

# The 1980s Satanic Panic

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Entertainment

## Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of  
episode outline)

Are you familiar with the term SRA? So SRA stands for Satanic ritual abuse, also known by its less formal name, shameful ridiculous bullshit. And as you probably guessed, this episode is about the Satanic panic that started in the 1980s and spilled over into the 90s and still hasn't fully receded...the legacy of hysterical superstitious silliness resulting in real-life consequences is sadly all too present today.

We've talked about Satanic panics in the past, this is not a rare phenomenon, there have been literal and metaphorical witch hunts throughout history and right now we're experiencing a version of one; there is a huge segment of the population that has embraced the QAnon conspiracy theory. We have a comprehensive episode all about QAnon, this is a loosely organized but growing online cult of damaged people who are convinced that

demonic forces have established themselves among bastions of leftism, among Hollywood and Democratic political organizations and the deep state, with the goal of harvesting adrenochrome from innocent children. It's always *innocent* children. What about the guilty children? Some kids are bastards. I guess it's OK to drain those kids. And by the way if you want to see a real and disturbing version of what Qanon *thinks* is happening to kids, search this article title from NPR: coastal biomedical labs are bleeding more horseshoe crabs with little accountability. June posted this in the Discord because in one of our previous episodes we talked about horseshoe crabs. It's truly dystopian. The included photo was chilling. Horseshoe crabs are not crabs, they're big armored aquatic lifeforms and I don't care if you think they have feelings or not, I'm not a vegan or something, but this is not OK. From the article "Lab technicians pierce the crabs through their hearts and drain them alive...which can deplete them of more than half their volume of blue blood." They do this over and over again. This is what QAnon thinks Democrats are doing to children because cult followers are stupid and gullible, but it's not like humans aren't capable of awfulness. We just get to decide which awfulness is

acceptable.

So I'll be honest, this is a terrifying episode for me, although the terrifying part has nothing to do with Satan, or child sacrifice, or demonic rituals, because those things do not exist. What's terrifying is that educated, adult humans in positions of authority went out of their way during the Satanic panic to spin elaborate conspiracies and grasp the flimsiest of straws in an effort to supposedly rid their communities of spooks and ghosties and black magic and demonic influence. This was like the most disturbing episode of Scooby Doo, and just like Scooby Doo, the paranormal villains would turn out to be nothing more than regular everyday scheming citizens. And there were real life consequences... People like Fran and Dan Keller went to jail for decades based on evidence that included "winking anuses" and fanciful, scatological stories concocted by "innocent" children. I mean these children *were* innocent of any crimes and probably weren't Dennis the Menace style brats but also a lot of it was their fault, I'm just throwing that out there. if they weren't amateur a little liars, this all would've turned out differently. Seriously, some of these adults died in prison. This stuff is bonkers. Children were accusing people of

flying on broomsticks and shooting other children in their extremities with guns, and everyone was like, sure, that seems reasonable. I mean people can't fly and there are no gunshot wounds visible on these children but hey, better safe than sorry. Hashtag believe all children! I'm sorry guys, but don't #Believe all of anyone. Give people the #benefitofthedoubt if they seem credible and their story checks out. But some people are vindictive or outright crazy. I wish we lived in a world where we could believe all of any vulnerable or frequently victimized group, and my instinct is to believe *most* accusations because I'm pretty cynical and inclined to believe the worst about people so if you tell me that somebody did something terrible I'm like, yeah, that tracks. but we did a whole episode on the Satanic panic in Salem in the 1600s in which a group of sneaky lying little hoochies got a bunch of innocent people unalived. That was a *witch* panic, but the mechanisms of paranormal panics are always the same, in times of uncertainty or upheaval people look for a common enemy to explain anything negative in their lives. These panics are never actually about children, they are about fear of the unknown, fear of the "other" and they are about denial. No one wants to believe that children are being molested by

regular god-fearing Christians and priests and uncles and fathers and neighbors, no, it has to be the influence of Satan. My teenager isn't smoking weed and telling me to go eff myself because of hormones and because I'm kind of a dick, no, it has to be that satanic heavy-metal music.

Now historically the most common villain wasn't Satan; can you guess? it was the Jews. Jewish people have always been convenient scapegoats. Now, you come from Jewish lineage and you are somewhat shady, but I'm not going to judge every Jew based on your terrible example. That wouldn't be fair. Every other Jewish person I know is a fine upstanding human being so I can only assume that you are the exception that proves the rule.

So the target of these persecutions has shifted throughout the ages; various minority populations have had the chance to take turns being vilified. America is nothing if not a revolving door of persecution.

Everyone gets a chance. you know how everyone gets 15 minutes of fame? This is basically the same, except the exact opposite. Every minority gets their 15 minutes in an internment camp.

In America, the red scare of the 1950s—the McCarthy trials—was perhaps the most immediate

predecessor to the satanic panic. The majority of Americans at the time—and a significant proportion today—believe that communists are evil incarnate, that they are hell bent on undermining our way of life, they are godless heathens dedicated to destroying America. They are monstrous. They have giant feet with hairy toes. And tremendous appetites. Maybe that's hobbits. Or yetis. The decades immediately following the 1950s witnessed the rise of fundamentalist Christianity as a political force, Jerry Falwell's moral majority would insert the language of fire-and-brimstone Christianity into the political fabric of America. In some ways the political rise of evangelical christianity and the moral majority had been a defensive reaction to what Christian fundamentalist viewed as the emergence of satanic influence in the United States. Anton Lavey had published the Satanic Bible in 1969. It has very little to do with Satan and is instead a misguided self-help book and libertarian hedonistic manifesto... the primary message boils down to "do whatever the hell you want as long as it doesn't harm anyone else." Which sounds appealing but is a terrible philosophy for life. Libertarianism always sounds great when you're like 15, until you realize that we wouldn't have roads or hospitals or

fire departments if everyone just did whatever the hell they wanted because no one wants to pay fucking taxes. We have to have rules and a system for enforcing those rules because it turns out that very few humans will act in the public interest out of the goodness of their three-sizes-too-small hearts. So the Satanic Bible is just a bunch of juvenile "I do what I want" douchebag posturing, but what it is not is anything resembling a Bible or anything involving Satan. And these days Satanism is even less satanic than ever.

We talked about this before, the modern church of Satan exists for essentially one reason: to bring lawsuits against Christian groups when they try to impose their churches on our states. In America we're supposed to have a separation of church and state, but in reality quite a few states ignore this constitutional decree and give clear preferential treatment to a specific religion. Not always Christianity, in Utah Mormonism is inextricably woven into the fabric of politics. So the church of Satan is useful: if you create a secular organization but refer to it as a church and generate a bunch of ritualistic mumbo-jumbo and claim to be an actual organized religion, then you have grounds to sue Christians and Mormons every time they try to erect another monument

to the Bible or the book of Mormon or pin the 10 Commandments on the statehouse walls. I kind of love the church of Satan because they're basically exposing American political hypocrisy: When Christians force children to pray in schools, the church of Satan sues for equal representation: you're going to force my kids to pray to a God they don't believe in? Fine, but they're also gonna bow down before Beelzebub. It's only fair. Praise Jesus and Hail Satan. The fact that they always lose these lawsuits doesn't make me appreciate them any less. Because the fact that they lose is the problem and again exposes judicial hypocrisy, and I give them props for continuing to try, and also I feel like ladies of the satanic church are into some freaky sex stuff and I'm here for it. Sexy goth girls ftw.

So the church of Satan is silly at worst and useful at best, but it's not remotely satanic; however, if you were a housewife in the 70s, the publication of a Satanic bible and the establishment of a church of Satan seemed scary as hell. Plus, religious groups are always territorial: they get upset when other people start trying to have the stuff that they think only *they* should have. I feel like Christians in the 70s would have opposed the church of leprechauns or the



unicorn Bible, it doesn't matter how ridiculous this stuff is they just don't want to share. But now you had middle America on high alert, and of course this coincided with the golden age of serial killers, many of whom seemed to come with satanic trappings. The night stalker, the son of Sam, the zodiac killer, and meanwhile cults began growing in popularity and influence and getting progressively scarier and more aggressive, culminating in The Manson family murders and the Jonestown tragedy. all kinds of arcane spiritual weirdness was sloshing around in pop culture and of course we had the explosion of the porn industry—with the introduction of VCRs people could finally masturbate to erotic films in the comfort of their own living room rather than in some sticky theater next to a bunch of weirdos in trenchcoats; the 1970s introduced the world to a whole new frontier of kinky sex stuff like swingers parties and orgies at studio 64, none of which I am necessarily opposed to but all of which did freak out the Christians. Right around this time, in 1972 Mike Warnke released his supposedly nonfiction biography called the Satan seller, which documents his teenage years as a Satanist, complete with demon-summoning and ritual sex and kidnap and rape and his eventual rise to the role of a Satanic high

priest overseeing 1,500 cult members, and finally his disillusionment with Satanism, his return to Jesus, and his redemption by becoming both a Christian preacher and a nationally touring comedian. I am not making any of this up, although Warnke certainly did, the book would be thoroughly debunked by a Christian publication called *Cornerstone* in 1991. I don't understand how it took an investigation to debunk a book about Demon-summoning and spellcasting, but ok. Seems like a book about demons kind of debunks itself, are you really unleashing an army of fact checkers looking for goat hoof prints on bloody pentagrams? Regardless, back in the 70s the *Satan Seller* was a massive hit among Christian communities and Warnke became very wealthy. His comedy act was even more bizarre than his book, he would alternate between cheesy rimshot take-my-wife-please jokes and dire, deadly serious pronouncements about the dangers of Satanism in our society. Only a year after the release of the *Satan Seller*, 1973 introduced an even more culturally impactful Satan-related piece of media, the exorcist, a movie that we have covered and was as you remember supposedly based on a true story...and this might be the problem with free speech in America. I am not a free-

speech absolutist, I think there should be punishments for lying about crazy shit, maybe not jail, just like a timeout or something. No Internet for you until you stop lying about demons and andrenochrome. So as we head into the 80s America is a churning toxic stew, the result of an unlikely and unfortunate confluence of events, the church of Satan is on the rise, coinciding with the demise of the free love movement, serial killers are proliferating, bodies are being shipped home from Vietnam, freaky cults are popping up left and right, demonic possession is entering the zeitgeist, people are jerking off in their living rooms, and while all of this is going on the country is also grappling with a completely new phenomenon that is in fact not new at all: the reality of child sexual abuse. In the past, sexual abuse of children was often framed as "incest" which is not the right word for it, because that implies some kind of consensual relations between family members, but that was frequently how it was viewed and reported. If the perpetrator was the father, often the blame fell on his wife for not meeting his sexual needs. But in the 1970s child sexual abuse had a kind of #MeToo moment, suddenly there was a recognition of how widespread it might be and the fact that the long term affects could be devastating.

People finally started being honest with their therapists about what had happened to them as kids, and a generation of therapists was traumatized, they started comparing notes and were like, whoa. This might be a problem. But even as people were acknowledging that childhood sexual abuse was rampant, no one wanted to admit that it was happening in THEIR communities. It was something that happened in poor neighborhoods, it was the fault of immigrants and cultists and weirdos. And of course, they were all being influenced by the devil. If there was a report of childhood sexual abuse in your neighborhood it couldn't be because your neighborhood wasn't safe, or because normal people can be dangerous, it must be... Satan. There's one other final and vital piece of the puzzle. The year 1980 witnessed the publication of a book called Michelle remembers. And this book...wow. You have a degree in psychology, what are your thoughts about recovered memories?

You and I grew up in an era during which the idea of multiple personalities and hypnosis and recovered memories, these were all considered valid scientific psychological concepts. And I think there are people in the midnight masses right now saying to themselves, "wait, recovered

memories aren't real? Multiple personality disorder isn't real?" No. Dissociative identity disorder is kind of hanging on as a fringe diagnosis, but the idea that you have "alternates" who are unaware of each other or exist to protect each other or can create separate memories, it's just pseudoscientific poppycock.

But much of the mainstream belief in this fully discredited area of pseudoscience is the fault of this single book. Just like *Sybil* fueled belief in multiple personalities, *Michelle remembers* fueled fascination with Hypnosis and memory recovery. The book was written by a Canadian preacher turned psychologist named Lawrence Pazder— and by the way that shouldn't be a thing that's allowed. I'm sorry but if you are a preacher you have demonstrated a fervent commitment to rejecting science. The book consists of a description of therapy sessions that Pazder conducted with his longtime patient Michelle Proby, who would eventually become his wife. Another thing that shouldn't be a thing that's allowed, and in fact is not, in many areas. It's illegal in California. Lawrence Pazder was initially treating Proby for depression related to a miscarriage... she had gotten pregnant by her husband, did I mention that they were both married to other people? Pazder

had four children. But anyway, Michelle Proby had recently lost a baby, so it's not like she was in a psychologically fragile frame of mind, she was definitely stable and credible and also fully capable of entering into a sexual and romantic relationship with her therapist. During one of these post-miscarriage therapy sessions in 1976, ("therapy" in quotes, I wonder how much of this *therapy* involved physical as opposed to mental probing) Michelle divulged a disturbing dream in which her hand began to itch and when she scratched it, spiders poured from the flesh. In a subsequent session, she abruptly began screaming non-stop for 25 minutes, and when she finally did calm down, she began speaking in a childlike voice. Pazder promptly rushed her to a hospital with a robust behavioral health clinic so that she could receive treatment from qualified professionals. No, that didn't happen at all. Because then he couldn't have started banging her, that would've been counterproductive to his goals. Instead of seeking genuine help for a patient who was clearly beyond his capacity to treat, Pazder concluded that Michelle Proby was regressing to a childlike state as a result of having traumatic experiences starting at age 5, and he began an intense regimen of

amateur hypnosis and so-called regression therapy, sending her back into these traumatic "memories" and uncovering increasingly bizarre stories of satanic ritual abuse she had endured at the hands of an evil cult of which her mother had been a member. She claimed that this cult was the original church of Satan, not the Anton Lavey version but a cult of Satan worshipers that supposedly predated the Christian church. And had settled in Victoria Canada. OK. Of all the places... the devil has heard of Las Vegas, right? There is literally a location nicknamed "sin city" where no one would bat an eye at a satanic ritual involving public defecation, that's just 3 AM on the strip. So I'm total Lawrence inflicted some 600 hours of hypnosis over 14 months on this poor broken woman. Through the intensive therapy sessions she was able to recover memories of all kinds of demonic shenanigans. It began with some type of eyes Wide Shut orgy at which a woman was bludgeoned to death and her body packed into a car by an evil warlock named Malachai who then staged a grizzly car crash to cover up the murder. Michelle was then forced to consume charred flesh from the dead body. Later she participated in orgiastic rituals at Ross Bay Cemetery complete with bacchanalian dancing and cult

members in robes chanting and writhing. "She remembered a bizarre ritual of rebirth in a nearby mausoleum, her tormentors hissing and dancing like cats while one of them licked her."

Do cats dance? That might be the least believable part of all of this. Cats would not sanction this buffoonery. These hypnosis sessions became increasingly more bizarre culminating in an 81 day marathon ritual during which the dark Lord Satan himself was summoned, but Michelle was miraculously saved by Jesus and the archangel Michael and the Virgin Mary, all of whom teamed up like a heavenly Justice League to remove the memories of the abuse from her brain and they assured her that the memories would only return when the time was right. Apparently that time was when you're being sexually exploited by your therapist. And the Lord said unto she, a married therapist with four children will bang these memories back into your sacred body. To make millions of dollars, apparently.

So your first clue that these memories might not be true is the fact that they involve the lord. And the anti-lord. When there are angels and a goat footed bogeyman involved maybe serious scientists should be asking some questions. Of course a few journalist did ask questions and the answers were



damning, it turned out that strangely, during the time of the supposed 81 day ritual, records indicated that Michelle had attended every day of school. With no blood or feces visible on her person. The cemetery was located near a residential neighborhood and yet no one heard throngs of Satan worshipers chanting or writhing or hissing and no cat dancing was witnessed; also, the mausoleum that she referenced is pretty much the size of a garden shed. It could have accommodated maybe three or four Satanist cat dancers tops. Proby's father and siblings were blindsided by the claims; her father, Jack Proby, was particularly wounded. In 1990 he told reporters, "It was the worst pack of lies a little girl could ever make up." And some kids in a Kern County daycare were like, "hold my beer," as we shall soon see. "Hold my Juicebox" that sounds weirdly sexual too, I don't even know how to get through this episode. Michelle's father continued, "The book took me four months to read, and I cried all the time. I kept saying to myself: 'Dear God, how could anyone do this to their dead mother?'" Despite the glaring inconsistencies and all of the evidence debunking the bizarre claims in the book, and the fact that it included fucking wizardry, Michelle remembers would end up becoming an actual assigned

textbook for social workers in the United States. I can't with us.

If there is one silver lining to Michelle Remembers it's the fact that, while the book popularized the idea of recovering so-called repressed memories via hypnotherapy, it eventually helped discredit the practice as well. As noted, the book was very easy to debunk, as was the idea of repressed memory as soon as anyone bothered to test it. We know at this point that memory simply doesn't work that way. Our brains are messy, there's no efficient system of locking away painful memories and there's certainly no magical hypnotic key that allows us to retrieve them. In fact, as we've covered on other episodes, memory is notoriously faulty. Even eyewitness testimony given mere hours after a crime can often be wildly inaccurate. Perhaps the biggest problem with probing for repressed memories is that hypnotherapy sessions and supposed instances of memory recovery can in fact be instances of memory implantation. "Numerous studies have demonstrated the weakness of memory; among the most famous is a paper from 2001 which found that with only a little prompting, fully one-third of respondents could be convinced that they had [met Bugs Bunny at](#)

Disneyland — despite Bugs being owned by a Disney competitor who has almost certainly never appeared in the iconic theme park." Sigmund Freud had found this out nearly 100 years before when he placed 18 female patients under hypnosis to try to uncover trauma from their past and they promptly began recounting crazy stories of cannibalism and sexual depravity similar to the ones in Michelle Remembers, and Freud eventually uttered the Austrian equivalent of "oops" and "back to the drawing board."

I've experienced this phenomenon firsthand, I have really intense memories from when I was a child, and I'll run them by my mom and she'll be like, "that is not even close to what actually happened." I'll be like, "remember when I almost drowned in that lake in Washington when I was five years old?" And my mom is like dude, that was Oregon, you were 10, and it was a puddle." she probably also didn't call me dude, but again, memory is a slippery bastard.

So Michelle Remembers unleashed the floodgates of American crazy. Formerly sleepy police departments were inundated by the 1970s equivalent of soccer moms claiming that their therapists were unearthing unspeakable horrors in their past, often committed by friends and family members.

Incidentally, there was also a subset of these reports that seem to be very clear attempts to provide damning evidence in child custody battles.

And then the daycare cases began.

Kern county, 1980: the beginning of the daycare sexual abuse hysteria. This is in Bakersfield CA, Not far from this studio, about midway between here and where the Hells Angels started, these last couple episodes are really hitting home. Everything terrible is within driving distance of the sleepless cell studio, it seems. Earthquake fault lines, Nuclear reactors, bicycle gangs, Satan apparently. The villain of this particular tale is not in fact Satan but a fiend of the flesh and bone variety. In this case the villain was the DA for kern county, named Ed Jagels. The inciting incident seems to have been a potentially credible case of child abuse. It was 1982 when a young girl named Becky McCuan reported that her grandfather on her mother's side had molested her. Her parents, Debbie and Alvin, took her to a doctor, who corroborated the charges, and a police report was filed. However, the accused grandfather, Rod Phelps, lived out of the county and was never apprehended. Now it's easy for this to get confusing because I'm

throwing a lot of names at you, but the child's father, Alvin, HIS mother was named Mary Anne Barbour. So this is the child's grandmother on her father's side. She was a piece of work. She had mental health issues, and spent time in a psychiatric ward suffering from psychosis, and she became fixated on the idea that her daughter-in-law, Debbie McCuan, hadn't taken sufficient steps to protect her grandchild. She began crowing to anyone who would listen about how awful Debbie was as a parent. She called social services, she contacted an anti-child-abuse organization called the "mothers of Bakerfield" but her accusations weren't getting any traction. So Mary Anne decided to escalate the conflict, and as it turned out, Debbie's day job was running a small childcare business. So Mary Anne stepped up the accusations, claiming that Debbie was abusing the children at her daycare.

Now this is where it all starts to feel eerily similar to Salem, with the mass hysteria spreading to anyone who was unlucky enough to get pulled into the gravitational orbit of all this crazy. The McCuans had friends, a couple named Scott and Brenda Kniffen, who themselves had two sons. Scott Kniffen was appalled by the ridiculous charges against Debbie and agreed to be a character witness. This put him on the radar of crazy ass Mary Anne

Barbour, who now started railing against anyone she viewed as an impediment to her crusade to take down Debbie. Suddenly the scope of her accusations exploded...this wasn't just about Debbie; now she claimed she had uncovered a ring of pedophilic satanists operating out of the daycare and the cult included the Kniffens and anyone else that Mary Anne perceived as a threat. Alvin McCuan's brothers were thrown into the mix, plus a social worker named Betty Palko and her boyfriend Larry Walker who was a coworker of Alvin's, all of them would be roped into the so-called "sex ring" and accused of producing child porn and snuff films and beating the children for hours.

The McCuan children were interviewed and only added to the lunacy by spinning wild, nonsensical tales. It would later become obvious that they had been coached by Mary Anne, and then sprinkled in their own childish lunacy because they were kids and have imaginations. Next, "The Kniffen boys were taken to Shalimar Children's Center for questioning. Authorities questioned the children together and then separately. Kern County authorities such as Carol Darling, Velda Murrillo, and Sgt. Fredenburg questioned the Kniffen children repeatedly, suggestively, and coercively. The children were

told the truth was already known and they were wrong unless they confirmed the guilt of their parents. When questioned separately, each boy was falsely told his sibling had said they both had been abused a sex ring that included their parents. Authorities suggested the children could go home to their parents if they testified according to the wishes of the prosecutors." So these were your textbook coercive interrogation techniques that we covered in our torture episode. The police promptly began making arrests based on zero physical evidence...remember when I talked about the scary part? It's mindboggling that this is a true story. These were police officers and detectives blatantly ignoring constitutional rights and the law; those investigators clearly could not have done any investigating because a cursory fact-check would have revealed that despite very specific accusations there were no video cameras or snuff films discovered in any of the houses; no marks or scars or rope burns on the kids; the sheetrock ceiling where one of the children claimed to have been suspended had no hooks and couldn't have even supported his weight; the list goes on. There was in fact no physical evidence whatsoever to support the wild accusations, these entire cases were based on the

ravings of a clinically psychotic old lady and the rambling nonsense of children. Yet the local media lent full-throated support to the allegations, and the community began stockpiling pitchforks and torches. And this may seem crazy, and like a massive overreaction by the public, but think about it...how often do you see a headline: "Local man arrested for child porn and molestation" and think to yourself, good, they got one. We want to believe that the bad guys are getting rounded up...there is supposed to be a legal presumption of innocence but when it comes to the crimes that we have decided are the most heinous it would be an understatement to say that there is often a rush to judgment. If you are accused of one of these types of crimes, even if you are eventually found innocent your life can be ruined by just the accusations. You would think the lack of evidence would turn the tide of public opinion when the actual legal proceedings commenced, but when the cases finally made it to court, judges sympathetic to the prosecution sealed Mary Anne's medical records so that her history of mental illness was inadmissible; after some of the children admitted that they had been coached by Mary Anne, defense attorneys were barred from any contact with the kids. It was a railroading, a



kangaroo court. And I know you've been waiting patiently so we've finally reached the winking anus portion of the show, always a highlight. Dr. Bruce Woodling testified that his examination of the children had revealed the "wink response," a foolproof indicator of sodomy and sexual abuse. The wink refers to a tightening of the child's anus that occurred when Doctor Woodling touched it with a swab and also when he inserted a lubricated glass tube to view the rectal canal. I don't know where to start. First off, I have never been sodomized, but if you poke my anus, it will "wink." That's called flinching. It is the natural response to being violated. In fact, this is known as the perineal reflex and if it *doesn't* happen you have a spinal injury. maybe we should be investigating Dr. Bruce Woodling...I don't want to contribute to hysterical panic and unfounded accusations but it occurs to me that while there is no evidence that the parents abused these kids this guy admitted on the stand that he penetrated child-ass with basically a glass dildo. How ironic that the only evidence we have of these kids being actually abused was by some child-probing quack appointed by the state. Apparently Dr. Woodling noted that the anal wink was observable in every child who claimed to have been abused.

Which is absolutely true. The problem is that it's also visible in every child who has *not* been abused, although in order to verify this fact you have to penetrate and thus abuse a bunch more children.

The McCuans and Kniffens were convicted in 1984 and sentenced to a combined total of more than 1000 years in prison. It's almost comical. In total, more than 35 people were convicted and many of them spent decades in jail. After more than 12 years most of the convictions were finally overturned in 1996 and millions of dollars would be eventually paid out to those who were wrongly convicted and didn't die in prison, but if there's a definition for the phrase "too little too late..."

And this was all as the result of one crazy woman who was the first domino in a bizarre chain reaction—this was the real butterfly effect—and it exposed the American justice system as woefully unprepared to compensate for human fear, bias, prejudice, and irrationality. our justice system is based on a jury of your *peers*...not even the smartest people you know, it's not even limited to people who have graduated from high school and have drivers licenses...it can be your unemployed stoner buddy Ralph who ends up casting the final jury vote to convict, any idiot can be on

a jury. I'm proof...I served on a jury in a murder case, I'll discuss it on the show some day. It's not easy, I have a lot of sympathy for jurors, and overall I believe that they're just trying to do their best but often their best sucks.

So the Kern county daycare case was the canary in the coalmine, and although it didn't receive a ton of national publicity, it was shortly followed by possibly the most well-known of the day care panic cases, the McMartin Preschool case, famous for being the most expensive and longest criminal trial in American history, stretching over more than 7 years and resulting in zero convictions. Just an absolute pointless clusterfuck of inconvenience. Or I guess disastrous and life-rending might be better a descriptor than inconvenient, at least for the people who went through it, but ultimately it all amounted to nothing. The big difference between this case and the previous was the fact that this wasn't a small-town fiasco that could be tucked under the rug of America's collective consciousness...this trial took place in Los Angeles, and received national publicity, and so in many ways it was more damaging because it spread the gospel of Satanic Ritual Abuse all across the country, sparking tons more

accusations, but it also created far more intense scrutiny that eventually helped undermine the idea of satanic cult abuse among discerning, intelligent people. The circumstances were in many ways similar so we won't cover them exhaustively. Once again the entire debacle was kicked off by a single crazy lady. In this case it was Judy Johnson, who in 1983 noticed that her son was having painful bowel movements and accused her estranged husband of buggery. She also accused a teacher at the McMartin preschool named Ray Buckey, claiming that in addition to sexually assaulting her child Ray Buckey once "flew through the air," which maybe should have raised a red flag or two. This is what I mean by the "believe all anyone" fallacy... some people are bonkers. It's all fun and games until someone accuses you of levitating, and people actually believe it. Judy would later be diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and die of complications related to alcoholism...so let me amend my advice: don't believe all crazy people, also don't believe all drug addicts. Some of them *are* very honest...sometimes too honest. I HATE YOU, I'VE ALWAYS HATED YOU. But also they are in a compromised state, and even when they're not, they will often say whatever it takes to achieve that

compromised state.

So investigators responded by promptly firing off a letter to ALL of the parents at the daycare, informing them of the accusations and also urging them to not make any assumptions and keep the letter confidential. Basically telling them not to panic. Those are incompatible actions and expectations...this letter is to inform you that your child's orifices may have been aggressively violated. please remain calm. No need to get all agitated now, it was just a little sodomy, chill out, have a snack and a juicebox while we insert this glass rod into your kid's butthole. We would appreciate your patience while we build the flimsiest possible case based on rumor and innuendo. From the letter, "Our investigation indicates that possible criminal acts include: oral sex, fondling of genitals, buttock or chest area, and sodomy...photos may have been taken of children without their clothing." Again, there was no physical evidence whatsoever of any of this, not even a winking anus, and no such photos were ever found...remember, this was the era of film cameras and photomats. You couldn't just snap digital images on your iPhone, you had to submit those film rolls to a business and be like, ok look, you may notice that there are some *artistic* photos on this roll...sunsets, local architecture,

naked 5-year-olds covered in feces. Standard artsy stuff, you wouldn't understand. Nothing you should concern yourself with or report to the authorities. The letter continued...here's a quote urging parents to ask their children "If they have ever observed Ray Buckey tie up a child...".

If the intended effect of the letter was to quell any hysteria, contain the problem, and obtain credible tips and information, let's say it did not have the intended effect. The department was flooded with calls and demands by furious and frantic parents; hundreds of children were interviewed and investigators were careful to use only the most manipulative and coercive techniques at their disposal. It was a farce. Eventually detectives somehow detected that 360 children had been abused. Those so-called interviews, which were more like interrogations, were classic examples of improper and leading questioning; a clinical psychologist named Michael Maloney would later assert, "many of the kids' statements in the interviews were generated by the examiner." Basically it went something like this, the investigator would say "So you were tied up and photographed and touched on your special spot, rights?" And kids were like, "ok, can I go now," and the cops were like, Eureka! We've got

'em, boys. It's ironclad. The tapes of the interviews would be the primary reason for eventual acquittal... *eventual* being the operative word. It took seven years. Which is just unbelievably wild, considering the allegations included secret tunnels below the school that were never located, flying witches, children being flushed down toilets to enter secret rooms, orgies at public airports and rides on hot air balloons.

It's wild. The real indignity and abuse these kids were subjected to was the questioning and the stress, the constant pressure to support sexually charged narratives and manipulative grown-up agendas and to constantly make up stories. Kids don't know what the hell is going on; during the trial, one of the children was shown a series of photographs by the defense and confidently identified Chuck Norris as an abuser. It sounds like one of those Chuck Norris tall tales. Not only can Chuck Norris dribble a bowling ball, he can diddle your children without ever meeting them. That one is less funny.

There were two trials, and you'll never guess which famed and esteemed psychologist met with the parents to provide advice and guidance before the proceedings began: Lawrence Pazder of *Michelle Remembers*, both he and Michelle would later be accused of

influencing the testimony of the children. It was just a complete travesty of justice and the justice system is only slightly vindicated by the fact that everyone was eventually released; by that time Ray Buckey had been in jail for five years without ever being convicted.

Unlike the Kern County cases, the McMartin trial had seismic effects on the culture. There was an explosion of daycare allegations.

"There was the [Little Rascals Day Care](#) Center in North Carolina; the [Oak Hill trial in Texas](#), [Wee Care Nursery School](#) in New Jersey, [Fells Acres Daycare](#) in Massachusetts; [Country Walk](#) in Florida; the [Bronx Five](#)." The list goes on.

I remember the aftermath of this. this was when Satanism infiltrated daytime talk shows; Geraldo in particular was a notorious offender when it came to featuring satanists on his show and harping about the satanic menace.

The tide began to turn at the end of the 80s as more and more SRA cases were reevaluated, and the public was finally beginning to doubt the validity of satanic demonic possession—what a crazy statement to make. "Around the time the Internet began to go mainstream, people started to



question whether magic was real." One television network actually contributed significantly to fighting against this national hysteria: Home Box Office. the HBO documentary "Indictment: the McMartin trial" began to erode public support for overzealous prosecutions, but by the early 90s—as we witnessed in the beginning of this episode—the panic was still entrenched in various rural communities worldwide.

There's probably no more famous example of the Satanic Panic in action than the trial of the so-called West Memphis 3 in the early 1990s. And once again HBO came to the rescue. You can still watch this series on Max—don't call it HBO or even HBOMax, it's just Max now, which I imagine is awesome for the millions of Maxes whose names have now been hijacked and will be forever associated with the network behind the "Velma" TV show travesty. Horrid. Regardless, Paradise Lost is a dated but fascinating low-budget documentary series featuring a nostalgic soundtrack of Metallica bangers—the group offered the rights to their music for free as a show support for the project—and it also features a cast of hicks and weirdos that will make you very concerned about the foundations of American democracy and our collective future. Remember, these people are breeding prolifically.

They don't believe in birth control. The documentary is set in West Memphis Arkansas, not Tennessee, that was very confusing for me, and it follows three teenage boys who—during the first instalment—were on trial for murdering three *8-year-old* boys in a Satanic ritual. It was a gruesome crime, one of the victim's penises was flayed, the skin was stripped off, and they show pictures of this, I made the mistake of eating dinner while watching this documentary, don't be like me. it becomes clear very quickly that the teenagers are being railroaded due to the fact that one of them supplied a false confession after 12 hours of interrogation. This particular kid, Jason Misskelly, had an IQ of 72—probably still does, I don't think you can smarten up via prison—none of them were the sharpest tools in the shed but this boy in particular was a perfect target for police because frankly he was easy to manipulate. As with all of the other scenarios we've covered, there was no physical evidence whatsoever linking any of the boys to the crime, but after a month with no leads the police were under pressure and they essentially turned to the usual suspects: weirdos and misfits that were the only people everyone in town could imagine committing this crime. kids who listened to heavy metal and checked out books from the library

about Alistair Crowley, kids like you and me were, basically. The fact that they wore black and listened to Metallica became actual pieces of evidence, and much hay was made of the fact that Damien Echols had researched the Wiccan religion. Not even Satanism, but instead the least intimidating religion of all, the earth goddess religion, Wicca is inoffensive hippie shit. Here's a clip from the documentary, the first two or three people to speak are police officers, describing why the kids were targeted, and then a couple parents of the murdered children, you'll know when we get there. This should give you a good overview of the prevailing philosophy in that area and the social climate. [play clip]

so Paradise Lost is a 3-part documentary but it's not like a Netflix series where all the episodes were released together; the 3 installments were produced years apart to catch the viewer up on events...part one ends with all three boys being convicted and one of them sentenced to death—this was Damian Echols—how convenient that he had the perfect demonic name, and physically he fit the bill, he was mildly effeminate, basically a full-on goth kid who was just like every mopey goth with black nail polish that you knew in high school, and by that I mean he was

obsessed with horror movies and dark metal music and liked to pretend that he was very profound and unaffected by everything and was in fact completely harmless and kind of adorable. And most importantly very obviously not a hardened murderer. He's a depressed kid who does some posturing on camera which didn't help his case, but he didn't think he was going to end up in jail because he trusted the justice system. Doh. However the true main character in the documentary is one of the most fascinating weirdos you will ever encounter, a father of one of the murdered boys, a man named John Mark Byers, who unlike Damian IS a disturbing sociopath. This dude comes across as scary and insane and throughly entertaining. He's right out of the Texas chainsaw massacre; Byers is 6 foot eight and 300 pounds and has fake teeth and a deep southern drawl and kind of a mullet; he preaches about Jesus and hellfire and goes on long rants and occasionally cries and often sings, he is uncomfortably emotional in the most unconvincing fashion and always performing for the camera, it's a wild ride. at one point he gave the HBO crew a hunting knife as a gift, like you do, and it turned out that the knife had dried blood on it that matched both his and his son's blood genotype; unfortunately investigators couldn't

determine whether the blood belong to him or his son or both, this was before really accurate DNA testing. The camera crew turned the knife over to the police and Byers would eventually have to testify about it on the stand. He explained that he must have cut his thumb although he had initially claimed it was a new knife that had never been used. He was an avid hunter and skinner of animals...and also penises, possibly. The saga of Byers throughout these documentaries is fascinating, he would eventually get in trouble for stealing a bunch of furniture from his neighbor when he moved out of state, and also for arranging a fight between two teenage boys and watching over them while holding a gun; he said he did it because he wanted to make sure it was a fair fight.

Later Byer's wife died between the first and second documentaries and her cause of death was "undetermined," according to him she just dropped dead at the dinner table with a bunch of substances in her system. I was 100% convinced that this guy was the killer, I just kept waiting for the documentary to drop the hammer, and it's pretty obvious that the camera crew was waiting for this revelation too. As was basically everyone who watched the first documentary installment, because the second

episode is an hour-long accusation against this guy. But the real twist is that Byers does not appear to have been the killer. He may have killed, I would not be remotely surprised if they found a few hitchhikers in his basement, but Byers was never charged nor convicted and suspicion would eventually fall on someone else, which we'll get to in a second... I firmly believe based on what we know now that Byers is innocent and I also firmly believe that this man should be jailed simply for public safety. I am nothing if not a hypocrite...I have my own version of Satanic panic, it's crazy hillbilly panic...I think crazy hillbillies should be jailed based solely on suspicion and prejudice, and I'm fine with that.

So in 2007 the boys—now men—had been in custody for 14 years and finally new DNA technology was used to essentially exclude the boys from having been at the scene of the crime, however a hair that had been discovered in the rope that was used to bind the kids did produce a match, implicating one of the victims stepfather's, a man named Terry Hobbs, and there was yet another hair that DNA strongly implied belonged to a friend of Terry's. Terry was a violent racist with a history of assault and battery and gun violence, we know this because when the DNA evidence was released, Natalie Maines from

the Dixie chicks spoke out in support of the West Memphis three, and Terry Hobbs sued her for defamation, looking for a payout. This opened Terry Hobbs up to questioning, he was deposed by Natalie's lawyers, who used it as an opportunity to ask him every uncomfortable question about his past that he didn't want revealed. He does not come across great.

[play clip]

Under further questioning he claimed he had never seen the boys on the date of the murder, which was contradicted by eyewitness testimony, and his ex-wife told the media that she believes he did it. Of course, she's a little biased, being his ex-wife, but also she has a relevant perspective, being the ex-wife that he used to beat regularly.

As a result of new findings and also public pressure—celebrities from Henry Rollins to Ozzy Osbourne to Johnny Depp were pouring support and money into this cause—as a result of all the steady drumbeat against the verdict, over the years two of the victims families switched sides and many of them recanted their testimony after becoming convinced of the innocence of the Memphis three. This included Byers, in a stunning turn of events. After he was basically exonerated by the DNA evidence and someone else was implicated, he did change

his tune, and would become a Loud and just as crazy and disturbing vocal supporter of the boys as he had been a detractor previously. In 2011, after 18 years in custody, all three of the boys—now men—were suddenly and unceremoniously released. It was an abrupt and strange release arrangement... basically the courts refused to admit that the verdict had been wrong but also couldn't justify keeping these men in prison considering the fact that the verdict had clearly been wrong. All three of the convicts entered Alford pleas, which means that they did not admit guilt but agreed to plead guilty to reduced charges just to get the hell out of jail. The men were subsequently sentenced to time served, and boom, after almost 2 decades of unjust imprisonment they were free. One of their first stops outside of the courthouse was at a party hosted by Eddie Vedder and Natalie Maines. Damian Echols, the former goth and the most well-known of the defendants, relocated to Salem Massachusetts... a strange choice, but ok. He had been very outspoken during his time in jail and had developed a bit of a fanbase; he grew into a handsome young man and married a landscape architect while in jail; they are still together and he now has appeared on the Moth story-show podcast thing, and is a poet



and artist and voiceover actor. He's an interesting dude. And pretty clearly not a penis-skinner. The Paradise Lost documentary and the release of the boys seems to have marked an official end to the Satanic panic that began some 20 years earlier.

So we're wrapping things up here but there is one big question looming over this episode: could something like the Satanic Panic happen again in the modern era, could people be sentenced to decades in prison based on zero evidence and a bunch of superstitious mumbo jumbo, and the answer is probably not to that extent...there is much more scrutiny of the justice system in the 2000s than there used to be back in the primitive landline-and-fax-machine world of the 1990s. But the unwashed masses of humanity are still reactionary, I hate to harp on cancel culture because it's just cliché to complain about it and also I think a lot of people *do* need to be canceled, but the speed at which we humans will jump to conclusions and condemn others and try to ruin their lives over perceived wrongdoing does not bode well for our future. The 1980s Satanic panic was a shameful episode in human history, and if we don't learn from it we will of course be doomed to repeat it. And considering Qanon

it's clear that a segment of the population has learned nothing, Jon Snow, there will always be a good 30% of the population that is incurably ignorant and scared and gullible, but what can you do? And that's how I'd like to end these episodes.

We have a new Menace!

**New CA\$7.50 patron! 🎉 Meet Lesley**

**PATREON**



Lesley just became a CA\$7.50 patron!

Email: [Lesley.calon@gmail.com](mailto:Lesley.calon@gmail.com)

Just Leslie. No last name, not even an initial this time, she learned from Jason Penis, from last episode, these insomniacs are getting wilier.

We have another new menace, another *upgrade* I believe, Abby was a minion and became a menace, now this is Abby Laverick and we made some crack about "Abby limericks" in the last episode because we're just running out of ideas and have resorted to rhyming.

However Abby decided to harness the power of ChatGPT to create our hypothetical limerick, you can judge whether AI is an amazing poet:

"There once was a girl named Abbie,  
Who listened to MFFI so nimbly,  
With her headphones on tight,  
She rocked through the night,  
And danced 'till her feet were quite wobbly."

**Abbie Laverick just edited their pledge to £4.50.**

**PATREON**



Abbie Laverick just edited their pledge  
from £3.00 to £4.50.

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**PATREON**



jesse mcguire just became a \$3.00 patron!

Email: [higt1120@gmail.com](mailto:higt1120@gmail.com)

almost an unmockable name, well played Jessie's parents. You weren't gonna let your kid become a laughingstock like Jason penis. But this is what I love about the insomniacs, this is an amazing contrast. So we have this new patron Jesse Maguire,

We also have a new review and

you'll see what I mean in a moment.  
Five stars,

**Always learning something**



Thanks for teaching me things

Tweet

View on Web

by Harvey Butthole · United States of America · Jun 7,  
2023

That's about right. That's the level of maturity I think we deserve.

Also before we get out of here a quick shoutout to Llama Trauma, my research minion who did a great job with assisting on this episode, and to Kassidy from all the way across the country, for her input and support. I hope she gets out of the sticks and moves back to Arizona soon; and finally to BoomsplodeKat for the in-progress cross-stitch of my face, which will definitely show up on a livestream eventually, because my actual face just isn't enough of my face for the video portion of this show. We need more my face. According to the Discord, at least. This isn't my idea, this is by popular demand, what can I say. We have *your* face on a T-shirt, so this seems fair.

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