

# American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970–2000

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“American Monsters” analyzes the satanic panic, an episode of national hysteria that dominated the media throughout the 1980s. It 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 trials against center owners, the most publicized of which was the McMartin Preschool trial in Manhattan Beach, California, still the longest and most expensive criminal trial in the nation’s history. This article explores how the panic both reflected and shaped a cultural climate dominated by the overlapping world-views of politically active conservatives. Their ideology was incorporated into the panic and reinforced through tabloid media. Infotainment expanded dramatically in the 1980s, selling conservative-defined threats as news. The panic unfolded mostly through infotainment, lending appeal to subgenres like talk shows. 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 analyzed it as a powerful delusion, or what contemporary cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard termed a “hyperreality,” in which audiences confuse the media universe for real life. Integral to the development, influence, and success of tabloid television, the panic was a manifestation of the hyperreal.

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 lead to the longest and most expensive criminal trial in American history.<sup>1</sup> Over the next few 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 child abuse tied to cult practices that the media and alleged experts called “satanic ritual abuse.” The FBI, as well as state and local law-enforcement agents, closed down the daycare center and began an extensive search for evidence, which included a futile dig for secret tunnels and animal remains beneath the school.<sup>2</sup> Although juries eventually acquitted all of the

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<sup>1</sup> Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedecker, *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (San Jose: Authors Choice Press, 2001; first published 1995), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

defendants, Buckey's arrest prompted other communities to turn against one another in variations of McMartin. After Satz's report, numerous employees and owners of daycare centers, preschools, and after-school programs throughout the country were accused, arrested, and imprisoned. Some of those incarcerated did not see their sentences overturned until years or even decades later, when influential doctors, scholars, journalists, and lawyers finally challenged the plausibility of their cases. During the 1980s, the legal and economic ramifications of ritual-abuse accusations, as well as ongoing news reports of cases, appeared to validate a national hysteria over the presence of devil-worshipping pedophiles in America's suburbs.

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. The panic's central narrative argued that circles of satanists, pedophiles, and pornographers, who owned and operated suburban daycare centers, were seducing, abducting, molesting, and sometimes murdering the nation's children. After tabloid media outlets began reporting on the McMartin case in 1984, people in several similarly wealthy, white suburban communities made claims that area children were being ritually abused. Over the next few years, interviews between social workers and alleged child victims in various cases produced hundreds of accusations against neighbors, teachers, policemen, relatives, friends, religious authorities, case lawyers, and celebrities. The panic polarized entire towns and brought social and financial devastation to those who had once been well-respected members of the community. It demonstrated that dozens of American suburbs in the 1980s were prone to hysteria, which was catalyzed and temporarily endorsed by the legal system, as well as by news and entertainment media.

In part, the panic stemmed from national anxieties surrounding the recently articulated problem of child abuse. The issue began receiving widespread attention after President Richard Nixon signed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, or CAPTA, into law on 31 January 1974. CAPTA was the first comprehensive federal initiative to recognize that many children in the United States suffered injury or death at the hands of a parent or guardian. While the law mandated that "Federal funding to States," as well as "public and nonprofit agencies including Tribal organizations," be used "in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities," it ignored scholarly research that found a link between economic struggle and abuse.<sup>3</sup> Instead, male pediatricians, who arose as the nation's preeminent

<sup>3</sup> "About CAPTA: A Legislative History," 2011, at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/about-capta-a-legislative-history](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/about-capta-a-legislative-history); "Child Abuse Prevention Act, 1973," *Eric.ed.gov*, at <http://>

experts on child abuse, had determined that “bad mothering,” or the lack of a “mothering imprint” was the cause. Based on samples pooled from their private practices, they argued that child abusers were motivated by “unrewarding experiences with their own mothers.”<sup>4</sup> In *The Battered Child*, an influential text published in 1968, the authors made a point of dismissing “social, economic, and demographic factors” as “somewhat irrelevant to the actual act of child beating.”<sup>5</sup> Subsequent state and federal legislation aimed at kidnapping, child pornography, and abuse within the foster-care system continued to work from these same basic assumptions, which required the authority of male doctors and catered to the concerns of their patients, who were often well-to-do white suburbanites. The panic was an extension of this fundamentally misguided approach to the national problem of child abuse.

However, the panic was also symptomatic of the major social, cultural, political, and economic changes that had taken place in the United States since the late 1960s. It was primarily connected to the rise of the “New Right,” the major strands of which converged and expanded in the 1980s against a backdrop of growing economic instability, even in the seemingly prosperous environment of the white suburb. During the 1970s, neoconservatives, libertarians, economic conservatives, and evangelical Christians began their cultural ascent. Despite major differences in ideology, they united through a shared antagonism towards “sixties” activists, members of liberal movements who were culturally prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Conservatives specifically directed their anger at feminists, gay rights activists, black power advocates, and scientists, whom evangelical conservatives often identified with liberalism. They also collectively derided communists or “fellow travelers,” who remained reliable Cold War foes, but recast them as “hippies” who were lazy, greedy, or dangerous.<sup>6</sup>

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[eric.ed.gov/?id=ED081507](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED081507); Debra A. Poole and Michael E. Lamb, *Investigative Interviews of Children: A Guide for Helping Professionals* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), 10–11; Brandt Steel and Carl Pollock, “A Psychiatric Study of Parents Who Abuse Infants and Small Children,” in Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe, eds., *The Battered Child* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 103–47, 108, 112. <sup>4</sup> Steele and Pollock, 108, 112. <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013; first published 1979); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America: Innocents at Home* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000; first published 1987).

This conservative coalition soon began to influence state and local politics, as well as many of the nation's dominant print and electronic media, which started stereotyping sixties activists as dangerous to idealized notions of the nuclear family, the main unit around which conservatives rallied. The evangelical animosity towards science, evident in numerous state and local campaigns to remove evolution as a subject from school textbooks, not only contributed to media depictions of science as bizarre or meaningless, and scientists as sinister, erratic, maniacal, or socially inept, but also helped situate media representations of white suburbia within a world of paranormal activity.<sup>7</sup> In fictional movies, as well as tabloid news reports, supernatural entities including aliens, ghosts, and demonic serial killers were portrayed as some of the most dangerous threats to otherwise tranquil residential neighborhoods. Starting with Ronald Reagan's election as President in 1980, the trend of demonizing sixties liberal types began to aggressively intersect with depictions of suburbia as populated with the paranormal.

Presented mostly through tabloid media, the panic was an indication of the New Right's political and cultural influence. Sensational fare on television, or "infotainment," increased dramatically throughout the 1980s. The genre's noticeable expansion was essential to the New Right's agenda because it successfully portrayed all conservative-defined threats to the white suburban nuclear family as "news." News stories fueled and legitimated recent laws punishing those who seemed to violate the sanctity and morality of suburbia and the nuclear model. Laws of the era addressed shoplifting, hitchhiking, substance abuse, kidnapping, cult membership, abortion, and pornography. In the case of CAPTA, experts and lawmakers blamed "bad mothers" for a systemic social problem, masking both the breadth of the issue and the growing financial problems of many suburbanites. Penalties that were made incrementally harsher appeared justified by tabloid media's conflation of a growing population of "criminals," many of whom had not committed violent offenses, with negative representations of sixties liberals.

The expansion of infotainment in the 1980s also coincided with significant developments in television technology that potentially transformed the viewing experience for many consumers. Wealthier Americans, like those living in the many white suburban communities that experienced the panic, could afford the largest television sets on the market to that date. Sony's 1983 high-priced Videoscope, for example, measured forty-eight inches diagonally and was described in a print advertisement as "giant."<sup>8</sup> The number

<sup>7</sup> Hartman, 71, 153, 208.

<sup>8</sup> Sony Videoscope advertisement, 1983, at [www.vintageadbrowser.com/electronics-ads-1980s](http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/electronics-ads-1980s).

of households with more than one television increased significantly throughout the decade, rising from 50 percent in 1980 to 65 percent by 1990.<sup>9</sup> It became much more common to design whole rooms to accommodate the television set, as well as its growing number of accessories. Home theaters, dens, and television rooms effectively shut viewers off from the natural world and enclosed them in environments dominated by electronic media technology. By the late 1980s, in addition to purchasing more and bigger television sets, consumers invested in videocassette recorders (VCRs), laserdisc (LD) players, video game consoles, satellite dishes, cable television, pay-per-view programs, and Dolby Surround, an advanced stereo technology that became available for home use through audio cassettes, compact discs (CDs), television broadcasts, video games, and personal computer (PC) software.<sup>10</sup> By 1990, VCR use had increased from just over 1 percent in 1980 to nearly 70 percent, and cable television reached 50 million subscribers, a number that had vastly expanded since 1950, when it served fewer than one hundred customers. Dozens of tabloid shows ran in syndication on cable networks, making them available multiple times a day.

The decade's substantial expansion of television's role within the domestic space possibly trapped viewers inside what contemporary cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard termed a "hyperreality." In his influential 1981 study of American media, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard described Western society as helplessly descending into a simulated environment. Particularly in the United States, the availability and ubiquity of commercial media technologies had, according to Baudrillard, created a hyperreality, where the natural world became indistinguishable from the simulacra that invaded, exploited, and appeared to reflect it. Within a hyperreality, viewers mistook manufactured electronic images and sounds for authentic experiences. As media representations stimulated real emotions, the consumer's ability to tell the difference between the "'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" dissolved.<sup>11</sup> It became potentially more difficult when the United States implemented a high-definition television (HDTV) standard, already available in some other countries, at the end of the decade. HDTV "perceive[d] the same resolution,

<sup>9</sup> "Multi-Set & VCR Households," *TVB.org*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> "Definition of: Dolby Surround," *Pcmag.com*, at [www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/41673/dolby-surround](http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/41673/dolby-surround); William Emmons, "Public Policy and the Evolution of Cable Television: 1950–1990," *Business and Economic History*, second series, 21 (1992), 182–91, 182.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994; first published 1981), 1, 3, 12, 13, 20–22, 67, 81, 126.

color, motion, depth of field, sounds, and immersion in the scene as real life.”<sup>12</sup> Those who experienced the panic directly were arguably inside a hyperreality, where the panic became more “real” to them than their natural lived experiences. As a manifestation of the hyperreal, the panic proved integral to the development, influence, and success of tabloid media, particularly in its televised format, and appeared to lend legitimacy to conservative backlash politics. The panic was not limited to tabloid media in the United States. Areas of Canada, Great Britain, and Australia erupted in similar accusations of satanic ritual abuse.<sup>13</sup> Reports were delivered through each nation’s respective tabloid media, which often borrowed from, and, in return, 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.

This work adds to a 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 morality more generally, in American history.<sup>14</sup> It also expands on a growing panic literature, comprising mainly studies written by journalists or lawyers working in support of various defendants in cases involving alleged child abuse and satanism.<sup>15</sup> These works provide detailed accounts of case participants and a chronology of events, collectively mounting a compelling challenge to guilty verdicts. In *No Crueler Tyrannies: Accusations, False Witness*,

<sup>12</sup> Alexander B. Magoun, *Television: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 158–67, 159.

<sup>13</sup> Nathan and Snedecker, *Satan’s Silence*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> 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, CT: 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).

<sup>15</sup> Nathan and Snedecker; Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (New York: Scribner’s, 1994); Mark Pendergast, *Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives* (Hinesburg, VT: 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, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995; first published 1990); Lawrence Wright, *Remembering Satan: A Case of Recovered Memory and the Shattering of an American Family* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

and *Other Terrors of Our Times*, journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz analyzes 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. 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.<sup>16</sup> However, most works that deal with the panic overlook the critical role of television and tabloid media, along with conservative cultural influences, in shaping and perpetuating the panic. In many ways, the panic represented a confluence of the New Right's values and policies, and demonstrated that their social impact, reinforced by the media, could be significant.

#### “STRONG STUFF FOR TELEVISION”

The panic began in 1983, when a schizophrenic woman named Judy Johnson enrolled 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. After a few days of taking him to the daycare, however, Johnson determined that she had found blood in her son's diaper, which she interpreted as 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. 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 placed under arrest. Although Buckey had not yet stood trial, local police chief Harry Kuhlmeier sent a letter to two hundred 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

<sup>16</sup> Nathan and Snedecker, 4, 234, 242, 113.



ask their children if they had ever spent time alone with Buckey or seen him tie up a child.<sup>17</sup> After parents received the letter in early September 1983, a group of child sex abuse specialists arrived in Manhattan Beach to interview the children; law-enforcement agencies shut down the school; hundreds of charges were filed against Ray Buckey and his grandmother, preschool owner Virginia McMartin, as well as his mother, sister, and other center employees; and talk show hosts and reporters turned their attention to the town of roughly 31,000 residents, providing the lens through which the panic unfolded.

Until 1990, when a second jury acquitted Ray Buckey on all counts, other suburban communities around the country turned against one another in variations of McMartin. After news reporter Wayne Satz presented the story in February 1984, several other cases became major local and national news stories. Less than a year later, in Malden, Massachusetts, a suburb outside 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 clients' children in County Walk testified against him, and he continues to serve out a 165-year sentence.<sup>19</sup> 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 being charged with raping his daughters and her friends as part of satanic ritual abuse.<sup>20</sup>

As accusations surfaced against Paul 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."<sup>21</sup> Although the charges against Clark were dropped, Schuler went to

<sup>17</sup> Robert Reinhold, "The Longest Trial – a Post-Mortem; Collapse of Child-Abuse Case: So Much Agony for So Little," *New York Times*, 24 Jan., 1990, 1, at [www.nytimes.com/1990/01/24/us/longest-trial-post-mortem-collapse-child-abuse-case-so-much-agony-for-so-little.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/24/us/longest-trial-post-mortem-collapse-child-abuse-case-so-much-agony-for-so-little.html).

<sup>18</sup> Demos, 282–92.

<sup>19</sup> "Interview Frank Fuster," *PBS.org*, at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/interviews/fuster.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/interviews/fuster.html); "A Summary of the Frank Fuster 'County Walk' Case," *PBS.org*, at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/frank/summary.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/frank/summary.html).

<sup>20</sup> Wright.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Glidewell and Barbara Behrendt, "A Nightmare Hits Home," *St. Petersburg Times*, 6 May 1990, LexisNexis Academic.



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. That same year, Robert Kelly, who ran the Little Rascals Day Care Center in Edenton, North Carolina, was sentenced to twelve consecutive life terms and 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.<sup>22</sup>

All of these prominent cases played out through tabloid media, mainly in its televised format, and added to its growing popularity. According to Kevin Glynn, tabloid television encompasses “a loosely delineated collection of related genres rather than a singular cohesive one.”<sup>23</sup> Tabloid programs became a dominant part of the television landscape in the 1980s, differing from one another in style, delivery, and format, but sharing a focus on sensational content as “news.” A list of *Donahue* episodes from the 1981–82 season, two years before the panic, reveals that many of the show’s segments involved extraordinary personal stories of violence and sexual trauma, two common themes of tabloid fare throughout its history. Some episodes featured Donahue in dialogue with political and intellectual guests such as Carl Sagan, Jesse Jackson, Ralph Nader, and Jesse Helms, which indicated that not all content was exclusively tabloid. However, many others bearing titles like “Missing Children: The Atlantic Story,” “Male Sexual Solutions,” “Women and Extra-marital Affairs,” “Abused Wives Who Have Killed,” and “Parents of Murdered Children” demonstrated that sensationalism was crucial to the genre’s appeal.

The success of many shows also depended on their live broadcasts, which remained one of the most persistent and successful features of the medium more generally. The genre helped expand the amount of live content on television, as infotainment joined network news programs, *Saturday Night Live*

<sup>22</sup> “Exonerating Jesse Friedman: Case Chronology,” *Freejesse.net*, 2012, at [www.freejesse.net/original-case-chronology](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*, 78, 7 (July 1992), 36, Academic Search Premier; Lona Manning, “Nightmare at the Day Care: The Wee Care Case,” *Crime Magazine*, 14 Jan. 2007, last modified 14 Jan. 2009, at [www.crimemagazine.com/nightmare-day-care-wee-care-case](http://www.crimemagazine.com/nightmare-day-care-wee-care-case); Nathan and Snedeker, 108; Dorothy Rabinowitz, “A Darkness in Massachusetts-III,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 May 1995, last modified 9 July 2001, at [www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122635385065015163?mod=\\_newsreel\\_2](http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122635385065015163?mod=_newsreel_2).

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Glynn, *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power, and the Transformation of American Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 6; Kevin Glynn, “Tabloid Television,” *Museum of Broadcast Communications*, last modified 2014, at [www.museum.tv/eotv/tabloidtelev.htm](http://www.museum.tv/eotv/tabloidtelev.htm).

(*SNL*), and sports broadcasts.<sup>24</sup> Although live tabloid programs were mainly limited to talk shows and the increasing number of local news programs, they appeared to render material across the genre both urgent and credible. A 1984 *Saturday Evening Post* article on Phil Donahue explained that the delivery of such emotional content live provided a guarantee that nothing on the show was “faked.” The article’s author insisted that it was “strong stuff for television.”<sup>25</sup> The alleged legitimacy of sensational material on television was bolstered by the use of anecdotal evidence, eyewitness testimony, surveillance footage, on-scene reports, and dramatic reenactments that often revolved around extremely intimate situations. In 1984, a *TV Guide* cover asked, “Is Local News Going Too Far?”, exposing the extent to which the genre attempted to transgress personal boundaries.<sup>26</sup>

Reports of satanic ritual abuse became television news stories partly because police logs supplied tabloid sources with content, as they had done historically, but also because they involved sexual encounters between children and adult employees. During interrogation sessions with social workers, who served as experts and primary criminal investigators in panic cases, children supposedly revealed intimate stories of abuse. A team of social workers from Children’s Institute International (CII), a private child abuse research group founded earlier in the century, questioned the McMartin children.<sup>27</sup> Social worker Kee MacFarlane assumed the role of lead investigator because of a 1981 California state law allowing specialists to conduct criminal investigations into child abuse cases without police oversight. The law successfully incorporated recommendations from leading abuse experts that “law enforcement officials should be used at a minimum.”<sup>28</sup> However, during her cross-examination with Daniel Davis, Ray Buckley’s lawyer, MacFarlane could not recall if she had ever been tested for her credentials as an interviewer.

Both non-tabloid and tabloid sources reported details of children’s interview responses with MacFarlane and other social workers. Articles and news

<sup>24</sup> Tony Verna, *Live TV: An Inside Look at Directing and Producing*, ed. William T. Bode (Boston: Focal Press, 1987), 159–61.

<sup>25</sup> Starkey Flythe, “Phil Donahue: His Name Is Controversy,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 248, 9, (1976), 93, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>26</sup> “The Cover Archive/1980s/1884/February 11, 1984,” *TV Guide Magazine*, at [http://tvguidemagazine.com/archive/suboffer/1980s/1984/19840211\\_c1.jpg.html](http://tvguidemagazine.com/archive/suboffer/1980s/1984/19840211_c1.jpg.html).

<sup>27</sup> “About CII,” *Children’s Institute, Inc.*, 2014, at [www.childrensinstitute.org/about](http://www.childrensinstitute.org/about); “About Us,” *Los Angeles County Inter-agency Council on Child Abuse & Neglect*, at <http://ican.co.la.ca.us/about.htm>; Margaret Carlson, Jonathan Beaty, and Elaine Lafferty, “Six Years of Trial by Torture,” *Time*, 135, 5 (1990), Academic Search Premier; Nathan and Snedecker, 75–77.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Mertens, “Child Sexual Abuse in California: Legislative and Judicial Responses,” *Golden Gate University Law Review*, 15, 9 (1985), at <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev/vol15/iss3/1>.

broadcasts highlighted children's claims that they had been stabbed, raped, impregnated, tortured, and forced to watch and participate in animal and human sacrifice. Despite initially denying that they had been assaulted, young people from the ages of two to fourteen said that Buckey and other defendants had molested them in meat markets, bathrooms, and car washes, and taken pornographic pictures of them performing sex acts on adults. 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.<sup>29</sup> While CII's controversial interview techniques, which included having social workers dress as clowns and coax information from children using hand puppets and anatomically correct dolls, ultimately led jurors to acquit all of the McMartin defendants, they were accepted as credible in several other cases, as well as in tabloid media reports. Infotainment provided national audiences with testimony that vividly brought the children's stories to life.

Although not all tabloid shows of the 1980s reported on the panic, many of them gained popularity and legitimacy by exploring its main themes of child sexual abuse, cult membership, and devil worship. The most prominent infotainment programs of the decade included *Sally Jesse Raphael* (1985–2002), *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986–2011), *The Geraldo Rivera Show* (1987–89), and *The Morton Downey Jr. Show* (1987–89), which were talk shows based on the model established by *The Phil Donahue Show* (1967–95), 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, because they utilized "actual" crime footage like surveillance tapes.<sup>30</sup> Together, these programs joined the growing number of local news shows, which had been reporting human-interest stories to communities around the country since the late 1940s.

At the end of the 1960s, the networks extended local news programs to half an hour, exploiting the solid reputation of their live national evening news broadcasts, which had also recently been lengthened from fifteen minutes to thirty starting in 1963. As the popularity and profitability of local news helped to transfer "the power base from the network to the local station," the networks added local news shows throughout the day.<sup>31</sup> By 1968, a survey of 329 commercial stations around the country reported that "news

<sup>29</sup> "The Salem Epidemic," *National Review*, 42, 17 (1990), Academic Search Premier.

<sup>30</sup> Glynn, *Tabloid Culture*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Michael D. Murray and Donald D. Godfrey, eds., *Television in America: Local Station History from across the Nation* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1997), xxv.

is *the* major element in local programming, and the local television station has become the chief source of information for the country at large.”<sup>32</sup> When the economy declined at the end of the 1970s, local affiliates helped keep networks profitable. The continued success of local news for the networks over the next thirty years was a major impetus for the explosion of other infotainment programs in the 1980s, many of which modeled their delivery on the local news format. As the panic dawned, networks were broadcasting “local news inserts during the morning,” as well as “news at noon, and news in the evening and late at night.”<sup>33</sup> That local television reporter Wayne Satz was the first to break the panic story revealed that, by the 1980s, sensational content and local news were heavily intertwined.

Through a mounting number of reports, local news programs around the country fleshed out much of the panic narrative. In her criticism of the case involving Gerald Amirault and his family in Massachusetts, journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz observed that it “had begun its long nightly run on the local news.”<sup>34</sup> Stories of satanic ritual abuse were potentially reinforced by reports of cults, rapists, kidnappers, pedophiles, and serial killers that simultaneously ran on both local and national network news. Since the late 1960s, national news programs had been shifting their stories towards sensational human interest to stay competitive with local news. They boosted the credibility of tabloid sources by reporting many of the same stories. National news program segments on satanic ritual abuse indicated that, by the 1980s, the networks were willing to support and enhance tabloid media’s most extreme and implausible content. The solid reputation of network news programming served to reinforce the plausibility of the panic narrative. Between 1984 and 1986, the NBC, CBS, and ABC national evening news collectively ran eighteen reports on McMartin, sometimes as part of longer stories on child sex abuse and pornography rings, with a few labeled “special segments.”

National news reports mostly supported the tabloid narrative that was first introduced by Wayne Satz in 1984. They used many of the same devices as local news, and tabloid media more generally, to suggest that defendants were guilty. NBC’s 1984 special news program on child sexual abuse entitled “The Silent Shame” openly questioned why so many people had “difficulty” accepting that “sexual abuse exists” and went on to analyze the “behavior of

<sup>32</sup> Herbert W. Land Associates, *Television and the Wired City* (Washington, DC: National Association of Broadcasters, 1968), 7, quoted in Lynn Boyd Hinds, *Broadcasting the Local News: The Early Years of Pittsburgh’s KDKA-TV* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2004), Land Associates’ emphasis. <sup>33</sup> Hinds, *Broadcasting the Local News*, 7, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Rabinowitz, “A Darkness in Massachusetts-III.”

most pedophiles.”<sup>35</sup> According to a critical *Los Angeles Times* review of “The Devil Worshipers,” an hour-long *20/20* episode on satanic ritual abuse, which aired in 1985 and dealt mainly with McMartin, the report took “a back seat to none when it comes to drum rolls and vamping for the camera.” Even parents of children involved in the McMartin case who watched the special told the reporter that it was incomplete and was “always concentrating on the lurid and the dramatic.”<sup>36</sup> Later that year, in a news segment on McMartin, ABC’s substitute nightly news anchor Hodding Carter authoritatively stated, “there is no question in the minds of investigators that children were abused over a period of many years.” He then asked, “How could it have gone on undetected?”<sup>37</sup> The mostly uncritical attention that satanic ritual abuse received on national network news appeared to validate a tabloid story.

National news reports of the panic began to decline in 1986, when the McMartin preliminary hearing ended with the dismissal of charges for all of the defendants except Ray Buckey and his mother. 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.<sup>38</sup> By the late 1980s, national news was generally avoiding the topic of ritual abuse, but it remained prevalent on television through both local news, which reported on cases throughout the late 1980s, and talk shows. *Geraldo* aired two specials on devil worship after the show’s 1987 debut. The second special, “Devil Worship: Exposing Satan’s Underground,” earned NBC its highest ratings ever for a live two-hour documentary, reaching an audience of 19.8 million, or one-third of all television viewers for its evening time slot.<sup>39</sup> Part of the program’s appeal rested with Rivera, a member of television’s growing population of charismatic tabloid personalities. Following in the footsteps of Phil Donahue, talk show hosts Sally Jessy Raphael, Morton Downey Jr., Oprah Winfrey, and Geraldo Rivera became household names. In 1984 Donahue was considered reputable enough to moderate the televised debates between Democratic candidates for

<sup>35</sup> “The Silent Shame,” 25 Aug. 1984, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*.

<sup>36</sup> Howard Rosenberg, “‘20/20’ Takes a Limited View of McMartin Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Jan. 1985, 1, at [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-02/entertainment/ca-6193\\_1\\_mcmartin-case](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-02/entertainment/ca-6193_1_mcmartin-case).

<sup>37</sup> Wexler, *Wounded Innocents*, 147.

<sup>38</sup> Don J. DeBenedictis, “McMartin Preschool’s Lessons,” *ABA Journal*, 76, 4 (1990), Academic Search Premier.

<sup>39</sup> Jay Sharbutt, “Cauldron Boils over Geraldo’s ‘Devil Worship’: ‘Satan’ Wins Ratings, Loses Advertisers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Oct. 1988, at [http://articles.latimes.com/1988-10-27/entertainment/ca-449\\_1\\_devil-worship](http://articles.latimes.com/1988-10-27/entertainment/ca-449_1_devil-worship).

President, along with ABC network news anchor Ted Koppel.<sup>40</sup> Other popular hosts included tabloid news correspondents 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*, as well as celebrity victim John Walsh, who hosted *America's Most Wanted* after his son Adam was abducted and murdered a few years earlier. Tabloid television hosts were a critical part of the genre's appeal.

"Devil Worship," which aired in 1988, was both the essence of tabloid television and one of its most extreme manifestations. It reinforced the ritual-abuse narrative and exploited it on an unprecedented scale. During the two-hour live special, Rivera alleged that McMartin was only one part of a vast devil-worshipping "underground," which had been operating in the United States since Charles Manson and "demented Son-of-Sam killer David Berkowitz."<sup>41</sup> His narrative wove together real criminal cases with those revolving exclusively around satanic ritual abuse, giving their level of tragedy and horror equal weight. The special combined "real" material, such as trial footage, commentary from law-enforcement groups, and interviews, many of them conducted live in the studio, with fictional entertainment including songs, film clips, and segments from other tabloid shows. With the constant interplay between fact and fiction, several different sources appeared to confirm that America was being taken over by Satan's disciples. Absent any context except the one Rivera provided, stories of satanic ritual abuse seemed as alarming as other violent crimes involving children. For example, Rivera also discussed the case of Tommy Sullivan, a young boy who had first murdered his mother then slit his own wrists and throat after writing up a contract with the Devil. The supposedly demonic nature of Sullivan's crime appeared to lend credibility to ritual-abuse cases, which Rivera supplied with their most comprehensive live coverage to that date.<sup>42</sup>

The special depended on, and amplified, standard devices of the genre, like using celebrity guests to appeal to viewers. Rivera interviewed Ozzy Osbourne live via satellite to debate whether the heavy metal musician's popular occult-themed songs were contributing to the satanic underground. Rivera also provided pre-taped footage of his face-to-face conversation with serial killer Charles Manson, whose recognizable image was already culturally synonymous with demonic crime. Rivera fundamentally depended on these devices, which

<sup>40</sup> "ABC Evening News for Friday, Jan. 13, 1984, Headline: 1984 Vote/Debates," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*; "The Republican Presidential Debate at Dartmouth," *Dartmouth.edu*, last modified 9 Oct. 2011, at [www.dartmouth.edu/debates/about/history/1984.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/debates/about/history/1984.html).

<sup>41</sup> "Geraldo: Devil Worship-Exposing Satan's Underground," 1988, *YouTube* video, 1:29:46, 3:00-3:15, 5 Sept. 2013, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcWbuBPNtPw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcWbuBPNtPw).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:00-13:20



included the show's live broadcast and dramatic narration, to give the Devil underground legitimacy. He rested the appeal of his show most acutely, however, on infotainment's trend of sexualizing children, which was also a key component of the panic. Rivera prefaced his segment on McMartin by stating, "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."<sup>43</sup> Although Rivera had urged parents to get children away from the television set during an earlier graphic segment, the scene cut to two McMartin children, positioned with their backs to the camera, preparing to disclose their sexual encounters to audiences. "The children of McMartin are still filled with lurid stories of their awful experience there," Rivera explained.<sup>44</sup> The edited responses of McMartin children, as well as the live interview via satellite with their parents, were enhanced by details from similar cases like that of Kaleb Kellum. Kellum, a five-year-old alleged victim from Grenada, Mississippi, revealed to Rivera in a taped conversation that he was taken to "an old caboose," sodomized, and forced to throw babies against a wall. "Ow, did it hurt," said Kellum 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.<sup>45</sup> While Rivera's observation that Kellum's drawings "can chill a parent's soul" suggested genuine concern, the episode continued to put childhood sexuality, presented in the context of satanic ritual abuse, on flagrant display.

Although "Devil Worship" was popular with television audiences, it did receive open criticism. Produced by Rivera's Investigative Reporters Group, an independent company that operated outside NBC's news division, the special aired carrying only fourteen commercials, two for the *National Enquirer* and "three for new horror movies," out of thirty-six potential spots.<sup>46</sup> Advertisers avoided the episode because of its questionable content, which had also prompted executives of *The Today Show* to refuse Rivera's request to appear in a promotional interview. *NBC Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw added that the network's choice to air documentaries outside the news division "troubles me greatly."<sup>47</sup> Rivera addressed the problem by calling network standards "a noose around my neck."<sup>48</sup> The network was able to run the controversial special because it was within the entertainment division, which was no longer subject to the stricter rules of the news division. These recently relaxed standards were indicative of conservative attitudes

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 43:04–43:15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:30–5:45.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 40:55–42:00.

<sup>46</sup> Sharbutt, "Cauldron."

<sup>47</sup> Peter J. Boyer, "Program on Satan Worship Spurs Controversy at NBC," *New York Times*, 26 Oct. 1988, at [www.nytimes.com/1988/10/26/business/program-on-satan-worship-spurs-controversy-at-nbc.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/26/business/program-on-satan-worship-spurs-controversy-at-nbc.html).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



towards media content more generally. During the decade, Mark Fowler, Ronald Reagan's appointee for chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), enacted "numerous liberalizations" that expanded the amount of commercial material on radio and television.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the latter experienced a proliferation of infomercials, sponsored religious programming, children's shows based on toys and games, and independently produced tabloid specials like "Devil Worship." Although the FCC had previously warned that program-length commercial content would "involve a serious dereliction of duty on the part of the licensee," such material was allowed to vastly expand its presence on television during the 1980s. The FCC's primary concern in the 1970s was that programs designed solely to market a product would push the station over "the maximum amount of commercial matter that will be broadcast in a given clock hour."<sup>50</sup>

The controversy over "Devil Worship" also revealed that the panic's biggest case was facing some skepticism from the public. By 1988, when "Devil Worship" aired, District Attorney Ira Reiner had dismissed charges against five of the McMartin defendants.<sup>51</sup> However, while these developments indicated that the McMartin case was falling apart, the popularity of "Devil Worship" demonstrated that the panic as a whole still had momentum. Several prominent cases arose the same year the episode aired and lasted into the next decade, even after Ray Buckey was acquitted in 1990. Tabloid media continued to explore the panic's main themes of pedophilia and the occult in white suburbia, although "Devil Worship" marked its last popular and successful foray into satanic ritual abuse. The panic was a testament to tabloid media's impact on the culture and remained integral to its success.

### A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

As an example of infotainment, the panic reflected expanding conservative influence over national media sources. Its rise in the 1980s paralleled a decade of major corporate mergers and relaxed federal regulatory policies that made it easier for tabloid fare to infiltrate television. The proliferation

<sup>49</sup> Adam Candeub, "Media Ownership Regulation, the First Amendment, and Democracy's Future," *University of California, Davis Law Review*, 41, 1558, at [http://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/issues/41/4/articles/41-4\\_candeub.pdf](http://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/issues/41/4/articles/41-4_candeub.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> "In the Matter of Program-Length Commercials," *Federal Communications Commission Reports*, before the Federal Communications Commission, 2 Feb. 1973, 1062, 1063, at [https://fccid.io/ftp.php?file=/pub/Bureaus/Mass\\_Media/Databases/documents\\_collection/73-215.pdf](https://fccid.io/ftp.php?file=/pub/Bureaus/Mass_Media/Databases/documents_collection/73-215.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> David Shaw, "Media Skepticism Grew as McMartin Case Lingered: News Analysis," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Jan. 1990, at [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-01-21/news/mn-980\\_1\\_mcmartin-case](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-01-21/news/mn-980_1_mcmartin-case).

of ritual-abuse stories across a variety of television genres and other media sources, including made-for-television movies, magazines, books, and newspapers, demonstrated the growing cultural reach of both tabloid media and the New Right. The panic was a product of conservative economic practices, but also of conservative values, as Ray Buckey and other defendants became hybrids of several different sixties backlash types. Tabloid reports represented the accused as a dangerous mixture of “liberal” threats to white suburban nuclear family life. At their core, alleged satanic ritual abusers were updated versions of Charles Manson, who in the 1980s was recognizably embodied in cinema’s icons of horror like Freddy Krueger and Jason Vorhees.

As the panic portrayed daycare center employees as devil-worshipping suburban predators, it revealed the particular cultural sway of conservative evangelicals, who identified the perceived threats to the sacred suburban nuclear family norm as demonic. Throughout the 1980s, several prominent evangelical preachers broadened their presence on television as part of a massive expansion of their corporate empires, which already included profitable television and radio networks, magazines, newspapers, and publishing and film companies. Coined “televangelists,” they promoted their consecrated vision of the 1950s nuclear family on shows for worship, as well as political discussion programs, cable networks, and tabloid television. That accusations against defendants appeared legitimate demonstrated the extent to which tabloid media had convincingly incorporated evangelical conceptions of suburbia as an epicenter of demonic activity. While white suburban neighborhoods crawling with paranormal entities were most vividly on display in fictional horror, they were also found on tabloid television shows.

Television news had been using horror movies to reinforce tabloid stories since 1969 with reports of serial killer Charles Manson. Local and national news stories on the murder of pregnant actress Sharon Tate by members of Manson’s cult rested heavily on material from *Rosemary’s Baby*, a popular 1968 film directed by Roman Polanski, Tate’s husband at the time of her death. The story of the Manson murders was also one of the first on television news to incorporate representations of white suburbia, in this case the Hollywood Hills neighborhood where Tate and Polanski resided, into the realm of the occult. Descriptions of Manson’s group demonically killing Tate and her friends mimicked scenes from Polanski’s film in which the main character is raped and impregnated by devil-worshippers. 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 satanic worship. 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,” and explained that membership involved juvenile delinquency, sex crimes, black clothing, and homicidal

violence.<sup>52</sup> An ABC segment simultaneously mentioned 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.”<sup>53</sup> News reports also exploited the uncanny similarities that Tate bore to Rosemary Woodhouse, the film’s protagonist. Aside from their direct association with Roman Polanski, both women were blonde, pregnant newlyweds who were tortured by cults. The Manson story demonstrated that using fiction to affirm reality could yield a successful news story with lasting cultural impact. Fictional characters and scenarios, mainly from popular movies in the expanding demon-horror genre, of which *Rosemary’s Baby* was an influential part, would continue to help render tabloid stories credible.

Reports describing the actions of Ray Buckey and his family conjured up images of Manson and his followers that remained prominent in the media of the 1980s. As they were described in news shows and tabloid television, defendants in panic cases adhered closely to the Manson narrative, embracing devil worship and engaging in violent practices that harmed white suburban women and children. Like Manson, they seemed to demonstrate that challenging the nuclear family model caused one to seek its demise. Their apparent rebellion linked them to sixties activists who had openly critiqued aspects of the traditional family norm. Although Manson was pursuing a career in the music industry at the time of the murders, news reports painted his cult as operating on the margins of society, which likened them to hippies. Manson grew up in Los Feliz, California, an affluent suburb located near Hollywood, and was pursuing a career in the record industry.<sup>54</sup> However, television news and other media sources viewed Manson as undeniable proof that one’s unwillingness to experience a stable suburban environment led naturally to violent psychosis.

The panic was an extension of the Manson narrative, but also part of its ongoing transformation. In the 1980s, amid an environment of rapidly expanding commercial media technologies, particularly in the suburban home, Manson became a more solitary, predatory, and destructive figure. Starting with Michael Myers in the successful 1978 film *Halloween*, and followed most notably by Jason Vorhees in *Friday the 13th* (1980) and Freddy

<sup>52</sup> “NBC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec. 02, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Manson Cult,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*; “NBC Evening News for Wednesday, Dec. 03, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Cult Leader,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*.

<sup>53</sup> “ABC Evening News for Tuesday, Dec. 02, 1969, Headline: Tate Murders/Suspects,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*.

<sup>54</sup> Adam Gorightly, *The Shadow over Santa Susanna: Black Magic, Mind Control & the Manson Family Mythos* (New York: Creation, 2009), 263.

Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), Manson types terrorized suburban residents. Wielding a variety of sharp objects, they relied more on physical intimidation than previous variations of the type, proving indestructible by either surviving repeated attacks against them or finding resurrection in a sequel. These terrifying characters also revived the use of ominous masks, an accessory of the type that debuted in 1974 through the character of Leatherface, the remorseless serial killer in the popular horror film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. When such characters did not wear a mask, like Freddy Krueger, they often possessed facial deformities that similarly distorted or concealed emotions.

Michael Myers, Jason Vorhees, and Freddy Krueger, as well as their numerous low-budget imitators, were uniquely tied to the rise of the New Right and its conservative economic policies. As globally successful brands that yielded television shows, games, toys, cartoons, school supplies, trading cards, apparel, Halloween costumes, and dozens of sequels over the next decades, the profitability of these commercial antiheroes reflected an expanding conservative influence on corporate practices. Although the worldviews of conservative groups displayed fundamental differences, prominent figures in the movement made compromises in order to realize their common goal of removing regulatory obstacles to global corporate expansion. Ronald Reagan's election as President in 1980 dramatically accelerated the trend, on the rise since the late 1960s, of passing federal legislation that allowed large, powerful American corporations to further monopolize, receive tax breaks, privatize state-run jobs and institutions, expand into foreign markets, and manufacture their products cheaply abroad. After 1980, an increasing number of important mergers and acquisitions also brought companies from different industries together, forming conglomerates that would continue to grow in size.

Included in the decade's "merger mania" were dozens of the nation's mass-media outlets. 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 that "they wouldn't automatically oppose a network takeover."<sup>55</sup> Although in 1974 the FCC had approved "formal rules prohibiting cross-ownership" of media industries, in subsequent years the Supreme Court continuously ruled in

<sup>55</sup> Charles Storch, "Capital Cities to Take Over Abc, Deal Tops \$3.5 Billion, Stocks Soar," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 March 1985, at [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-03-19/business/8501150668\\_1\\_capital-cities-communications-american-broadcasting-cos-abc-television-network](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-03-19/business/8501150668_1_capital-cities-communications-american-broadcasting-cos-abc-television-network).

favor of the many media conglomerates that objected to those rules. By 2003, a series of successful challenges led the FCC to relent and allow for “unlimited ownership in large media markets.”<sup>56</sup> Cinematic characters like Myers, Vorhees, and Krueger were products of, and helped to shape, this environment of intense conglomerate growth. Their popularity stemmed from aggressive marketing tactics rooted in evolving media technologies that were similarly applied to many tabloid television stories.

Ray Buckey and other defendants in ritual abuse cases increasingly resembled the demonic suburban stalkers of the decade’s horror movies, likewise serving as national symbols of terror. Descriptions of Buckey, for example, painted him as reckless and menacing. A 1984 *People* magazine article quoted an alleged child victim fearfully stating, “Ray could come waltzing down the street anytime he wants – and we can’t do a thing about it.”<sup>57</sup> News reports described defendants with sharp objects and placed them in dark, secluded locations, such as the supposed series of tunnels under the McMMartin preschool that investigators ultimately failed to find. The similarities between accused ritual abusers and the decade’s commercial antiheroes were pronounced enough that Wes Craven, director of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, changed the description of Freddie Krueger from child “molester” to child “murderer” before the film’s 1984 release to avoid any association with McMMartin and the panic.<sup>58</sup> Collectively, defendants and their fictional counterparts were products of the nation’s deregulated commercial media companies that were helping to fuel conglomerate growth. In 1991, Peggy McMMartin Buckey attempted to redress this fact when she filed a class action suit against Capital Cities/ABC, as well as ABC reporter Wayne T. Satz, claiming that her “rights to due process, privacy, equal protection, and a fair trial had been violated.” Although the lawsuit was eventually dismissed, Buckey conveyed her belief 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.”<sup>59</sup>

Along with the rapid growth of corporate media, the panic helped to perpetuate many of the New Right’s backlash politics that had originated in

<sup>56</sup> Candeub, “Ownership,” 1568, 1574, 1579.

<sup>57</sup> Michelle Green, “The McMMartins: The ‘Model Family’ Down the Block that Ran California’s Nightmare Nursery,” *People*, 21, 20 (1984), at [www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20087858,00.html](http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20087858,00.html).

<sup>58</sup> Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978–1986* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 151.

<sup>59</sup> *Peggy McMMartin 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* (US App 1991), LexisNexis Academic.

the 1960s. It reinforced conservative moral values, many of which were dictated by evangelical Christians who claimed to substantiate them with biblical text. Defendants stood accused of “satanic ritual abuse,” an idea that could only be conceived and condemned in a society universally acquainted with the Bible and generally accepting of its interpretations of good and evil. The cultural ubiquity of biblical morality was partly the result of America’s “Judeo-Christian” tradition, a concept that began 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 changing the national motto to “In God We Trust.” Several religious figures also began hosting their own television programs in the 1950s. However, the panic was not simply a manifestation of Judeo-Christianity’s cultural prevalence. It was a symbol and result of its inherent tensions and the ascendance of conservative evangelical Protestantism during the 1970s, which positioned itself on the front lines 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 influence many of the nation’s commercial media outlets through powerful alliances forged during the previous decade with other conservatives, many of whom served as influential members of the Republican Party. One of the most “controversial and prominent” evangelical conservatives was Jerry Falwell, a Baptist clergyman from Virginia and a member of the expanding population of televangelists who preached religious sermons from their “electronic churches” on television.<sup>60</sup> 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.”<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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

<sup>60</sup> Steve Bruce, *Conservative Protestant Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 225.

<sup>61</sup> 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, 9 (1985), Academic Search Premier. <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

subjects and topics in news broadcasts, talk shows, television specials, newspapers, and national magazines.” The *Time* article appropriately labeled televangelists “celebrities,” who were “well financed, visible, organized and effective.”<sup>63</sup> 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.

As the panic demonstrated, powerful conservative evangelicals had a substantial bearing on culture by the 1980s. While other social groups influenced representations of family life in the decade’s mass media, televangelists had an instrumental hand in shaping predominant conceptions of suburbia and of the occult. They crowded out alternative portraits of home, community, and nation by expanding their media operations and partnering with other global conglomerates. Ray Buckley and other defendants were accused of satanic ritual abuse in a climate where powerful evangelicals sanctified the nuclear family and demonized enemies associated with sixties liberal activism. However, their cultural influence was not permanent. The panic began to wane at the end of the decade as several televangelists became embroiled in public scandal, much of it reported in tabloid media. Journalists and media sources also began openly challenging panic cases and a more diverse array of media technology became available to American consumers.

### CONSERVATISM IN CYBERSPACE

The panic receded dramatically after 1990, when Ray Buckley 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 the *Washington Post* hastened the release of every major panic defendant over the course of the next two decades except for Arnold Friedman, who committed suicide in prison, and Frank Fuster. Many journalists and lawyers began to view 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 that of the West Memphis Three, the mostly young male defendants in these trials were not tied to daycare centers and faced charges for real crimes that had been committed. The changing climate indicated that the conservative influence on media and culture was

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 105.



evolving. Despite becoming more entrenched, it was also more open to scrutiny, criticism, and ridicule.

In many ways, the New Right remained a potent cultural force in the 1990s. Although scandals in the late 1980s involving sexual infidelity and fraud ruined the careers of some of their peers, the reputations and media empires of conservative evangelicals like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Billy Graham stayed intact. They continued to exert powerful political influence when Ronald 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."<sup>64</sup> He expanded Reagan's deregulation policies that benefited large media corporations 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.<sup>65</sup> Although now uncoupled from daycare, satanic ritual abuse, an idea dependent on prevailing evangelical notions of suburban nuclear family life, was considered a national issue into the mid-1990s. In 1993, the National Conference on Crimes against Children, held in Washington, DC, addressed satanic abuse of children as a "major concern."<sup>66</sup> It was simultaneously criminalized in state laws passed in Idaho, Illinois, and California.<sup>67</sup> Into the new millennium, sequels to the demon-horror slasher movies of the 1980s experienced commercial success and helped bolster the credibility of tabloid media.

News stories in the 1990s also demonstrated that conservative ideology was still pervasive. The profitability and ongoing expansion of tabloid television continued to push the direction of news towards live sensationalism. The Manson type in particular, which Ray Buckey and other defendants perpetuated, kept its prominence. In 1993, the leader of an isolated sect of Seventh-Day Adventists near Waco, Texas, 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

<sup>64</sup> William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*, 2nd edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 192.

<sup>65</sup> "Media Regulation Timeline," *PBS.org*, last modified 30 Jan. 2004, at [www.pbs.org/now/politics/mediatimeline.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/mediatimeline.html).

<sup>66</sup> James Randall Noblitt and Pamela Sue Perskin, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), xv.

<sup>67</sup> "Ritual Abuse Legislation Passed by U.S. State Legislatures," *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*, last modified 20 March 2001, at [www.religioustolerance.org/ra\\_law.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/ra_law.htm).

siege undertaken by federal law-enforcement officers. Stories were replete with descriptions of Koresh, who was killed along with most of his cult followers in the fire, as “violent and megalomaniacal.”<sup>68</sup> As a “charismatic” cult leader, he was compared directly to Charles Manson, who was similarly described as using religion to control members.<sup>69</sup> 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. However, the panic had successfully helped incorporate sexual abuse into the Manson narrative. It became a focal point in the case of Koresh, although not until after he was killed.<sup>70</sup> In the wake of his death, some reports emphasized that former cult members had “recounted sordid details of sexual exploitation of female followers.” Many were allegedly part of “Koresh’s personal harem,” ranging in age “from teenage girls to women in their 70s.”<sup>71</sup>

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 a political context. While some news programs and print media briefly raised questions about the ease of civilian access to weapons technologies, most glossed over larger social problems that may have contributed to such violent episodes. Reports simply portrayed the perpetrators as lone wolves.<sup>72</sup> Networks also 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 citizens battling over finances and other personal disputes in a court of law. An increasing number of shows went into syndication, allowing them to air on cable channels several times a day. They took place in an

<sup>68</sup> Chris Wood and Virgil Grandfield, “A Prophet of Doom,” *Maclean’s*, 106, 11 (1993), Academic Search Premier.

<sup>69</sup> “ABC Evening News for Wednesday, Mar. 03, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Standoff/Cult Leaders,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*; “CBS Evening News for Wednesday, Mar. 03, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas//Cult Standoff/The Raid,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*.

<sup>70</sup> “CBS Evening News for Tuesday, Apr. 20, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Standoff/Aftermath/Jamar Interview,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*; “NBC Evening News for Tuesday, May 04, 1993, Headline: Waco, Texas/Cult Fire/Investigation/The Children,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*. <sup>71</sup> Wood and Grandfield.

<sup>72</sup> Key Word search for “Timothy McVeigh,” “Unabomber,” and “Columbine,” *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*. 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.

environment of even more aggressive media saturation than the 1980s, as Americans bought more television sets that displayed larger, sharper, higher-resolution images.

Tabloid media generated “Reality TV,” which centered on documenting aspects of people’s daily lives with cameras.<sup>73</sup> Reality television was cheap to produce and offered neatly packaged “staged spectacles” that appeared to promote the idea that anyone could become a television star.<sup>74</sup> 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). Despite the fact that reality television was contrived, employing actors, scripts, sets, and cameras, tabloid and other media sources took it seriously, seeming to affirm that its world of mostly white suburbanites was “real.” 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 reminiscent of images in 1980s film and television. Veteran programs like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* (1984–present) would be joined by *The Anna Nicole Show* (2002–4), *The Osbournes* (2002–5), *The Bachelor* (2002–present), *The Bachelorette* (2003–present), *Laguna Beach* (2004–6), *The Hills* (2006–10), and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007–present), to collectively exhibit a “real world” devoid of any political or economic problems. This superficial suburban “reality” was a direct outgrowth of tabloid television, which was in part made possible by the panic. As reality shows began to crop up about paranormal activity in suburban neighborhoods, like *Ghost Hunters* (2004–present), a successful franchise with several spin-off series, and *An American Haunting* (2013–present), they demonstrated that the panic had helped create a media universe that was convincing and sustainable in the decades that followed. Although the panic ended in the early 1990s and the worldview in which it was embedded was subjected to louder criticism, its evangelical, white suburban backdrop continued to be presented as a “real” place.

However, the 1990s were not identical to the 1980s. Although news stories continued to reinforce conservative evangelical values, other media sources began to more openly critique them. In the 1990s, as protests against the

<sup>73</sup> Glynn, *Tabloid Culture*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 3.

panic became louder, challenges to various aspects of the commercial system also 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 initiated changes in television's function and content. Television shows started to heavily employ irony and satire that directly confronted the cultural environment that had given rise to the panic. Since its inception, television had consistently offered programs that satirized societal conventions and norms, often through comedy. Although their numbers dwindled throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, staple comedy shows like *Saturday Night Live* (1975–present) and *The Tonight Show* became part of a revival of television satire that began at the end of the 1980s.<sup>75</sup> Satirical fare collectively offered a direct challenge to conventional media wisdom on family life. In contrast to shows like *Full House* (1987–95) and *Growing Pains* (1985–92), television programs launched in the late 1980s like *Married ... With Children* (1987–97), *Roseanne* (1988–97), and *The Simpsons* (1989–present) made fun of the nuclear-family norms they displayed. Other satirical programs included *The Tracey Ullman Show* (1987–90), *In Living Color* (1990–94), *Beavis and Butt-Head* (1993–2011), *MADtv* (1995–2009), *The Daily Show* (1996–present), *Daria* (1997–2001), *South Park* (1997–present), *Family Guy* (1999–present) and *Futurama* (1999–present). While the proliferation of irony suggested that a circumstance identical to the satanic panic was not likely to happen again without some media scrutiny, a resurgence of media satire was not unproblematic. The main issue was that those who mocked the system also greatly benefited from it, rendering their irony itself ironic.

Another important difference between the 1990s and previous decades was that consumer access to information and technology greatly expanded. Between 1984 and 1994, the proportion 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 to 26 percent over the same years.<sup>76</sup> Digital databases and applications for communication allowed people to research causes and interests beyond the confines of their local neighborhoods. Their online conversations and pursuits were no longer bound by

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson, "The State of Satire, the Satire of State," in Gray, Jones, and Thompson, eds., *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 3–36, 6; Ethan Thompson, "I Am Not Down with That': King of the Hill and Sitcom Satire," *Journal of Film and Video*, 61, 2 (2009), 40, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>76</sup> "The Sociodemographics of Access and Adoption: Trends in PC and Internet Access," *National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Studies*, archived 19 Aug. 2015, at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/5902/20150819104800/http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf01313/socio.htm>.

the rules that governed their physical reality. Contemporary news stories and books did voice some concern about America's entrance into the "digital age," as the era was coined. For example, a 1994 *Newsweek* article 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."<sup>77</sup> *Democracy in the Digital Age*, a book published in the year 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."<sup>78</sup> However, allowing consumers to create and participate in online communities 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."<sup>79</sup> 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."<sup>80</sup> The Internet was a powerful consumer tool that could influence and change the way people engaged with one another. It allowed them to conceptualize relationships that were different from those portrayed in other dominant media, like television.

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 less easily replicated in the virtual one. Laws in the 1980s

<sup>77</sup> Barbara Kantrowitz, "The Butlers of the Digital Age Will Be Just a Keystroke Away," *Newsweek*, 17 Jan. 1994, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Feenberg and Maria Bakardjieva, *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 4, 8.

<sup>80</sup> 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*, 30 Aug. 1995, at [http://articles.latimes.com/1995-08-30/business/fi-40375\\_1\\_geek-house](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-08-30/business/fi-40375_1_geek-house).

and 1990s targeted child pornography, hacking, wiretapping, fraud, piracy, bomb threats, scams, and hoaxes, but many were mired in controversy and debate.<sup>81</sup> Facets of legislation allegedly designed to protect consumers and children often stirred calls for appeal and heated conversation over the First Amendment rights guaranteed to all citizens.<sup>82</sup> 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 generally provided an effective platform for free speech without fear of criminal prosecution.<sup>83</sup> Sites on the Internet forayed into numerous topics considered subversive to religious conservatives. This was especially true of pornography, which invaded cyberspace throughout the 1990s in torrents, despite the 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, for example, were in possession of thousands of images and dozens of videos.<sup>84</sup>

The panic’s bloated scale throughout the 1980s and quick decline beginning in 1990 demonstrated that power and technology were not static. Although conservatives once again came to power in the year 2000 with the election of George W. Bush, their representations of white suburban ideals needed to 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, forcing older technologies to diversify their applications and content. Over the next decade, news stories on pedophiles in the Catholic Church and at Penn State University, for example, which kept the enemies of conservatives culturally prominent, competed with an expanding amount of alternative content coming through new “social-media” platforms. The idealized white suburban world that the

<sup>81</sup> Office of Legal Education Executive Office for United States Attorneys, “Prosecuting Computer Crimes: Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section Criminal Division,” *United States Department of Justice*, 1–3, 59, at [www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/criminal-ccips/legacy/2015/01/14/ccmanual.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/criminal-ccips/legacy/2015/01/14/ccmanual.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> Peter P. Swire, “Elephants and Mice Revisited: Law and Choice of Law on the Internet,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 153, 6 (2005), 1976, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>83</sup> Eric Lichtblau, “Sting Nets 100 Arrests in Internet Child Porn,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 Aug. 2001, at <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/aug/09/news/mn-32234>.

<sup>84</sup> Bonnie Hayes, “Sex Offender Indicted in Internet Child Porn Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Aug. 1997, at <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/aug/13/local/me-22161>.

panic had helped reinforce was both intact and fading away, still potent but now less recognizable. Although panic cases had appeared to prove the existence and accuracy of the threats that conservatives described, they also signaled a society undergoing transformations that made such threats less believable.

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

In 2015, I completed my PhD in American history at Temple University after receiving a Dissertation Completion Grant for the Spring 2014 semester. In 2013, I presented on my dissertation at the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting in San Francisco. I currently do a wide variety of volunteer work, including delivering meals to the elderly and visiting patients in hospice care. I would like to thank my mom, dad, brother, and the Grangers, as well as my friends, for their continued help and support. I would also like to thank the readers for their comments and insight; my adviser, Dr. Kenneth Kusmer; and my editor, Tyler B.