

counselors. More significantly, CSATP's high confession rate freed the government from having to pay for trials, maintain men in prison, keep their children in foster care or to put their families on welfare.

With MacFarlane's help, NCCAN in 1979 gave the Giarrettos \$200,000 to train child-protection workers nationally.⁷⁰ With that, social workers and therapists throughout the country began descending on San Jose for training, then they returned to their communities and started new programs. The results were dramatic. The year before the federal grant went into effect, MacFarlane had conducted a national survey of sex abuse intervention programs and found fewer than a handful. Three years later, she counted three hundred. Sixty were direct offshoots of the Giarretto model and many others were variations.⁷¹

Thus, by the beginning of the 1980s, incest was no longer the dark secret it had been a decade earlier, when Kee MacFarlane started her job at the Arizona Children's Home. Now, thanks to an alliance among feminists, therapists, and law-enforcement officials, it was becoming possible for daughters to disclose their victimization and for fathers to admit their guilt. In national media from the *New York Times* to *Playboy*, *The Ann Landers Encyclopedia*, and *Donahue*, testimonials abounded from repentant fathers, newly assertive wives, and girls regaining their dignity.⁷²

Yet later research would reveal that many incest offenders also molest children outside their families (and they rape grown women as well).⁷³ Further, there is evidence that regardless of what kind of treatment sex abusers get, as many as one in seven goes on to offend again.⁷⁴ Ironically, then, politicians' and child-protectionists' fervor to keep fathers in families left many youngsters and women at risk for further abuse. And by pushing Godfather Offer confessions, the therapy model of sex-abuse intervention replaced skilled forensics personnel with social workers and others who knew nothing about how to test the validity of criminal sex-abuse charges and who unstintingly believed all of them.

Such credulity was hardly a problem in the 1970s, when the vast majority of the accusations and confessions were truthful. But if national consciousness about sex abuse was rising in new and heartening ways during that decade, it was also descending into primeval depths of fear and irrationality that soon would produce a wave of false charges and a panic over ritual abuse.

TWO

Demonology

In 1970, the same year that Kee MacFarlane dedicated her life to helping youngsters abused by their relatives, America began pulsing with rumors about threats to children that sounded even darker and more frightening than incest. Throughout the decade, a rash of claims would spread, in the popular culture and later among local and national policing agencies, that America's youngsters were gravely threatened by psychopathic murderers, kidnappers, occultists, pornographers, and child molesters. These stories were either baseless or grossly exaggerated, but the media, politicians, feminists, psychotherapists, and child-protection professionals helped promote and spread them. Then, in the 1980s, a Republican presidential administration turned its back on the incest-intervention efforts of child protectionists like Kee McFarlane, propelling her and her colleagues into theory and practice that would ignite mass panic over ritual abuse.

Subversion Scares

"That plump red apple that junior gets from the kindly old lady down the block may have a razor blade hidden inside," the *New York Times* warned during Halloween season, 1970.¹ For the next few years, the media repeated this admonition and reported that hundreds of trick-or-treaters had been murdered or injured by deadly objects purposefully put into their candy by adults.²

Yet, strangely, the culprits never seemed to have identities. Attempting to track down Halloween sadists, sociologist Joel Best reviewed decades of newspapers from all over the country and found only two deaths caused during the 1970s and 1980s by trick-or-treat candy tampering—both by a member of the child's own family. Only a handful of other incidents were documented. None resulted in serious harm, and many turned out to be attention-getting hoaxes perpetrated by children.³

Halloween sadist stories are apocryphal, and so are many other popular warnings about children in danger. They bear the hallmarks of "urban legends"—modern myths that are passed on as true and believed by almost everyone who hears them. One typical story warns about drug dealers who loiter around grade-school playgrounds, offering children Mickey Mouse stickers that are laced with LSD. Another concerns a girl who went to the bathroom by herself at a mall restroom and vanished. Authorities quickly sealed off the building and found the kidnaper and the child—but her hair had been cut and dyed and her clothes changed so she would not be recognized.⁴

Though these stories are not true, they sound as though they are. This is so, in part, because the typical urban legend is spread not through the mass media but by word of mouth or on school and workplace bulletin boards. The tale is always told as though it just took place, and if communicated orally, it is said to have happened to the narrator's friend, or to a friend of a friend.⁵ These details and credibility reinforce a sense of community. At the same time, they rework ages-old folktales that are venerable and culturally ingrained that when people with good imaginations hear only the barest outline of a new legend, they can generate details that conform remarkably with stories already circulating.

Related to the concept of urban legend is the *memorate*, a term folklorists use to describe the process by which an individual uses popular legends to explain an ambiguous or puzzling experience—such as a perceived contact with the supernatural. People who describe "close encounters" with UFOs appear to be using memorates, as do those who claim to have seen Elvis Presley after he died. These stories allow the tellers to share enigmatic feelings in socially acceptable ways without stigmatizing themselves as deviant.⁶

Memorates and urban legends are credible partly because they draw on a rich stock of old folk material, updated with Elvis, toy stores, or other details from current popular culture. A deeper reason the stories are believable, though, is that they communicate anxieties about perceived social emergencies and often express grassroots desires to transform political and social structures.⁷ The first UFO encounter stories, for instance, emerged at the start of the cold war, concurrently with Western preoccupations about invasion and control by the Soviet Union.⁸ Likewise, the LSD-

ker legend and the mall-restroom story reflect fears about drug use and contemporary social anomie and issue a veiled call for more policing of children.⁹ Like the Halloween sadist legend, with its themes of children leaving home at night and accepting lethal candy from strangers, is both an expression of angst about children's increasing socialization away from the family and a nod to candy companies' desire to commercialize Halloween further by abolishing homemade treats.

The deep social anxieties, yearnings, and political projects disguised in these narratives are incarnated in contemporary bogeymen like aliens, mall kidnapers, and trick-or-treat psychopaths, with their faddish spaceships and candy bars. But new villains have venerable ancestors. In the West, rumors of evil done to innocents date back to the ancient Greeks, and comprise part of what anthropologists call a subversion myth—a story that attaches blame for complicated problems to scapegoats. Subversion myths appear in times of acute social stress, and typically contain several elements. Most basic is a conspiracy narrative, in which the plotters are usually racial and cultural outsiders. Or they may be members of the culture's powerful elites, such as aristocrats, politicians, priests, or the police.¹⁰

The crimes these culprits are charged with constitute the most evil, loathsome behavior imaginable, perpetrated against society's ultimate symbol of its own purity and self-renewal: its children. In many subversion myths, the young victims are said to be destroyed by draining their blood, excising their vital organs, amputating their limbs, and cannibalizing their flesh. If all this were not terrible enough, the perpetrators in these stories often wreak their atrocities amid rituals of public enormity calculated to violate the culture's strongest sexual taboos, including incest.

These terrible accusations first appeared in Western culture before the Christian era, when Greeks leveled them against Jews. Later, in the Roman Empire, members of Christian sects were said to ritually sacrifice infants and conduct incestuous orgies. Historian Norman Cohn recounts the impact of such accusations in Lyons in A.D. 177. There, the entire Christian community, including its pagan slaves, were hounded by mobs, stoned, imprisoned, and tortured until the slaves declared that their masters had cannibalized children and held incestuous bacchanals. Following these "confessions," the Christians were killed.¹¹

As Christianity's popularity increased, earlier persecutions were forgotten as sects accused each other of incest, cannibalism, and child murder.¹² Centuries later, believers elaborated the "blood libel" myth that Jews ritually murder young Christian children. The rumor originated in twelfth-century England and quickly spread to Europe. In France, dozens of Jews were executed and burned at the stake. Similar atrocities occurred in Germany, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and Italy.

During the Reformation, blood libel stories were eclipsed by Protestant and Catholic scapegoating of suspected witches and minority Christian sects. But in the mid-nineteenth century, anti-Semitic rumors returned with a vengeance in Europe, Russia, and Egypt, and were formalized in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a phony document fabricated in Russia that outlined a Jewish conspiracy to conquer the world. Ritual-murder trials occurred in Eastern Europe until the eve of World War I, and were accompanied by brutal pogroms that fueled massive Jewish emigration to the West. But even in the United States, blood libel rumors persisted in communities, such as Chicago and Fall River, Massachusetts, where Eastern European Jews and Christians lived in the same neighborhoods.¹³

Variants of the blood libel myth still exist. After the 1968 student uprisings in France, rumors flew in provincial cities that the Jewish owners of trendy boutiques were trapping and abducting teenage girls in their stores' dressing rooms. Recently, hundreds of French parents insisted that several children had been kidnaped, photographed, raped, and eviscerated. Even though there were no missing children and no evidence, the sadistic child kidnapers were said to be Turkish and Northern African immigrants—whom many French blame for sabotaging their nation's economy and culture.¹⁴

In poor Asian and Latin American countries that supply children to adoptive parents from rich nations, popular resentment of growing economic inequality between the First and Third Worlds has lately been expressed through rumors that these babies are being slaughtered and their organs used for pediatric transplant operations. In 1994, three foreign women were severely beaten in rural Guatemala by crowds incited by these stories.¹⁵

The United States has also supplied fertile ground for subversion myths about children. During the height of antipapist hysteria, in the 1830s and 1840s, several books were written by women claiming to be ex-nuns who had escaped from convents where they witnessed orgies, torture, witchcraft, and the slaughter of infants. One account was so popular that in the years before the Civil War, its sales were surpassed only by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. During this same period, ex-nuns and priests, real or feigned, made a handsome living touring the country and testifying about the slaughter of innocents at the hands of mothers superior and bishops.¹⁶

Fear of ritual child killing still exists in the United States, but these days the culprit has changed—as illustrated by events in eastern Kentucky. In 1988, thousands of terrified residents from several counties there called police to report rumors that blond, blue-eyed children were being targeted for sacrifice. This time, though, the predators were not said to be of any particular ethnicity or race. Now they were supposed to be satanists.¹⁷

Demonology

Why satanists? This latest scapegoat is explainable via the anthropological concept of the *demonology*: the narrative, specific to every culture, that identifies the ultimate evil threatening the group. During periods of social turmoil and moral crisis, societal preoccupation with its demonology intensifies.¹⁸

In Christian cultures, the demonology is based on the concept of a threat from Satan and his mortal agents.¹⁹ Normally, this idea is ridiculed by the state and its intelligentsia. Confined to folk belief, its main function is to explain disease, ostracize village deviants, and reinforce community mores. But when demonology has been taken up by entire societies, the results have been devastating. During the Middle Ages, for instance, the Church was challenged by political competitors and by the Black Plague, which wiped out a third of Europe's population during a time when epidemics were considered divine vengeance for lack of faith. Confronted with these threats, medieval intellectual elites appropriated ordinarily harmless witchcraft beliefs and warned that the world was menaced by a devil so mighty that he could be controlled only by new nation-states of the devout, joined with each other through kings and the Church. This unity must be maintained, the intellectuals insisted, even if it meant burning everyone who supported Satan. Such was the logic that drove the medieval witch trials, as well as the legends and literature describing their obscene sabbats and ritual child murder.²⁰

By the twentieth century, intellectuals had abandoned the idea of Satan battling with God and replaced it with materialist explanations for problems such as disease. Yet deep within the culture, the demonology prevails in times of crisis. When it is promoted by powerful social institutions and mixed with subversion myth, scapegoats are persecuted, often with deadly results. In the United States after the Russian Revolution, Communists were ferociously condemned as sexual deviants, rapists, anti-Christians, devils, and foreigners. In Nazi Germany, the government used the same imagery against both Communists and Jews, and rationalized ancient fears with the cooperation of social science, medicine, and the mass media.²¹

Half a century later in the United States, these institutions have also helped foment satanist subversion myths, though not as consciously as the Nazis did with Jews. Hollywood, for instance, is much less interested in attacking devil worship than in filling movie theaters, and beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the industry realized that Satan sells tickets. During this period, *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* were adapted from novels into blockbuster movies. Their phenomenal success was due, in part, to the way they employed ancient demonological imagery to communicate contemporary social anxieties.

In the movie version of *Rosemary's Baby*, released in 1968, the heroine is a pregnant young Manhattanite who gradually realizes that her baby is not her husband's, but the Devil's. Five years later, *The Exorcist* depicted a twelve-year-old girl possessed by Satan. Following that film's success, a rash of copycat movies featured youngsters colonized by the Devil.²²

This cinematic casting of children as Ultimate Evil resonated with the times. By the late 1960s, women were regulating their fertility in unprecedented ways, through birth control pills and abortions that in some states were already legalized. They were also postponing maternity, bearing fewer children, and leaving them in other people's care as they entered the workforce.

Much of the increase in women holding jobs came from married mothers,²³ but contrary to the expectations of upper-middle-class feminists, many of these women did not feel liberated by their new jobs. They went to work because they had to, in order to keep their families afloat economically. Between 1973 and 1990, the median income of young families with a head younger than age thirty plummeted by almost a third, and even when wives went to work, family income hardly rose.²⁴

The institutionalization of the two-worker family created massive social speedup as parents juggled responsibilities between work and home. Most of the extra labor fell to women, who still did the bulk of child care, cooking, and household chores.²⁵ Single mothers had a worse time than wives. With the decline of the breadwinner-husband ethic, many men reneged on child-support payments after divorce, or avoided marriage entirely. And while it was often women who chose to shun matrimony or leave it, single motherhood was a terrible deal, given that women still earned far less than men.

Under these circumstances, child rearing seemed more arduous, draining, and conflictual, and the tensions women felt were vented through the devil-child movies' use of increasingly resonant symbolism. In 1964, a national poll found that 37 percent of Americans believed in Satan as a literal entity. By 1973 the figure had risen to half the population, and it continued climbing during the next two decades.²⁶

Growing belief in the Devil and his works is part of a general shift from rationality to mysticism in contemporary American culture that is independent of any particular religious ideology. At the same time, preoccupation with Satan reflects the growing popularity during the last generation of fundamentalist Christianity, with its belief that Lucifer is at war with God for the souls of mankind, and that the final battle will be taking place soon. While this belief is long-standing among fundamentalists, millenarian excitement grows stronger when thousand-year periods turn—as one is soon scheduled to do.

American intellectuals have long ignored or mocked these preoccupations, but that

has not discouraged fundamentalism's survival, nor its recent resurgence. For the past generation, much of the growth has occurred among people in declining sectors of the economy, who have turned to small churches for solace and companionship.

Traditionally, fundamentalists lived in rural areas, and were poor and politically marginal. But this is no longer the case. As the 1970s unfolded, poverty spread in the cities and suburbs, along with massive changes in relations between men and women, parents and children. These changes unsettled people across the economic spectrum, and fundamentalist Christian churches reaped the benefits. As their membership exploded, the churches established an economic and political power base, acquiring radio and television networks and broadcasting their beliefs nationally via Reverends Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson and other media celebrities.²⁷

By the end of the decade, many fundamentalists were middle class and even wealthy, and could no longer be written off as ineffectual humpkins. Falwell's establishment of the Moral Majority in 1979 marked their active entry into conservative politics, as they registered tens of thousands of voters and promoted candidates at all levels, from municipal to federal. Protestant churches often allied themselves with Catholic and Mormon fundamentalists, and the publications and television and radio networks these groups developed comprised an infrastructure that could provide members with instant information and marching orders about political issues.²⁸ As a powerful force on the New Right, fundamentalists organized campaigns against sex education in schools, legal abortion, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Attacks were typically posed in demonological language: sex education was said to encourage fornication, abortion was state-sanctioned murder, and the ERA violated biblical injunctions about the proper relations between women and men.

Cult Fears

The 1960s counterculture, meanwhile, engendered many new religious groups. Some were variants on Protestant fundamentalism, while others took their beliefs from ancient occult-magical traditions, from the human potential movement, and from non-Christian, Asian theologies.²⁹ The United States has a long tradition of demonizing unconventional religions by condemning them as politically subversive, brutal, authoritarian, sexually immoral, and endowed with supernatural powers.³⁰ These suspicions erupted again in the 1960s and 1970s. They were fueled by several interest groups, including distraught parents who claimed that their (usually adult) children were being "stolen" from them. Leaders of established fundamentalist religions also resented New Age religions, fearing competition for members. Disgruntled defectors from the new groups criticized them; so did some therapists and academics.³¹

Out of these forces, organizations such as the Cult Awareness Network and the American Family Foundation formed to discredit the new groups and "rescue" young people from them.³² The Unification Church (the Moonies) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas) came in for particularly fierce attacks and sensationalist publicity. The claim that they were brainwashing their devotees was widely disseminated and generally accepted, even though studies indicate that people who join such groups seldom remain members for more than two years. Nevertheless, the brainwashing epithet became a powerful weapon justifying illegal acts, including kidnaping members and forcibly "deprogramming" them.³³

By the early 1970s, critics were also calling organizations such as the Unification Church "cults," and comparing them to the Californians who murdered movie star Sharon Tate at Charles Manson's bidding. The word *cult* conjures up visions of a fanatical group subversive of Judeo-Christian values and led by a manipulative zealot commandeering mind-controlled acolytes. Any popular skepticism about this image evaporated after 1978, when hundreds of followers of the Reverend Jim Jones committed mass suicide at the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana. After that, to be labeled a cult was to be automatically demonized.³⁴

With that connection established, anticult activists went on to address Americans' increasing obsession with the Devil. By the early 1980s, they had much material to work with. The previous two decades had witnessed a plethora of new religions, such as Wicca and neo-Paganism, whose members claim roots in the shamanistic practices of ancient Europeans and call themselves witches. Sociological research indicates that although wiccans and pagans are organized into "covens," believers do not typically follow charismatic leaders. Instead, they practice their rituals alone and avoid proselytizing. In the 1970s, there were some three hundred such groups in the United States.³⁵

Other witchcraft groups were self-proclaimed satanists. The biggest was Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, founded in San Francisco in 1966. A former circus musician, LaVey enjoyed pointing out that movie stars such as Sammy Davis Jr. and Jayne Mansfield had been members of his church, and he performed satanic baptisms and weddings for celebrities that were heavily publicized. Many sociologists speculate that the Church of Satan functions mainly as a social spoof, much as professing allegiance to Lucifer during the nineteenth century was a way for leftists and aristocrats to mock bourgeois conventions.³⁶ For whatever reasons it attracts people, though, the Church of Satan has, at most, only five thousand active members. A spinoff organization, the Temple of Set, is far smaller.³⁷ Despite these tiny numbers, and the fact that neither group has ever been implicated in any criminal activity, by the early 1980s both had become lightning rods for anticult and antisatanist fears.

After becoming preoccupied with adult satanists, anticult organizations also began worrying about children being recruited to devil worship. The stretch of imagination needed to make such a claim was slight. By the early 1970s, some teenagers were calling themselves satanists, and a few were committing acts of serious violence. In 1971 in Vineland, New Jersey, two teenaged boys tied up a twenty-year-old and drowned him in a pond. The local newspapers described the killers as satanists and characterized the homicide as part of a ritual. As it turned out, the victim had a history of mental illness and had asked the youths to help him commit suicide.³⁸

Most criminologists believe that blaming satanism is an after-the-fact rationalization for law-breaking, not its cause. Speculation about the relationship between teenage occultism and felonious misbehavior is somewhat academic, though, since most self-styled teenage satanists are white, upper-middle-class suburban boys whose main activity as devil worshipers consists of gathering in small groups and practicing black magic, which they do not learn from the Church of Satan or any other adult-oriented group. Instead, they improvise rituals with chants and routines picked up from friends, heavy-metal rock lyrics, popular movies, magazines, and books.³⁹

Occasionally, they commit illegal mischief, such as writing graffiti, overturning gravestones, and assaulting animals. Although the outcome of such behavior can be disturbing, often it has no connection with satanism. America has a long history of church desecrations, cemetery vandalism, and animal mutilation, and there has not been a significant increase in these crimes in recent years. Folklorists and criminologists therefore speculate that much of what currently is being called teenage satanism is merely the latest enactment of "legend trips"—visits adolescents enjoy making to supposedly supernatural sites in their communities, such as haunted houses or cemeteries. Typical activities during legend trips include lighting bonfires, vandalizing property, telling ghost stories, and chanting spells.⁴⁰

Starting in the late 1960s, some police and other adults who happened upon legend-trip sites interpreted them as evidence that the local youth were involved in organized satanism.⁴¹ These perceptions were echoed by small-town newspapers and by a growing number of police officers who represented themselves as experts on satanism, as well as by Christian preachers, revivalists, and parents in the anticult movement.⁴²

Their dire warnings were soon buttressed by a spate of rumors and urban legends about mysterious killings in the countryside and Faustian bargains in the city. In 1974, the nation's press began reporting that ranchers were finding cattle dead in the fields, their bodies drained of blood and their sex organs removed "with surgical

precision." Shortly after these stories emerged, an inmate at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary told an official from the U.S. Treasury's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms that the killings were being committed by a supremacist cult who used animal genitals during black mass orgies, and who planned to kill prominent liberal and black politicians, including Edward Kennedy and Barbara Jordan. In response, the federal government began a nationwide investigation of satanist organizations, and a Treasury Department report about the racist, cattle-mutilating cult was distributed to police throughout the country and leaked to the press. The inmate's claims were eventually discredited as fabrications, but it was too late: the government report had taken on a life of its own.

On its heels, satanic livestock-killing rumors spread through the Southwest and Midwest, but investigating officials found that the animals' death and mutilation had been caused by snakebites, coyote attacks, common diseases, and rodents or other small scavengers. The ranchland cult legend died for a while, only to be reborn in other satanic myths.⁴³

One, widespread in 1977, had it that Ray Kroc, chief executive officer of the McDonald's fast-food enterprise, had appeared on a television talk show and bragged that his business was thriving because he was tithing his profits to the Church of Satan.⁴⁴ Kroc had said nothing of the sort, but the rumor was a perfect example of populist hostilities that often emerge in urban legends and that the McDonald's story embodied, as many Americans during the 1970s were forced into minimum-wage service work like the kind offered at hamburger franchises. The Ray Kroc rumor barely surfaced in the world of respectable discourse, but other urban legends did, and they caused a whirl of confusion.

The Procter & Gamble legend was one. For decades, all the company's products, including such homemaker staples as Tide laundry detergent, sported a trademark man-in-the-moon face flanked by thirteen stars. According to rumors that began in the early 1980s, the venerable logo was actually a secret satanist symbol. The media played no part in spreading this story. In urban-legend fashion, it traveled through word of mouth, church sermons, chain letters, and bulletin board postings. The message always included urgings to boycott the company's products until it rescinded its evil pact.

By mid-1982, Procter & Gamble was being bombarded with mail, phone calls, and threats against employees and celebrities who promoted its products. Executives attempted to quell the rumor by persuading fundamentalist Christian leaders and the national media to assure the public that the company had nothing to do with satanism. In a few months, publicity was favorable and sales were up. But then the satanic soap company legend began spreading anew. In 1985, Procter & Gamble admitted defeat and removed the moon and stars from all its products.⁴⁵

The Kiddie Porn Crusade

Grassroots rumors and small-town media hype were not the only sources of worries about threatened youngsters and cultists in the 1970s. Child-protection experts, feminists, and the government also played a major role in adding a sexual component to the national fear.

In 1977, Congress considered the problem of child abuse from a different angle than the one it had focused on during the CAPTA hearings three years earlier (see chapter 1). Now it concentrated on child pornography, which had recently made its first appearance in "adult" bookstores. Almost immediately, there was a public outcry against kiddie porn. One leader of the campaign was psychiatrist-lawyer Judi-
anne Densen-Gerber, the flamboyant founder of an international drug-rehabilitation program that would later be exposed as coercive and cultlike under her authoritarian leadership.⁴⁶

In 1976 Densen-Gerber happened upon some child pornography, and the discovery transformed her, in her words, into "a raving banshee."⁴⁷ She mailed the material to legislators and began touring the country, warning about widespread forced child prostitution, kidnaping, and murder. As a result, major newspapers and national television programs began denouncing child pornography and demanding that it be outlawed. The flood of concern led to congressional hearings. At one, Densen-Gerber dragged in a trunk filled with material, waved it before shocked legislators, and angrily claimed that in her travels she had counted 264 child pornography magazines published each month. She also claimed that children were being routinely sold for "snuff" films—movies recording actual murders. Further, she said, as many as 1.2 million American children were victims of child pornography and prostitution.⁴⁸

Densen-Gerber was followed by Lloyd Martin, a sergeant with the Los Angeles Police Department and former member of its vice squad. Martin was head of the department's new Sexually Exploited Child Unit, a group of detectives who investigated juvenile prostitution, kiddie porn, and sex between children and adults who were not related to each other. The Sexually Exploited Child Unit was the first of its kind in the United States, and, as its head, Martin considered himself a pioneering expert on child sex abuse.⁴⁹

The use of youngsters in commercial sex materials, he told Congress in 1977, was a multimillion-dollar enterprise and a large part of the pornography industry. Speaking at the same hearing, Densen-Gerber claimed that production and distribution were highly organized and controlled by sophisticated crime syndicates. Martin warned of vast networks of pedophiles. One, he said, was the Rene Guyon Society, whose slogan was "Sex before eight or then it's too late" and whose membership numbered five thousand.⁵⁰

Densen-Gerber warned that making pornographic images of children was the most heinous crime imaginable, one that led to their "mutilation." Martin agreed: sexually exploiting a child, he said, was "worse than homicide." Further, Densen-Gerber contended, incest was "on the rise" because of child pornography.⁵¹ The press demonstrated no skepticism about these declarations, nor did it question the witnesses' improbable claim that as many as one in twenty-five American children were being sold for sex and posed in obscene pictures.⁵²

The media's credulity was hardly challenged, because it assuaged deeper fears. For a public confounded about incest and child molestation, it was reassuring to think that these seemingly intractable and ubiquitous evils could be blamed on something as deviant yet concrete as kiddie porn. On the other hand, many people suspected that sex abuse was caused by more than dirty magazines but had other reasons for embracing Densen-Gerber's and Martin's logic. Some feminists were troubled by pornographic depictions of women and, when Congress held its hearings, had already begun a moral crusade around the issue. In 1976, Diana Russell, a feminist sociologist who later would win government funding to study the prevalence of incest, co-founded the San Francisco-based Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media.⁵³ Nominally, the group opposed violent portrayals of women on television, record album covers, and other mass media. But in practice, members concentrated their efforts against pornography, even those genres that they defined as nonviolent. Their focus was codified when a New York branch of the group dropped the word *violence* and shortened its name to Women Against Pornography.⁵⁴

The new organization's emphasis on stamping out pornographic images of women mobilized broad-based support, during a time when the women's movement in general was experiencing increasing disarray and disorganization. By the mid-1970s, feminism's strength had peaked in America: the ERA, which had passed in several states by 1973, was stalled under right-wing, grassroots assaults, and newly legalized abortion was also under attack. The backlash did not come only from men. Feminism during the 1960s had questioned family roles, undermined traditional assumptions about sexuality, and envisioned women as public beings—all of which contradicted long-standing notions about gender identities and posed unsettling questions about selfhood for women. Amid the anxieties provoked by these transformations, domestic life remained difficult and sexual violence persisted. But instead of these problems being attributed to the failure of government or community, feminists were blamed for contradicting biological destiny. In defensive response, many began to embrace romantic, essentialist views of women's sexual purity and their superiority as the caretakers of children.⁵⁵

By the mid-1970s, the trend was to blame patriarchy not on male social roles but

on males themselves. According to this essentialist view, biology was destiny, or, as Susan Brownmiller put it in *Against Our Will*, her popular 1975 treatise on rape: "By anatomical fiat—the inescapable construction of their genital organs—the human male was a predator and the human female served as his natural prey."⁵⁶ Sexism, racism, hunger, war, and ecological disaster, *Ms.* magazine founder Robin Morgan wrote three years later, were all due to "the Man's competitiveness and greed."⁵⁷

Antipornography feminists pandered to the idea and dramatized it by demonizing male sexuality. Writer Andrea Dworkin, for instance, warned women that sex with men was unremittingly exploitive and dangerous: "the stuff of murder, not love."⁵⁸ Her view of intercourse was equally bleak: "Fucking," Dworkin wrote in 1976, "is the means by which the male colonizes the female."⁵⁹ "Man fucks woman; subject verb object," echoed her theoretical collaborator, Catharine MacKinnon, in 1982. MacKinnon also suggested that women have no sexuality apart from what men desire from them, and she equated pornography with rape, incest, and other sexual coercions.⁶⁰

Dworkin's and MacKinnon's views are contradicted by the fact that much pornography caters to gay men and has no females in it; that some is produced by women; and that many pornography consumers are women (a 1989 survey, for instance, found that 47 percent of the adult-video rental market was comprised of women, who rented the materials by themselves or as members of couples).⁶¹ Despite all this, and despite the fact that to date no research has found a causal connection between pornography and violence—and much work has found none⁶²—antiporn feminists claim that there is a causal connection and that pornography is not protected speech.

The cultural feminist insistence on a direct link between dirty pictures and violence was seized on by moral conservatives, whose priggishness about sex often seemed archaic to the larger culture. Antipornography feminists rescued the conservatives, however, by coupling violent sexual depictions to concrete, measurable harm. This equation allowed fundamentalists to modernize their rhetoric by replacing embarrassing terms like *sin* and *lust* with more respectable ones such as *women's degradation*,⁶³ even as it offered women the chance to rage against persistent patriarchal inequalities. As Victorian feminists had done a century earlier, women's advocates allied with conservative men who had no interest in gender equality—indeed, who staunchly opposed it.

Many people, including many feminists, who found pornography distasteful were torn by their belief in the First Amendment right to produce and view it. On the other hand, sexual depictions of children seemed incontrovertibly wrong, and for free-speech advocates, Densen-Gerber's and Martin's horrifying claims were

cathartic. Columnist Ellen Goodman communicated this response as she described her disgust at "being force-fed the 'heroics'" of adult pornographers like Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* magazine, who recently had been charged under obscenity statutes and cleared on First Amendment grounds. But now, as the congressional witnesses paraded their dire statistics and pictures of nude children, Goodman felt a "sense of relief." Now, she wrote, Americans could register their disapproval of pornography in a "refreshingly uncomplicated" way—by denouncing the child sexual exploitation industry as an "unequivocal villain."⁶⁴ Congress, too, was unequivocal. In 1978, the Child Protection Act had been enacted to eliminate commercial child pornography by forbidding the sale of material depicting subjects younger than sixteen, and by funding law-enforcement efforts to eliminate production.

But when officials swung into action, they found almost nothing to destroy. Shortly after the new law was passed, the Federal Bureau of Investigation began an extensive sting operation in which agents raided major pornography warehouses across the United States. They found no material involving children. Illinois' Legislative Investigations Commission (ILIC) initiated an even more searching inquiry with identical results. The commission concluded that by the time the Child Protection Act went into effect, kiddie porn had already disappeared completely from the commercial chain of distribution; there was little evidence of its existence underground, either.⁶⁵

The frightening claims of Densen-Gerber, Martin, and other "experts" were thus grossly exaggerated, not only in the ILIC's and FBI's estimation, but also according to subsequent congressional investigations. Organized crime has never been involved in juvenile prostitution. At its height, kiddie porn grossed far less than \$1 million per year (compared with billions of dollars for the adult industry).⁶⁶ And during the 1970s and 1980s, the total number of people affiliated with pedophile-support groups in the United States was probably fewer than 2,400 (the Rene Guyon Society, with its infamous slogan, most likely had one member).⁶⁷ Most of this information was publicly available by 1980, but during the next few years, officials and much of the media continued to claim that commercial child pornography involved millions of children and a vast underground network of pedophiles engaged in a multibillion-dollar business.⁶⁸

Social paranoia about malevolent molesters was aggravated during this period by an emerging school of victimologist researchers who used social science rhetoric to advance moral claims about child sexual abuse.⁶⁹ Investigators like Diana Russel found that by age eighteen, 54 percent of all women had been sexually abused. Another study concluded that 62 percent were victims.⁷¹ The new numbers were published by the mass media, and they were terrifying.

What popular audiences did not realize was that the new research vastly broadened the definitions of sexual abuse.⁷² A child, for instance, could be anyone from a toddler to an older teenager (including one who was married). Whereas abuse earlier had meant fondling or penetration, now it included acts such as exhibitionism and verbal propositions by age-peers.⁷³ Given these revisions, sexual abuse could now mean anything from a father anally raping his three-year-old daughter to a seventeen-year-old girl cat-called by a boy her age. Further, a large body of research suggests that minors, especially girls, who have sexual contact with adults generally suffer negative reactions and continuing problems later in life;⁷⁴ at the same time, many people show no ill effects, and a small proportion report that they enjoy or benefit from the experience.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, many victimologists regarded every incident as inevitably traumatic, even devastating.

Their research did help focus attention on the unwanted and often traumatic sexual attentions that children (again, particularly girls) routinely endure. But it also became difficult to distinguish different types of experiences and children's varying responses to them. Incidents such as father-daughter incest almost always involved patently skewed, coercive relationships. Others were far more ambiguous. One gray area was "hustling," or boy prostitution with men clients. In the 1970s, child-protection officials began conjecturing that hustlers were Mafia-controlled and often prepubescent.⁷⁶ Neither assumption was true, and subsequent studies revealed that hustlers tend to come from low-income families. Or they are gay, but their families and friends are so homophobic that they feel compelled to seek sex and sociability with adult men.⁷⁷

Yet child protectionists and politicians were reluctant to discuss hustling as a poverty problem, and even more loath to condemn homophobia aggressively. In fact, just the opposite happened in the late 1970s, when moral conservatives accused gays of "stealing" straight children and turning them into homosexuals. An influential promoter of this paranoia was the singer and Florida orange juice-industry representative, Anita Bryant. In 1977 Bryant launched "Save the Children," a drive to revoke a Miami-area ordinance barring discrimination against gays. Her campaign denounced gay men as child molesters, and it received national attention.⁷⁸

At the same time that homosexual men were being denounced as child molesters, sex-abuse researchers and law-enforcement officials were promoting the idea of rampant, conspiratorial cabals of men bent on sexually abusing youngsters. Boston psychiatric nurse Ann Burgess, who earlier had studied women's emotional reactions to rape, was the main proponent of this new idea. In the late 1970s, she studied men convicted of having sex with groups of children. Although some were girls or young boys, most were male adolescents similar to the youths involved in

hustling.⁷⁹ Burgess called their group activities with men "sex rings,"⁸⁰ and soon law-enforcement personnel were making baseless claims about giant rings, linked through computer and transportation networks, to move children around the nation and the world in order to molest them and make pornography. At a federally funded conference Burgess organized in 1981, a detective from Indiana called these apocryphal rings "cults" and speculated about ways to ferret them from the "underground."⁸¹

By the early 1980s, even professionals and the government were fomenting panic-laden images of children as helpless prey for secretive, organized evildoers. If musings about cults and billion-dollar pornography mafias were not enough to feed the fear, the missing children panic added more fuel. One morning in 1979, a six-year-old named Etan Patz vanished near his home in lower Manhattan and was never seen again. Two years later, Adam Walsh, also six years old, disappeared from a Florida department store and was later found with his head severed.

These chilling and highly publicized cases set off a tidal wave of concern for missing children. Soon milk cartons and shopping bags were covered with photographs of American youngsters whose parents did not know where they were. The situation was said to be grave: politicians and journalists estimated at least 50,000 kidnappings annually, most committed by strangers.⁸² If even the low estimate had been correct, it would have meant that practically every U.S. school would have at least one pupil missing—yet no one seemed to know of a case personally. Still, few doubted the numbers. The media published them, and the government repeated them. Much of the rhetoric linked the missing children problem to sexual abuse and pedophiles.⁸³

Later research would reveal that, in fact, the vast majority of abducted children are snatched by divorced, noncustodial parents, and that annually, only a few hundred are taken by strangers for more than a few hours.⁸⁴ This information would not be publicized until the latter part of the 1980s, however. In the meantime, frightened parents flocked to police stations to have their children fingerprinted. Pedophile kidnapper fears burgeoned and spawned urban legends about small children snatched in malls and castrated in public restrooms.

There are, of course, violent crimes committed by sexual psychopaths against children. Such offenders are extremely rare, but during the missing-children scare, they became the focus of intense grassroots organizing by a group emerging from the new "victim's rights" movement—a national effort that had begun by demanding more sympathetic treatment of people who had been raped and assaulted, but which by the late 1970s was teaming up with conservative, law-and-order police and prosecutor organizations.

Panic in the Clinic

It was only a matter of time before "satanists" would be blamed for the missing children phenomenon. The first public charges came in the 1980 book *Michelle Remembers*, co-authored by Michelle Smith and her psychiatrist, Dr. Lawrence Pazder.

Michelle Remembers is a first-person testimonial in which Smith claims she was tormented during her childhood by a satanic cult whose members imprisoned her for several months during 1955, when she was five years old. The book is filled with graphic descriptions of little Michelle being tortured in houses, mausoleums, and cemeteries, being raped and sodomized with candles, being forced to defecate on a Bible and crucifix, witnessing babies and adults butchered, spending hours naked in a snake-filled cage, and having a devil's tail and horns surgically attached to her. There is also an account of a cult attempt to kill the child and make it look like an accident, by placing her in a car with a corpse, then deliberately crashing the vehicle. These grotesque abuses are said to have gone on for almost a year, until Michelle's indomitable Christian faith discouraged the satanists, and they set her free. She then completely forgot the experiences for more than twenty years, until she entered therapy with Dr. Pazder.⁸⁵

The problem with Smith's "memories" is that there is no independent verification for them; indeed, there is much to contradict them. Smith is from Victoria, British Columbia, and residents of the neighborhood where she was raised say her father was alcoholic, but that otherwise, there was nothing remarkable about her family. A neighbor and a former teacher recall that Smith started first grade in 1955, attended school regularly, and was photographed for the yearbook—at a time when *Michelle Remembers* has her locked in a basement for months.⁸⁶

Further, Smith has no records of childhood hospitalizations, and, while Pazder has documentation that she was treated for dental and dermatological problems as an adult, neither condition has any particular relationship to the tortures she claims she suffered. Pazder also claims to have interviewed an elderly pediatrician who said he could "vaguely recall" treating Smith for injuries she might have gotten in a car collision. But there are no newspaper accounts during late 1954 and early 1955 of any fatal traffic accidents resembling the one in the book—and the local newspapers from that time gave detailed coverage to even the most minor mishaps.⁸⁷

A more likely explanation for Smith's "memories" is that they resulted from therapeutic suggestion. During the 1990s, a new term, "false memory syndrome," entered the popular and mental health field lexicon, to describe the phenomenon whereby patients—primarily women—in psychotherapy for common problems such as depression emerge with previously unremembered recollections of brutal

childhood sexual abuse. Dating as they do from the late 1970s, Smith's stories are early examples of the false memory process, but they are not the first ones. Therapeutically induced confabulations about childhood sexual abuse have a long history, going back the late nineteenth century, when Sigmund Freud and other European clinicians were treating female hysterics.⁸⁸

Dissociation Theory

Freud's French mentors, Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet, believed that hysteria occurred when a child suffered a trauma so unbearable that the mind developed amnesia by "dissociating" the terrible event into another psychic compartment, separate from consciousness. The memory was thereafter forgotten to the conscious mind, but intruded itself in somatic ways: through the paralyses, tics, bleeding, and fits, for example, that caused patients to seek treatment. The cure for hysteria, according to dissociation theory, was to access that memory and bring it into consciousness. The method of choice for this procedure was hypnosis. During trance, patients produced impassioned and detailed stories about all kinds of childhood traumas, including incest and molestation.⁸⁹

Freud took these stories of abuse seriously. Based on his work with thirteen female patients, in early 1896 he announced his "seduction theory" of neurosis, which claimed that hysteria and similar psychopathologies were invariably caused by the trauma of childhood sexual violation. In formulating this notion, it is clear that Freud pressured the women who entered therapy with him to produce abuse narratives that he interpreted as memories, and that he contributed his own sexual preoccupations to their stories.

According to Freud's own accounts, before patients began analysis, they knew nothing about the scenes he wanted them to remember. Many were indignant at his suggestion that they had been abused as children, and produced "memories" only after being virtually forced to. As Freud wrote, "One only succeeds in awakening the psychical trace of a precocious sexual event under the most energetic pressure of the analytic procedure, and against an enormous resistance. Moreover, the memory must be extracted from them piece by piece."⁹⁰ Indeed, his efforts to elicit abuse memories were so intense, and his refusal to take no for an answer so intransigent, that he complained to a colleague that he was "almost hoarse" from pressuring patients for ten to eleven hours a day.⁹¹

Freud eventually gave up the seduction theory of neurosis, as well as the use of hypnosis, partly because he recognized that many of his patients' "memories" seemed illogical, impossibly bizarre, or otherwise untrue. In formulating a new explanation—that the stories were actually fantasied symbols of unresolved oedipal drives—Freud opened the door to a psychopolitical critique of patriarchy and the

phallic obsessions masculine domination creates in children of both sexes, but particularly in girls. At the same time, the fact that the mental health professions were male-dominated meant that, until recently, clinicians overwhelmingly used the Oedipus complex to dismiss most girls' and women's reports of sexual violation as nothing more than obscene imaginings.⁹²

By the late 1970s, however, the seduction theory of neurosis and the dissociation model of psychic trauma were being rehabilitated, partly because of feminist influence, but for other reasons as well. Hypnosis, for instance, which fell out of favor during the rise of Freudianism, had been revived during the 1950s by the federal government, out of fear that Chinese Communists in Korea were using sophisticated techniques to induce captured American soldiers to make hostile public declarations about capitalism and the United States. The government began calling this practice "brainwashing," and, though research has since discredited the concept, the idea that Manchurian candidate-style manipulations and subliminal messages can create human robots has remained popular in American culture.⁹³

During the McCarthy era, when the brainwashing concept was widespread, the federal government provided more than \$5 million to researchers to study the uses and effects of hypnosis. Findings replicated what had been well known among clinicians in the previous century: some people are highly hypnotizable and can produce dramatic bodily changes in response to suggestion; and, while memories elicited under trance can be richly textured and feel like real experience, many are actually fantasies.⁹⁴

Though forensic psychiatrists of the 1970s generally knew about these research findings, many therapists did not. One reason for their ignorance was that the mental health field during this period was undergoing profound changes, producing increasing numbers of therapists who were less trained than their predecessors and more apt to accept at face value patients' accounts of their pasts.

Since then, the number of people entering the psychotherapy professions has skyrocketed, and the field has changed from a primarily male-dominated one to mainly female. Many were graduates of new, freestanding professional schools that proliferated to train them. These institutions had no affiliation with universities, their admission standards were low, and their commitment to scientific standards of inquiry was far from rigorous.⁹⁵ In Freud's time, people seeking psychological help tended to be female, and the same was true in the 1970s. But by then, the therapeutic relation between patient and healer had changed. Earlier, a woman typically saw a male clinician who acted emotionally distant and analyzed her problems through the lens of Freudian drive theory and its emphasis on inner impulses in conflict with the external world (the notorious Oedipus complex is one example). With the feminization of psychotherapy, today's patient is likely to see a therapist

who has rejected drive theory for object-relations approaches. According to object-relations theorists, psychopathology results from bad parenting and other external trauma. Bad feelings and behavior are dignified as normal coping responses to these terrible events, and clinicians typically "re-mother" their patients by acting warm and empathic toward them.⁹⁶

As more women entered therapy, the eating disorders, depression, anger, and unpleasant dreams they brought with them were increasingly framed as caused by severe childhood trauma. Therapists focused on recovering memories, using hypnosis and other consciousness-altering techniques. When patients began telling stories of sexual abuse that they had not recalled before treatment, feminist-oriented clinicians did not question their credibility. Instead, theoreticians such as Jeffrey Masson and Judith Herman revived the old concepts of dissociation and repression to explain how traumatic memories could have been isolated so long from consciousness before finally returning in therapy.⁹⁷

Multiple Personality Disorder

Swayed by the increasing popularity of repression and dissociation models of neurosis, both among mental health workers and in the culture generally, patients began to produce previously unremembered stories of childhood sexual abuse. Many of these were accounts of fondling by fathers, cousins, and uncles; others, like the accounts of Michelle Smith, described grotesque scenarios of sadomasochism committed by hooded and robed figures of both sexes.

The most bizarre tales often came from patients who had been diagnosed as schizophrenics or borderline personalities, but who now were labeled as suffering from multiple personality disorder (MPD)—a condition in which, proponents believe, one or more "alter" personalities emerge from a traumatized child to manage the dissociated memories.⁹⁸ Before 1970, fewer than 200 people worldwide had ever been assigned medical labels reminiscent of today's MPD, and a mere handful of them came from the United States. After that date, the number of cases mushroomed—to at least 1,000 in 1984,⁹⁹ then several times that number by 1989.¹⁰⁰ The vast majority were located in North America, and they were overwhelmingly female.

Skeptics contend that unlike disorders such as schizophrenia and mental retardation, MPD has no medical validity, and that it is more properly viewed as a social identity, often constructed as a joint effort of patients and their therapists. Chris Sizemore's multiplicity was described in 1957 in *The Three Faces of Eve*, written by her psychiatrists, Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley. In this best-selling book, which was made into a movie, the authors disapprovingly described "Eve White" as a quiet, mousy wife and mother. They could barely conceal their awe and excite-

ment, however, at the emergence of a throaty-voiced, cigarette-smoking, bachelorette alter personality whom, in the classic mother/whore tradition, the therapists christened "Eve Black."¹⁰¹ After the Eves (and a third personality) were presented to the world in print and at the movies, Thigpen and Cleckley were shocked when they were contacted by thousands of women who were diagnosing themselves as multiple personalities.¹⁰²

In 1973 a book called *Sybil* appeared, in which a woman was said to have developed sixteen personalities after being chronically raped and tortured by her mentally ill mother. Although *Sybil* also became a best-seller and later a television film, revelations have lately emerged that suggest the patient had been diagnosed as schizophrenic, but was encouraged by her therapist, Dr. Cornelia Wilbur, to produce multiple personalities as a strategy to market the book.¹⁰³

Sybil was read by millions of teenage girls and adult women, and a rash of copycat books soon followed. Meanwhile, Wilbur joined the psychiatry department at the University of Kentucky, where she collaborated with faculty studying patients diagnosed as suffering from multiple personalities. Under hypnosis, many produced stories about sadomasochistic sexual abuse, including details about gang rape and being buried alive, mutilated, and forced to murder infants.¹⁰⁴

Many early MPD therapists noticed that large percentages of their patients came from fundamentalist Christian families. This was probably no coincidence, considering that as early as the 1960s, Pentecostal Christians had been promoting a diabolic theory of mental illness that later integrated ideas about devil possession with secular theories about MPD.

As Pentecostalism made inroads into mainstream Christianity during the 1970s, so did belief in demons, who were considered embodiments of sin. Demons could invade people, Pentecostals claimed, and the most susceptible individuals were those who practiced folk healing, spiritism, card reading, New Age rituals, and similar blasphemies. Children whose parents engaged in these activities could also be Devil-possessed, and become physically and mentally ill. Once the youngsters were stricken, the only cure was to cast out the devils.

The ancient ritual of exorcism became a model for this healing. Christian counselors used it in the 1970s to cure emotional afflictions, and they likened it to therapy for multiple personality disorder. Growing numbers of these clinicians combined demonological concepts with secular psychology,¹⁰⁵ and some women went back and forth between the two kinds of treatment providers.

In hindsight, it seems clear that, like UFO and Elvis encounter stories, the tales of cultic abomination that emerged from these sessions were attempts by troubled women and their therapists to mediate anxieties and emotional disorganization through the cultural formulations of subversion myth and demonology. Such story

making was particularly compelling for patients and clinicians from devout Christian backgrounds, and the authors of *Michelle Remembers* were no exceptions. A dedicated Catholic, Pazder had a long-standing interest in possession states and exorcism. (He had also studied Western African witchcraft rituals, and some of the details Michelle remembered, such as being buried in a pit, echo these rites.) For her part, Smith had attended high school in a Catholic convent and thus was familiar with the religion and its symbols.¹⁰⁶

Much of the book, including photographs the authors say depict visitations by the Virgin Mary, places it as inspirational allegory for pious Catholics. It became a mass-market success because it combined sacred motifs with the same therapeutic themes that had made *Sybil* a best-seller. In 1980, when *Michelle Remembers* was first published, it did not occur to book reviewers or the media to investigate the authors' claims. The next year, Pazder presented a paper at the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting, where he coined the term "ritual abuse."¹⁰⁷

Soon other women were revealing to the media, the police, and their therapists that they, too, had been assaulted as children by members of satanic cults. In the wake of their stories, a group of prominent American psychiatrists who specialized in hypnotherapy began organizing the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality & Dissociation (ISSMP&D). They elaborated and formalized treatment techniques, including methods for communicating nonverbally with alter selves by having them wag the host personality's fingers to answer yes or no to therapists' questions.

While Pazder and Smith made headlines, Ronald Reagan was also dominating the media. His new administration immediately began to gut the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, dramatically slashing its funding. As a result of the cuts, NCCAN laid off much of its staff, including Kee MacFarlane.

Unemployed, she left Washington and took a job with a beleaguered community sex abuse treatment program in Los Angeles. There, shortly after she arrived, a decade's preoccupation with moral conservatism, subversion myth, and demonology would come full circle with the frustrations of feminists, child-protection activists, and parents who watched helplessly as the government turned its back on youngsters' well-being. The country was ripe for a drama to enact this angst.

It made its debut in California.