a trial of eleven members charged with murdering federal agents during the siege.²¹ Reports of the Branch Davidians conjured images of the Manson family, *Rosemary’s Baby*, Thugees, Ray Buckey, and other cult stories from news and fiction of earlier decades that remained popular. However, Koresh and his followers were not directly linked to devil-worship in any major news reports, which indicated that by the early 1990s, it was no longer a required component of the Manson-type. He was, however, directly compared to Charles Manson and Jim Jones.²² The panic had also helped successfully incorporate sexual abuse into the type, which became a focal point in the case of Koresh, although not until after he was killed.²³ In the wake of his death, some reports emphasized that former cult members had “recounted sordid details of sexual

²⁰ “CBS Evening News for Friday Mar 26, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Standoff/ Day 27,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 20, 2014.

²¹ “NBC Evening News for Monday, Jan 10, 1994, Headline: San Antonio, Texas/Branch Davidian Trial,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 20, 2014.

²² “ABC Evening News for Wednesday, Mar 03, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Standoff/Cult Leaders,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed January 4, 2015; “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, Mar 03, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas//Cult Standoff/The Raid,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed January 4, 2015.

²³ “CBS Evening News for Tuesday, Apr 20, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Standoff/Aftermath/Jamar Interview,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 20, 2014; “NBC Evening News for Tuesday, May 04, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Fire/Investigation/The Children,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 20, 2014.

exploitation of female followers.” Many were allegedly part of “Koresh’s personal harem,” ranging in age “from teenage girls to women in their 70s.”²⁴

The Manson-type remained one of the most consistent threats to white suburbia in the 1990s. After Ray Buckey’s acquittal in 1990, news media replaced him with other white men who seemed to prey on suburban residents, even if neither criminal nor victim resided there. David Koresh joined the Unabomber, a reclusive former MIT professor arrested in 1994 for sending mail bombs to colleagues; Timothy McVeigh, who was convicted and executed in 1995 for bombing a federal building in Oklahoma; and Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two young boys who killed fellow classmates in 1999 in Columbine, Colorado, as the most recent incarnations of the Manson-type. These individuals were labeled “pariahs,” “extremists,” “kooks,” and “terrorists,” although the last term was never explicitly discussed in political terms. While some news programs and print sources briefly raised questions over the ease of civilian access to weapons technologies, most glossed over larger social problems that may have contributed to violence on such a massive scale. These white men were portrayed simply as lone wolves.²⁵ Articles with titles like “A serial bomber strikes again” also suggested, like the satanic panic, a far-reaching problem that cut across race and class. Major disparities between bombers and mass murderers were muted so that the nation seemed to be crawling with dozens of psychopaths. They operated alone, but it appeared that they were all over the country, acting without reason.²⁶ They were compared with one another, as when a 1995 article in the *Christian*

²⁴ Wood and Grandfield, “Doom.”

²⁵ Key Word searches of “Timothy McVeigh,” “Unabomber,” and “Columbine,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 26, 2014. Between 1995 and 1996, McVeigh was reported on 174 times; between 1994 and 1996, the Unabomber was reported on 164 times; between 1999 and 2000, Columbine was reported on 193 times.

²⁶ Elizabeth Gleick and David S. Jackson, “A serial bomber strikes again,” *Time* 144, no. 26 (1994), Academic Search Premier, accessed June 22, 2014.

Science Monitor argued, “Oklahoma City was terrorism wholesale. The Unabomber practiced terrorism retail.” Both instances “raised the question of whether we are witnessing some extreme form of white male rage.”²⁷ The panic was one stage of an evolving cultural practice that employed live news to render Manson-types a continuous and growing threat to suburban communities. By the 1990s, the practice became more pronounced and widespread, with Manson-types of varying ages constantly on display.

African-American men cast as Willie Horton also continued to permeate sensational news media, many of them culled from the growing number of black male celebrities. While Ray Buckey arguably served as a Horton-type in his white middle-class neighborhood because of the absence of black residents, such a scenario became potentially less likely as popular African-American athletes, politicians, and actors replaced him. In 1994, former professional football player, actor, commercial spokesperson, and “Monday Night Football” announcer O.J. Simpson was tried for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend Ron Goldman. The trial came after a live high-speed chase that involved dozens of helicopters and was covered by all the major networks and rolling-news stations like CNN and FOX News. The images of a white Ford Bronco carrying Simpson along California’s stretches of freeway, flanked by helicopters and trailed by flashing police cars, was a scene straight from Ray Bradbury’s 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451*. In the book, protagonist Guy Montag is on the run from police, a Mechanical Hound that tracks his scent, and a “camera helicopter,” also depicted in the 1966 film version directed by Francois Truffaut. In both the movie and novel, Montag observes live coverage on television of police efforts to capture him. Though the depictions vary slightly,

²⁷ Daniel Schorr, “When alienated, violent men demand to be publicized,” *Christian Science Monitor* 87, no. 112 (1995), accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1995/0505/05191.html>.

Montag sees images of himself as a fugitive plastered on television sets throughout the community.²⁸

Sensational news media in the 1990s transformed O.J. Simpson into Guy Montag, broadcasting his image and attempts to evade the law in real-time. As the white Bronco raced down Interstate 5, “ninety-five million viewers across the nation—one of the largest television audiences in US history—watched helicopter video images of Simpson.”²⁹ However, because he was an African-American fugitive in a culture still heavily influenced by conservative ideology, he also took on the aura Willie Horton, albeit disguised as a resident of a wealthy Los Angeles suburb. Simpson became a symbol for the “whole race,” often associated in the media with ideas of “correction, incarceration, censoring, [and] silencing.” Images of Simpson on the cover of *Time* in 1994, recycled from an earlier story in *Newsweek*, even darkened his face, exposing the extent to which Simpson’s “savage actions” rendered him a brutal black buck.³⁰ Casting him as such also helped to mask the vast wealth disparity between Simpson and most black Americans. Although Simpson resided in one of the wealthiest communities in America, he was remade into a representative of inner-city black identity, which explains why many black Americans considered his eventual acquittal a triumph over a racially biased legal system, as well as the tabloid media that supported and fueled it.³¹ The trial divided Americans along racial lines, with

²⁸ *Fahrenheit 451*, directed by François Truffaut (1966; Hollywood, California: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD; Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1953], 2012), 133.

²⁹ Darnell M. Hunt, *O.J. Simpson Facts and Fictions: News Rituals in the Construction of Reality* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, University of Cambridge Press, 1999), 17.

³⁰ Kenneth N. Gilpin, “Second ‘miracle’ for Iowan: A touch-up,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 1997, accessed August 26, 2014; Toni Morrison, *Birth of a Nation’hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), xxviii, 113.

³¹ Hunt, *Facts*, 83.

“whites nearly twice as likely as blacks to consider Simpson ‘probably guilty.’”³² Simpson’s depiction in the media differed from those of the rioters, however, because he was a black celebrity. In the 1990s, the news media particularly fixated on scandals involving successful black male public figures, including Simpson, Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas, who was accused of sexual harassment, and basketball player Magic Johnson, who was diagnosed with HIV. These men had succeeded in a white man’s world but ultimately failed to “abide by ‘the rules of the game.’”³³ Their achievements could not make them immune to the black buck stereotype, which, according to news media, trumped their wealth as a motivating factor for their behavior.

Not all news stories of the 1990s neatly fit culprits into the deranged sixties liberal-types that pervaded news and entertainment media over the previous two decades, but most consistently reinforced conservative ideals, evident in the panic, that privileged nuclear families living in white suburbs. While black bucks and Manson-types threatened to subvert those ideals, dishonest adulterers seemingly did as well. News sources suggested that the latter potentially posed a danger to the entire country when they spent a year presenting the story of President Bill Clinton’s attempts to cover up his affair with a young intern named Monica Lewinsky. Local, network, and 24-hour news reported on the scandal almost daily from January, 1998, when they first broke the story of Clinton conspiring to hide his indiscretions, until February 1999, when his impeachment hearings ended.³⁴ Segments were sensationally titled “White House Crisis,”

³² Ibid., 4.

³³ Stephen Michael Best, “Game Theory,” in *In Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, ed. Sasha Torres (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 219-225.

³⁴ “CNN Evening News for Wednesday, Jan 21, 1998, Headline: Clinton/Allegations/Lewinsky,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed August 26, 2014; Key Word Search for Monica Lewinsky, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 21, 2014.

“White House Sex Scandal,” and “White House Under Fire.”³⁵ Although the Senate eventually acquitted Clinton after the House voted to impeach him, politicians and news outlets spent an abundant amount of time, money, and resources on the story. Reports and impeachment hearings continued despite the fact that both the 1998 Midterm elections, in which the Republicans lost significant congressional seats, and the results of nationwide polls indicated that citizens were unconvinced by, or annoyed with, the story. These negative reactions from the public showed that “political leaders in Washington and the press corps obsessed with the scandal” had created a large “disjunction” between themselves and the public.³⁶ The cost of that disjunction was much higher, however, for the Republican politicians who lost their seats than for the news media, which simply moved on to the next story.

Clinton’s story joined others in which subjects stood accused of acts that violated the sanctity of suburbia and the nuclear family unit. Some of the decade’s most sensational also included the 1993 trial of the Menendez brothers, two wealthy white brothers who murdered their parents in Beverly Hills in 1989, and the 1996 murder of JonBenet Ramsey, a six-year old girl from Boulder, Colorado. The news media was particularly captivated by JonBenet’s death because of her participation in beauty pageants that they claimed sexualized her. The Ramsey’s otherwise quaint residential Boulder neighborhood became a live version of *Twin Peaks*, a place where no one could be trusted and everyone was a suspect. After the story broke, JonBenet’s

³⁵ Key Word Search for Monica Lewinsky, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed June 21, 2014. Between 1998 and 1999, the search yielded 878 results.

³⁶ Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, “The Clinton Presidency and the Politics of Scandal,” in *The Clinton Scandal and the Future of American Government*, eds. Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), x, xi.

parents became the prime suspects and were not cleared until 2008 with DNA evidence.³⁷ The family was heavily scrutinized in books and articles that emphasized the allegedly deceptive nature of their Boulder community, particularly through titles like *Perfect Murder*, *Perfect Town* and “A Death in Paradise.”³⁸ JonBenet’s pageant activities also invited dozens of reports on pageant culture. Focusing on their supposedly voyeuristic and erotic nature, the pageants seemed to infuse the Ramsey’s suburban lifestyle with strange and dangerous sexual proclivities. Established print sources like *The New York Times* ran several articles including “Never Too Young to be Perfect,” and “Playing at Pageants” that targeted JonBenet’s pageant participation as the primary motive for her death.³⁹ A dozen years later, John Ramsey still harped on the idea when he told ABC that he regretted his daughter’s entry in pageants because they “possibly might have drawn attention to us.” He advised parents to “keep your kids protected.”⁴⁰ However, even as the media warned that JonBenet’s “sexuality” played a role in her murder, print and television reports constantly provided detailed information of the alleged sexual assault that took place before her death. A 1997 headline in the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, read,

³⁷ Matt Pearce, “Grand jury reportedly indicted JonBenet Ramsey’s parents in 1999,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 2013, accessed June 21, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jan/29/nation/la-na-nn-jonbenet-ramsey-indictment-1999-20130129>.

³⁸ Lawrence Schiller, “A Death in Paradise,” *Newsweek*, February 22, 1999, LexisNexis Academic, accessed June 22, 2014.

³⁹ Karen De Witt, “Never too young to be perfect,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1997, accessed June 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/12/weekinreview/never-too-young-to-be-perfect.html>; Elizabeth Gleick and Cathy Booth, “Playing at pageants,” *Time* 149, no. 3 (1997), Academic Search Premier, accessed June 22, 2014; “Kids on the catwalk?” *Current Events* 96, no. 20 (1997), 3, Academic Search Premier, accessed June 22, 2014.

⁴⁰ Rene Lynch, “JonBenet Ramsey: Father recalls slain daughter; she’d now be 21,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 2012, accessed June 21, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/14/nation/la-na-nn-jonbenet-ramsey-20120314>.

“No Semen at Killing Scene, Paper Reports.”⁴¹ Much like the panic, childhood sexuality was simultaneously both highlighted and deplored.

In many ways, news in the 1990s was a continuation of the increasingly sensationalized tabloid news of the previous decade, partly made possible by the panic, but in an environment of more sophisticated and pervasive television technology. There was more news across an expanding number of channels. It was delivered on a growing amount of larger, higher resolution television sets per household. The graphic content of the stories that followed the panic was arguably heightened amid the decade’s continued expansion of individual television use. The average number of total viewing hours per day in each household from 1995 to 2000 regularly surpassed viewing totals during the 1980s, sometimes by more than an hour. The number of households with multiple sets went from 50.1 percent in 1980 to 75.6 by 2000, with 99 percent owning at least one set with color, and VCR use increased from 1.1 percent to 85.1 over the same years.⁴² Throughout the 1990s, both 1980s movies and the tabloid news stories that seemed to validate their imagery were available in several different rooms of the house, and often through the same television set.

Conservatism in Cyberspace

However, the 1990s were not identical to the 1980s. Although news stories continued to reinforce conservative evangelical values, many other media sources began to more openly challenge them. In the 1990s, as voices of protest against the panic became louder, the media’s

⁴¹ Times Staff and Wire Reports, “No Semen at Killing Scene, Paper Reports,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1997, accessed June 22, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-03-16/news/mn-39041_1_paper-reports.

⁴² “Multi-Set & VCR Households”; “TV Households”; “TV Basics, Time Spent Viewing: Households,” *TVB.org*, accessed August 29, 2014.

voices of dissent against various aspect of the commercial system became more widespread. Their expanding presence was partly made possible by evolving computer technology and new consumer products available on the market. These developments simultaneously changed television's function and content. Television shows in particular began to heavily employ irony and satire in order to directly confront the cultural environment that had given rise to the panic. While this suggested that a circumstance identical to the satanic panic was not likely to happen again without some intense media scrutiny, a resurgence of media satire was not unproblematic. The main issue was that white men who mocked the system also benefited from it, rendering their irony itself ironic. Satire also coincided with the rise of "reality" television, which became incredibly popular with viewers. While it was contrived, employing actors, scripts, sets, and cameras, tabloid and other media sources took reality television seriously, affirming that its world of mostly white suburbanites was "real." As reality shows began to crop up about paranormal activity in suburban neighborhoods, they demonstrated that the panic had helped create a media universe that was convincing and sustainable in the next decades. Although the panic ended in the early 1990s and the worldview in which it was embedded subjected to louder criticism, its evangelical, white suburban backdrop remained "real."

An influential difference between the 1990s and previous decades was that consumer access to information and technology greatly expanded. Between 1984 and 1994, the percentage of households with a personal computer (PC) went up from 8 to 24 percent. By 1998, just four years later, it had reached 42 percent. Internet access climbed from 2 percent to 26 over the same years.⁴³ Digital databases and applications for communication allowed people to research causes and interests beyond the confines of their local neighborhoods. Their online

⁴³ "The Sociodemographics of Access and Adoption: Trends in PC and Internet Access," *National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Studies*, last updated March 2001, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf01313/socio.htm>.

conversations and pursuits were no longer bound by the rules that governed their physical reality. Contemporary news stories and books did voice some concern about America's entrance into on the "digital age," as the era was coined. The dramatic evolution of technology and its increased availability to consumers led critics to express cynicism about the potential power of "cyberspace." A 1994 *Newsweek* article, for example, explained that "electronic stores and information services" could be exploited by "government agencies" to "keep tabs on a consumer's personal life," or "open up a consumer to a greater onslaught of catalogs and junk mail."⁴⁴ A 1997 review for a new techno-erotic magazine called *Future Sex* criticized that the magazine's vision of "progress" involved transforming "seedy erotica," once "confined to run-down, dimly lit city neighborhoods," into "androgynous" sex that was "technologically mediated to achieve peak moments of 'cyborgasm.'"⁴⁵ *Democracy in the Digital Age*, a book published in 2000, questioned whether the "speed at which technologies transmit, store, and erase messages" actually worked to "subvert the ability of persons to share equally in a sustained, deliberative exchange of ideas in the public sphere."⁴⁶ However, their despondent tones provided only further indication that an awesome technology was not only providing consumers with new products, but altering the way consumer's related to those products and the larger society that offered them.

As the Internet grew in availability, scope, and popularity, and more people flooded into cyberspace, aspects of conservative morality that guided the non-virtual world were not easily

⁴⁴ Barbara Kantrowitz, "The Butlers of the Digital Age Will Be Just a Keystroke Away," *Newsweek*, January 17, 1994, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 28, 2014.

⁴⁵ Langdon Winner, "Cyberpornography," *Technological Review* 97, no. 2 (1994): 70, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 28, 2014.

⁴⁶ Anthony G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

replicated in the virtual one. Laws in the 1980s and 1990s targeted child pornography, hacking, wiretapping, fraud, piracy, bomb threats, scams, and hoaxes, but many were mired in controversy and debate.⁴⁷ While facets of legislation aimed to protect consumers and children, they often stirred calls for appeal and heated conversation over the First Amendment rights guaranteed to all citizens.⁴⁸ Individuals potentially faced heavy penalties for breaking these laws, as evidenced by the story of a 2001 child pornography sting operation that involved “executing searches in 37 states,” arresting one hundred people, and passing along “the names of 9,000 Web subscribers to local authorities because of the users’ “predilection’ for child pornography.” However, despite claims such as Attorney General John Ashcroft’s that, “today’s Internet has become the new marketplace for child pornography,” cyberspace mostly provided an effective platform for organic free speech without fear of criminal prosecution.⁴⁹ Sites on the Internet still forayed into numerous topics considered subversive to religious conservatives. This was especially true of pornography, which invaded cyberspace throughout the 1990s in torrents, despite legislation aimed at child pornography. Although articles rarely provided statistics on the number of sites dedicated to pornographic material, they indicated that the total figure was substantial. They sometimes mentioned that online pedophiles were in possession of thousands

⁴⁷ Office of Legal Education Executive Office for United States Attorneys, “Prosecuting Computer Crimes: Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section Criminal Division,” *The United States Department of Justice*, 1-3, 59, accessed August 29, 2014, <http://www.justice.gov/criminal/cybercrime/documents.html>.

⁴⁸ Peter P. Swire, “Elephants and Mice Revisited: Law and Choice of Law on the Internet,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 153, no. 6 (2005): 1976, LexisNexis Academic, accessed August 28, 2014.

⁴⁹ Eric Lichtblau, “Sting Nets 100 Arrest in Internet Child Porn,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 2001, accessed August 28, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/aug/09/news/mn-32234>.

of images and dozens of videos.⁵⁰ As the reviewer of *Future Sex* magazine pointed out, pornography had successfully been relocated from “dimly lit city neighborhoods” to the less tangible reality of the Internet, where it was made instantaneously available all the time.

Allowing consumers to create and participate in online communities also offered a potent challenge to conservative ideology. Social networks directed at a wide variety of interests and behaviors demonstrated that individuals could “use the technology to their purposes,” which included pursuits that were not always explicitly commercial. They could potentially expand personal interests far beyond the parameters of white suburban norms. While online networks were complex, dynamic, and sometimes problematic spaces, many encouraged “free speech, universal participation, mutual aid, and information sharing.”⁵¹ For some individuals, the communities created through online networks provided alternative ways of understanding and engaging with their physical environment. A 1995 *Los Angeles Times* article on early tech culture explored communal living in Santa Cruz, California, where groups of “techno-savvy young people, mostly in their 20s” were “drawn together in part by shared interests that range from alternative music, film and underground literature and comics to role-playing games, neo-paganism, and Renaissance festivals.” Their lives reportedly revolved around the “on-line world of social computing.”⁵² The Internet was a powerful consumer tool that could influence and

⁵⁰ Bonnie Hayes, “Sex Offender Indicted in Internet Child Porn Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1997, accessed August 28, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/aug/13/local/me-22161>.

⁵¹ Andrew Feenberg and Maria Bakardjieva, *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 4, 8.

⁵² David Pescovitz, “The Cutting Edge: Computing/Technology/Innovation: It’s All Geek to Them; Digital Communes Find a Social Scene in Computers,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1995, accessed July 8, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-08-30/business/fi-40375_1_geek-house.

change the way people engaged with one another. It allowed them to conceptualize relationships different from those portrayed in other dominant media, like television.

The simultaneous growth of video game consoles likewise changed the way individuals interacted with technology in their homes. After a market crash in 1983, video games sales began to escalate again in the late 1980s, experiencing only occasional downturns during the next decades.⁵³ Video games, which operated on both television sets and PC's, significantly expanded the consumer's choice of visual content, especially for the children and young adults they targeted. They allowed game players to interface with, and manipulate, the images on screen, many of which did not support dominant stereotypes shaped by conservative ideologies. In 1985, the game industry revived when the Japanese company Nintendo released the game *Super Mario Bros.* to Western consumers. It is currently considered the most successful gaming franchise of all time, with cumulative global sales of over 240 million units since its release. The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), which was released the same year as *Mario* and served as the platform on which the game was played, replaced Atari as the market leader. NES helped bridge "the gap between arcade games and home video game systems." For the first time in history, games for a home console, declared "dead" during the 1983 crash, were redesigned for

⁵³ Joost Van Dreunen, "A Business History of Video Games: Revenue Models From 1980 to Today," *Colombia Institute for Tele-Information*, April 8-9, 2011, 2-3, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&resrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.superdataresearch.com%2Fcontent%2Fuploads%2F2011%2F01%2FBusinessHistoryofVideoGames.pdf&ei=-5SpVNfLAYm1yASjhYCgAw&usg=AFQjCNGCNpvkMyIcAHaxVxI-hEf0eeANlw&bvm=bv.82001339,d.aWw>. The steady increase of game sales lasted until 2005. After that they jump exponentially. In 2005, per capita spending on games was around thirty dollars. In 2008, it reached its highest levels to date, doubling to roughly sixty dollars. In those years there was not a substantial change in cost of systems or games.

the arcade.⁵⁴ While aspects of the main characters in *Super Mario Bros.* were changed for American gamers, like Mario's original moniker, "Jumpman," enemies and plotlines frequently did not recognizably conform to stereotypes prevalent in other American media. While Mario and his brother, Luigi, displayed many traits consistently associated with Italian Americans, including dark moustaches and jobs as plumbers, their opponents resembled animals and bore original names like Koopa Troop and Goomba.⁵⁵ Since the origins of most of the enemies were not explained in the game, they did not easily fit into existing racial, gender, and ethnic tropes. Games from companies like Nintendo were available at arcades, but through the sale of consoles they became more prolific in homes throughout the U.S. during the late 1980s and 1990s. Like *Super Mario Bros.*, other successful games for home systems cast players in roles and universes that defied easy stereotyping, such as warriors, street fighters, superheroes, hedgehogs, gorillas, racecar drivers, pilots, boxers, golfers, bikers, tennis pros and professional sports teams. A few revolved around solving puzzles, which absolved the need for heroes or antagonists.

Some games did appear to explicitly reinforce various prevailing conservative values, like *Contra*, a popular arcade game released in 1987 from Japanese company Konami. Konami released the game a few months after the Iran-Contra affair, in which news outlets reported that American government officials had brokered a deal to sell weapons to Iran, at the time under an arms embargo. In return, the government had sought the release of American hostages in Lebanon and funneled resources to the Contras, a right-wing reactionary group fighting

⁵⁴ Dominic Arsenault, "Company Profile: Nintendo," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from Pong to Playstation*, 113, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), xviii, 96, 113.

⁵⁵ "Game Blog: Super Mario Bros: 25 Mario facts for the 25th anniversary," *The Guardian*, September 13, 2010, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2010/sep/13/games-gameculture>.

Nicaragua's Sandinista government.⁵⁶ The game player in *Contra* controlled an armed Contra fighter who used guerilla tactics to kill futuristic enemies. However, despite developments throughout the decade that improved features of video games like image resolution, color palette, and motion, representations of figures-in-action remained awkward, clumsy, and hard to accurately control. They sometimes even blended into the background. It became potentially difficult for players to fully identify with a game's heroes, who often received as much screen time as enemies. Also, as games like *Contra* were "ported across many systems, from arcade versions to versions for home consoles, home computers, and handheld game systems," gaming became "something more conceptual and less tied to a specific imaging technology."⁵⁷ The net effect of the availability and popularity of video games was to render domestic television and computer technology more dynamic and less rooted in any single ideology.

During the 1990s, television's monopoly over the domestic space was continually transforming. Personal computers (PCs) likewise evolved. PCs increasingly offered larger color monitors, higher-resolution images, smaller hard drives, faster internet access, more web sites, databases, and chat rooms, and interactive features like cameras and microphones that helped them more successfully compete with television for time and attention. However, adults still spent more time each day with television, which provided viewers with new services like LaserDisc and Digital Versatile Disc players (DVDs), and more cable, premium, and pay-per-view channels.⁵⁸ By the early 1990s, the cable industry had revolutionized, making dozens of

⁵⁶ Wills, *Innocents*, 408, 412.

⁵⁷ Wolf, *Explosion*, 5, 84.

⁵⁸ Barry R. Litman, "The Structure of the Film Industry: Windows of Exhibition," in *The Media and Entertainment Industries: Readings in Mass Communications*, ed. Albert N. Greco (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 111-113; "Television Reaches More Adults Each Day Than Any Other Medium," "Adults Spend more Time With Television Each Day."

new channels available after adding stations like ESPN, C-SPAN, CNN, MTV, Nickelodeon, the Disney Channel, and the Weather Channel.⁵⁹ In the late 1980s, the consumer base for premium channels, which at the time included Home Box Office (HBO), their sister station Cinemax, and their rivals, Showtime and The Movie Channel (TMC), dramatically expanded amid a writers strike that temporarily halted the possibility of new material on basic cable stations and the networks.⁶⁰ Consumers found premium channels appealing because they had recently incorporated both twenty-four hour programming and original content.⁶¹ Premium channels provided television with a viewpoint that was different from most other commercial stations.

In 1995, HBO aired its original film *Indictment*, which examined the McMartin case, as well as the panic, from the perspective of the defense attorneys involved. The film, which starred James Woods as Ray Buckey's lawyer, Danny Davis, was consistently unsympathetic to the prosecutors. It portrayed Kee MacFarlane as a "dangerously misguided zealot." *Indictment* reserved its starkest condemnation, however, for media outlets, which were cast as "the biggest villains." According to a *Time* review of the film, everyone from "talk show hosts to newspaper reporters" appeared as ruthlessly committed to depicting the McMartin family as "torturers." Wayne Satz was shown inciting panic by reporting "the ghastliest accusations against the McMartins with sensationalistic relish."⁶² With *Indictment*, HBO provided television with another voice of dissent against the panic, until then mostly limited to PBS. Towards the end of the

⁵⁹ Barnouw, *Tube*, 494.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 108-110.

⁶¹ Aaron Dobbs, "The Oldest of Them All: The History (And Rivalry) Between Showtime & HBO (Thoughts Spurred by a Conversation with Showtime)," *Out of Focus*, September 20, 2013, accessed August 29, 2014, <http://www.outoffocus.org/outoffocus/2013/09/20-cableexecs3-nevins-shohbo.html>.

⁶² Gina Bellafante and Lisa H. Towle, "Chronicle of a witch hunt," *Time*, 145, no. 21, (1995), Academic Search Premier, accessed August 13, 2013.

decade, HBO introduced successful original programs like *Oz* (1997-2003), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) that focused on characters who did not operate within the confines of the typical suburban nuclear unit. *Oz* explored the lives of inmates in a fictional prison, while *Sex and the City* followed the relationships of four single female friends, all of whom were over the age of thirty and lived in trendy areas of Manhattan. *The Sopranos*, which held the title of HBO's most watched series until the recent introduction of the globally successful show *Game of Thrones* (2011-present), was located in a New Jersey suburb, but focused on a corrupt mafia family.⁶³ While North Caldwell, where Tony Soprano and his family lived, was like the town of Twin Peaks, existing as both a safe haven and criminal backdrop, the shady activities of its inhabitants were not tied to supernatural phenomena. The threats against Tony Soprano and his family were directly connected to his corrupt mob life. As a nod to mafia movies like *The Godfather* (1972) and *Goodfellas* (1990), *The Sopranos* offered a view of suburbia that was entirely different from any other representation of it on television. It helped to challenge, rather than reinforce, the preponderance of wholesome white suburban families on TV. While the material on video game consoles, Internet services, and cable, satellite, and premium networks was still mostly commercial in the 1990s, it increasingly offered strong challenges to various aspects of the prevailing system.

Suburbia as Satire

Voices of dissent in the 1990s against the conservative ideology of the previous decade additionally came through the expanding presence of irony and satire in the media, particularly

⁶³ Ken Lombardi, "'Game of Thrones' tops 'The Sopranos' as HBO's most watched series ever," *Cbsnews.com*, June 6, 2014, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/game-of-thrones-tops-the-sopranos-as-hbos-most-watched-series-ever/>.

on television. The 1990s were rife with shows that not only challenged white suburban norms, but also heavily ridiculed them. Since its inception, television had consistently offered programs that satirized societal conventions and norms, often through comedy. Popular comedic satire of the past was conveyed on programs like *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1948-1971), *The Steve Allen Show* (1956-1960), *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* (1962-1992), *That Was the Week that Was* (1964-1965), *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (1967-1969), *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (1968-1973), and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974).⁶⁴ Although their numbers dwindled throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, continuing comedy shows like *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present) and *The Tonight Show*, which updated its hosts, became part of a revival of television satire that began at the end of the 1980s.⁶⁵ Satirical fare collectively offered a direct challenge to conventional media wisdom on family life.

In contrast to shows like *Full House* and *Growing Pains*, television programs launched in the late 1980s like *Married...With Children* (1987-1997), *Roseanne* (1988-1997), and *The Simpsons* (1989-present), made fun of, to varying degrees, the nuclear-family norms they displayed. They not only acknowledged the financial difficulty of maintaining suburban standards, but also laughed at white patriarchy by presenting deliberately flawed father characters. Al Bundy, Dan Connor, and Homer Simpson echoed famed characters from past eras like Jackie Gleason and Archie Bunker, who repeatedly bungled their attempts to assert authority over other family

⁶⁴ "Hope for America: Performers, Politics, and Pop Culture, Satire Enters Television," *Library of Congress*, accessed June 24, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/hope-for-america/satire-enters-television.html>.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson, "The State of Satire, the Satire of State," in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, eds., Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 6; Ethan Thompson, "'I Am Not Down with That': King of the Hill and Sitcom Satire," *Journal of Film and Video* 61, no. 2 (2009): 40, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 30, 2014.

members. Both *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) and *All in the Family* (1971-1979) were examples of earlier sitcom satire, which had made occasional appearances on television until the late 1980s, when it flooded the medium. On updated satirical family sitcoms, patriarchal figures flaunted their hefty weight, drank copious amounts of beer, ridiculed children, and begrudgingly submitted to likeable wives. On a 1993 episode of *Married...With Children*, for example, Al Bundy and his friends form the National Organization of Men Against Amazonian Masterhood, known as NO MA'AM. The goal of the group is to protest the fact that their wives have taken over their bowling night.⁶⁶ While characters on *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons* did sometimes try to impart serious lessons to viewers, the varying incompetence of family patriarchs sometimes made their advice merely humorous. They contributed to a noticeable shift in television content away from the wholesome family-oriented programs of the 1980s towards those that parodied their earlier model of domestic life. Running throughout the day in syndication, they provided a direct competitor to sensational tabloid fare.

The popularity of *Seinfeld* and other satirical sitcoms coincided with other comedy programs that used the same sardonic humor to ridicule ideals that prevailed during most of the 1980s. These included *It's Garry Shandling's Show* (1986-1990), *The Tracey Ullman Show* (1987-1990), *In Living Color* (1990-1994), *The Ren & Stimpy Show* (1991-1996), *The Larry Sanders Show* (1992-1998), *Beavis and Butt-Head* (1993-2011), *TV Nation* (1994-1995), *The Critic* (1994-1995), *MADtv* (1995-2009), *The Daily Show* (1996-present), *Daria* (1997-2001), *King of the Hill* (1997-2010), *South Park* (1997-present), *Home Movies* (1999-2004), *Family Guy* (1999-present) and *Futurama* (1999-present). A few remained rooted in suburbia, like *The Simpsons*, but did so to examine it cynically. While the resurgence of satire that began to heavily encroach in the late

⁶⁶ "No Ma'am (14 Nov. 1993), TV Episode," *IMDb.com*, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0642336/>.

1980s still showcased certain conventions of the decade regarding race, class, and gender, it helped to reorient many dominant media sources away from idealizing suburban family life.

The suburban ideal was also challenged in the 1990s on a host of sitcoms that deliberately focused on alternative adult living arrangements. On successful shows like *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998), *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), *Mad About You* (1992-1999), *Martin* (1992-1997), *Frasier* (1993-2004), *Living Single* (1993-1998), *Ellen* (1994-1998), *Friends* (1994-2004), and *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), adults were shown living alone or with other adults who were only sometimes their spouses, in small apartments most often located in New York City. In the case of *Will and Grace*, a straight female character lives with her gay male roommate. These programs avoided providing moral lessons on family life because, like *Sex and the City*, they focused on dating, friendships, and adult life without children. *Seinfeld* was known as the “show about nothing” because it attempted to highlight the absurdities of white middle-class conventions. Episodes revolved around dealing with mundane issues like ordering soup, showering under low-pressure showerheads, and talking with people who conversed too quietly or too close. Suburbia and its norm of the two-parent, financially comfortable nuclear family were geographically and ideologically distant on such shows. While they did not usually discuss finances or the exorbitant cost of renting an apartment in Manhattan, characters resided in homes that appeared modest. Jerry Seinfeld’s Upper West Side living room was shabby compared to that of suburban homes on many other simultaneous network family shows. However, characters were generally still white, with shows like *Martin* and *Living Single*, which featured African-American casts, providing rare exceptions.

Several network and cable dramas added to the sitcom reorientation away from suburban family life by focusing on female protagonists who disparaged, or operated outside of, the typical nuclear unit. *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and *Charmed*

(1998-2006) centered on women who privileged activities that were usually unrelated to the suburban nuclear family. While *Buffy* and *Charmed* relegated those activities to the realm of the paranormal, *My So-Called Life* placed them mostly within the turbulent world of an American high school. Although the controversial show was short-lived, it provided a darker portrait of life as a suburban teenager than the one showcased on other popular programs of the era like *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000) and *Saved By The Bell* (1989-1993). However, *My So Called Life* joined the latter two shows in placing the high school social dynamics of white suburbanites above nuclear family life.

Across different genres, an increasing number of television shows in the 1990s competed with wholesome family fare. They provided an effective challenge to content that alleged to take itself seriously. This was especially the case with popular mock news programs, like *The Daily Show* and *SNL's Weekend Update* segment, which throughout the 1990s joined a growing number of shows like *South Park* that consistently ridiculed local news. These programs used humor to satirize news content and deem newsworthy the information sometimes ignored by television and print news sources. In 1990, an *SNL* sketch parodied the McMartin trial after it came to a close. In the skit, Peggy McMartin Buckey hears “the jury’s verdict as: ‘Mrs. Buckey molesting her eye,’” when someone was simply describing “a picture of [her] wiping a tear from her eye.”⁶⁷ Other trials and news stories of the decade were similarly ridiculed, including the Gulf War, the Bill Clinton scandal, and the O.J. Simpson trial.

The palpability of satire in the media of the decade often undercut the seriousness of white, patriarchal suburban norms and the news stories that placed them in peril. Comedic satire was supplemented by several successful movie dramas that painted suburban ideals as

⁶⁷ Douglas J. Besharov, “The McMartin Case: Protecting the Innocent,” *National Review*, February 19, 1990, 45, accessed August 31, 2014, www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/legal/mcmartincase_90.pdf.

artificial, invasive, and potentially destructive. Films like *Lolita* (1997), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Pleasantville* (1998), and *American Beauty* (1999) attempted to demonstrate that maintaining the appearance of nuclear family tranquility in suburbia actually wreaked havoc on the emotional health and stability of its residents. In the case of *American Beauty*, that mental instability turns fatal when a Nazi-obsessed suburban neighbor, who is sexually confused and in an unfulfilling marriage, shoots and kills protagonist Lester Burnham, played by Kevin Spacey. The film characterized financially comfortable white suburbs as teeming with superficial materialism and repressed desires, including pedophilia and homosexuality, as well as violence, sadness, and death. The characters all “desire beauty,” which proves elusive, even when Ricky Fitts, the love interest of Lester Burnham’s teenage daughter, Jane, claims to have captured it on videotape.⁶⁸ His video recordings of “beauty” are unsettling because they focus on lifeless objects like a dead bird and an empty bag blowing in the wind. As Fitts, played by Wes Bentley, watches a video with Jane, played by Thora Birch, he remarks with choked emotion, “sometimes there’s so much beauty in the world, I feel like I can’t take it, and my heart is just going to cave in.”⁶⁹ In *The Truman Show*, protagonist Truman Burbank, an insurance adjuster, played by Jim Carrey, comes to realize that his suburban life is a façade. His job, marriage, friendships, and personal experiences are manufactured by network executives, who film his life as a live reality show. The last scene of the movie shows Burbank walking out of the studio set door, potentially liberating himself from both the pristine suburban environment he inhabits and the television cameras that help manufacture it.

⁶⁸ Judith A. Spector and Katherine V. Tsiopos Wills, “The Aesthetics of Materialism in Alan Ball’s *American Beauty*,” *Midwest Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2007), 281, Academic Search Premier, accessed August 31, 2014.

⁶⁹ “American Beauty: Quotes,” *IMDb.com*, accessed August 31, 2014, <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0169547/quotes>.

The Truman Show offered a critique of suburbia as well as of the live, often sensational, reality-based television that fixated on it. It was also part of a trend in film that employed irony to suggest that characters resided within a hyperreality. Movies like *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), *The Net* (1995), *Strange Days* (1995), *Dark City* (1998), *Pi* (1998), and *The Matrix* (1999), placed protagonists inside simulated environments that operated without their consent or control, but initially appeared authentic and manageable to them. Although located in dark urban environments, these films contributed to an emerging media vision of a consumer-oriented society as a false one, where the benevolence of material comfort is a lie created through manipulation. The real emotions of the characters in these movies are always deeply repressed. Protagonists are only capable of liberation when they understood the extent to which they had been misled. The film *Pleasantville*, which took place within a hyperreality, provided one of the most obvious representations of this liberation. Set in the 1950s, it transformed characters from black and white to color when they finally recognized and embraced their true feelings.

Delivering irony and satire of the larger corporate system through commercial media, however, was not without problems. While it invited questions about the essence of reality in suburbia, or as a consumer, it sometimes ended up supporting many of the norms it sought to critique. For example, in the 1997 horror film *Scream 2*, a sequel to the 1996 original, character dialogue was once again employed to satirize conventions of the genre. Wes Craven's successful franchise combined comedy and horror to poke fun at certain tropes while still utilizing them to scare audiences. At the start of the second film, an African-American couple purchase tickets to see "Stab," the latest horror movie in theaters. While in line, the female character, played by Jada Pinkett Smith, complains to her male date, played by Omar Epps, that, "the horror genre is

historical for excluding the African-American element.”⁷⁰ However, both characters are killed within the first ten minutes of the movie. A cast of white actors quickly replaces them. While the producer of *Scream*, Miramax cochairman Bob Weinstein, told *Entertainment Weekly* that the film “crosses every boundary,” it followed the standard horror convention of centering on a group of white suburban teens.⁷¹ Like Wes Craven’s *Scream* movies, most attempts to satirize the culture came from a predominant white, male perspective that allowed it to persist. The collective effect made it appear that white men with real power, many of whom controlled and produced media content, were cynical about that power. They were unhappy with the culture they mostly still shaped. They failed to publicly recognize that they represented a contradiction when they profited from the same corporate-controlled, commercial media they critiqued. Their satire was in many ways superficial. To employ true irony, as many attempted to do, would first require admitting that they directly benefited from the society they mocked.

This unacknowledged problem caused satire in the 1990s to mostly come across as cynicism. Pointing out what was ironic within the system did not amount to a fundamental rejection of it. The conundrum was evidenced in Alanis Morissette’s 1995 hit song entitled “Ironic,” which focused cynically on bad coincidences, rather than incidents of actual irony. Morissette includes examples like “rain on your wedding day,” “a traffic jam when you’re already late,” and “the good advice that you just didn’t take” that merely demonstrated bouts of misfortune.⁷² However, one of the starkest examples of substituting cynicism for irony was

⁷⁰ “Scream 2 (1997),” *IMDb.com*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120082/>; “Scream 2 opening,” *Vimeo*, 11:34, 2011, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://vimeo.com/29892570>.

⁷¹ David Hochman, “Scream and Scream again,” *Entertainment Weekly* November 29, 1997, Academic Search Premier, accessed July 9, 2014.

⁷² “Jagged Little Pill,” *Alanis.com*, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://alanis.com/music/jagged-little-pill/>.

embodied in the heavy metal music genre. Bands like Metallica, Pantera, Slayer, and Anthrax, most of whom had been popular in the previous decade, continued to experience global commercial success. Comprised mostly of white men, they primarily appealed to a white, male fan base. The “typical” fan was “an adolescent, caucasian male from a lower class background in an urban or suburban area.”⁷³ Songs were steeped in lyrics of resentment, anger, frustration, and oppression.

In Metallica’s hit 1991 ballad “The Unforgiven,” lead singer James Hetfield laments, “new blood joins this earth and quickly is subdued.” He continues, “through constant pain disgrace, the young boy learns their rules.” Towards the end of the song, Hetfield reveals that the boy, now a bitter old man, is “me.” He prepares to “die regretfully” after “the unforgiven” have dedicated “their lives to running all of his.” The song marketed dissatisfaction with white, male hegemony to young white men. Though a wealthy rock musician, Hetfield complained of constantly waging a “fight he cannot win.”⁷⁴ The song was part of the band’s self-titled fifth album, which initially debuted on the Billboard charts at number one. In 2014, it became “the first album to sell 16 million copies since SoundScan started tracking sales in 1991.”⁷⁵ At metal concerts, white male fans violently slammed into one another in “mosh” pits. The display exhibited the inherent self-destruction of cynicism presented as irony. Instead of exposing the

⁷³ Robert L. Gross, “Heavy Metal Music: A New Subculture in American Society,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 1 (1990): 122, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 1, 2014.

⁷⁴ “The Unforgiven,” *Metallica.com*, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.metallica.com/songs/the-unforgiven.asp>.

⁷⁵ Keith Caulfield, “Metallica’s ‘Black Album’ Hits 16 Million in Sales,” *Billboard.com*, May 28, 2014, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6099381/metallica-black-album-sales-16-million-nielsen-soundscan>.

class disparities that white male power generated, the genre concealed and supported them. Challenges to corporate culture in heavy metal music were always presented within the system in order to benefit it. As such, they were unable to expose the entire system itself as ironic. Many scholars praised metal because it potentially “provide[d] its fans with a sense of spiritual depth and social integration.” However, like the similarly white male-dominated grunge genre that emerged in the 1990s with bands like Nirvana and Soundgarden, it explored “the dark side of social life.” It indicated a “dissatisfaction with dominant identities and institutions,” to which all successful commercial metal bands were tied.⁷⁶

As the panic demonstrated, the success of bands like Metallica sparked heated debate over the implications of heavy metal music that continued into the 1990s. The genre was explicitly targeted by groups like the PMRC in 1985 and became the subject of congressional hearings in the late 1980s on music content. Bands and lyrics were a regular story on tabloid television throughout the era. “Oprah Winfrey and Morton Downey Junior” traded “verbal barbs with fundamentalist preachers on the perils of heavy metal,” and Geraldo interviewed musicians like Ozzy Osbourne over allegedly dangerous practices associated with the music such as devil-worship.⁷⁷ An alleged rash of teens committing “group suicide” in 1987 led an *ABC Evening News* report to point out that one of the victims was obsessed with the band Metallica.⁷⁸ In 1990, ABC featured a story on the Catholic Church’s statements about the connection between “the devil and heavy metal music.” The report was supplemented with clips from

⁷⁶ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), xvi-xvii.

⁷⁷ Gross, “Metal,” 119.

⁷⁸ “ABC Evening News for Friday, Mar 13, 1987, Headline: Illinois/Teenage Suicides,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed September 1, 2014.

movies that included *The Exorcist* and *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, a 1941 film.⁷⁹ Magazines and journals published research that drew links between mass media, particularly metal music, and “risky” behavior in teens like “sexual intercourse, drinking, smoking cigarettes, smoking marijuana, cheating, stealing, cutting class, and driving a car without permission.”⁸⁰ A 1993 study published in *Pediatrics* concluded that young people who engaged in these behaviors “were most likely to name a heavy metal music group as their favorite.”⁸¹ However, as heavy metal became more popular, several scholars and critics also noted that it was “by no means as subversive as it appears.”⁸² While many sources deemed it an “anti-social subculture,” it was as representative of the dominant culture as tabloid television, which also expanded vastly in size and scope during the 1990s.⁸³ Both often echoed the sentiments of white men in power who believed that power was slipping.

Despite the success of efforts to convey irony through commercial media, tabloid television remained highly competitive. It also generated “Reality TV,” which centered on documenting aspects of people’s daily lives with cameras.⁸⁴ Reality television was cheap to produce and offered neatly packaged “staged spectacles” that seemed to promote the idea that

⁷⁹ “ABC Evening News for Thursday, Mar 08, 1990, Headline: The Devil/Heavy Metal Music and The Catholic Church,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, accessed September 1, 2014.

⁸⁰ Jonathan D. Klein, Jane D. Brown, Kim Walsh Childers, Janice Oliveri, Carol Porter, and Carol Dykers, “Adolescent’s Risky Behavior and Mass Media Use,” *Pediatrics* 92, no. 1 (1993), 24, check page, Academic Search Premier, accessed September 1, 2014.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gross, “Metal,” 122.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Glynn, *Tabloid*, 41.

anyone could become a television star.⁸⁵ Some of the first popular examples include *The Real World* (1992--present) on MTV and network shows like *Big Brother* (1999--present) and *Survivor* (2000-present). In the new millennium, hundreds of shows emerged documenting people's allegedly real experiences as, or with, aliens, ghosts, demons, killers, rapists, torturers, cults, kidnappers, prisoners, drug addicts, refugees, soldiers, animal hunters, adventurers, athletes, celebrities, models, real estate agents, entrepreneurs, inventors, interior designers, chefs, housewives, shoppers, child stars, teen moms, gamers, conspiracy theorists, paranormal experts, and scientists. All of them professed to show "reality."

The genre initially appeared "democratic," seeming to offer anyone the possibility of becoming a celebrity.⁸⁶ Its participants also potentially failed to adhere to the era's prevailing media stereotypes of black bucks or bad moms, for example. To market them as "real" people, reality stars had to at least seem unpredictable, which sometimes made it hard for them to fit into existing types. To gain ratings, many early shows followed the format established on *The Real World* of putting strangers together in a house "to find out what happens when people stop being polite, and start getting real," as *The Real World's* opening monologue explained. On such programs, less recognizable characters that defied easy categorization made for more entertaining television, allowing unconventional types to begin to pervade the television universe. In 1994, the third season of MTV's *The Real World* introduced viewers to a young gay man living with HIV in San Francisco named Pedro Zamora. Zamora, a Cuban immigrant, was an "uncompromising political radical" and one of the few openly gay men on television.⁸⁷ His

⁸⁵ Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁷ Jose Esteban Munoz, "Pedro Zamora's *Real World* of Counterpublicity: Performing and Ethics of the Self," in *In Living Color*, 195.

popularity was evident in Bill Clinton's statement that, in Zamora, "young American saw a peer living with HIV."⁸⁸ While there were few media characters as unique as Zamora on reality television, the genre offered the potential for unfamiliar types of people to enter America's living rooms.

Despite its democratizing potential, however, the influx of reality shows in the new millennium often became "self-conscious parodies of their original premise."⁸⁹ They also carried on tabloid television's tradition of generally avoiding the issue of social class. Like most infotainment, reality shows presented a world separated from any economic context. Cast members discussed every imaginable personal issue except for finances, which were made irrelevant because shows usually housed their participants in lavish quarters, *Survivor* being one of the few exceptions. An increasing number of shows in the new millennium, many of them taped in California, displayed images of wealthy white suburban neighborhoods. Ritzzy reality show communities were reminiscent of images in 1980s film and television and dubbed "real." Veteran programs like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* (1984-present) joined *The Anna Nicole Show* (2002-2004), *The Osbourne's* (2002-2005), *The Bachelor* (2002-present), *The Bachelorette* (2003-present), *The Surreal Life* (2003-present) *Laguna Beach* (2004-2006), *My Super Sweet 16* (2005-present), *The Hills* (2006-2010), *Flavor of Love* (2006-present), and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007-present), in following around wealthy suburban residents as they threw parties, dated, went to beaches and shopping malls, ate at expensive restaurants, and hung out at nightclubs. These shows helped spawn the careers of stars like Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, who, like the reality programs to which they were tied, appeared to confirm that suburban wealth was

⁸⁸ Tim Teeman, "Pedro Zamora, A Hero in the Real World," *The Daily Beast*, June 1, 2014, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.timteeman.com/2014/06/01/pedro-zamora-a-hero-in-the-real-world/>.

⁸⁹ Andrejevic, *Reality*, 3.

everywhere. A “real world” devoid of any political or economic context was a direct outgrowth of tabloid television, which was in part made possible by the panic.

In the 1980s, the satanic panic was born out of powerful intersecting conservative ideologies that influenced legislation and heavily infiltrated the media, especially television. The panic destroyed the lives of many people who became embodiments of every perceived conservative threat, mainly articulated and brought together throughout the 1970s and 1980s by evangelicals, libertarians, neoconservatives, and commercial interests. Representations of Ray Buckey and other panic defendants appeared to confirm that white suburbia and its resident nuclear families, which represented the epicenter of the conservative universe, was in peril. As much as panic cases appeared to prove the existence and accuracy of the threats that conservatives described, however, they also signaled a society that was rapidly transforming.

The panic’s bloated scale throughout the 1980s and quick decline in 1990 demonstrated that power and technology were not static. Although conservatives once again came to power in 2000 with the election of George W. Bush, their representations of white suburban ideals were forced to keep pace with the changing times and find new ways of appealing to viewers. Advanced machines that could organize and analyze unprecedented amounts of information became available to hundreds of millions of consumers, pushing older technologies to diversify their applications and content. Over the next decade, stories of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, subsequent wars with Afghanistan and Iraq, and reports of pedophiles in the Catholic Church and at Penn State, all of which kept the enemies of conservatives prevalent, competed with an expanding amount of alternative content coming through all media platforms. The white suburban world that the panic had helped reinforce was both intact and fading away, still potent but less recognizable.

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