America Remembers: The Geopolitics behind the ‘Satanic Panic’

A video of Paula White, the pastor, and televangelist, became a hit sensation on social media among those who dislike US President Donald Trump. The selected clip from her Jan. 5th, 2020 Sermon portrayed the spiritual guru, who is loosely connected with the commander-in-chief, uttering the words: “We declare that anything that’s been conceived in satanic wombs, that it will miscarry, it will not be able to carry forth any plan of destruction, any plan of harm,” and asking Jesus Christ to “command all satanic pregnancies to miscarry right now.” White has come forward and said she was speaking metaphorically, and that her words seem less bizarre when put into the context of the full sermon.

At the same time, a true-crime miniseries entitled “Fall River”, which documents the hysteria that swept a small Massachusetts town in 1979 after some gruesome killings, is currently in production.

All of this seems to point to that the fact that the United States is now attempting to interpret a strand of fear-based religious and political thinking that sprung up in the United States during the late Cold War. What is widely described as the “Satanic Panic” was a major current in US society from the 1970s up into the early 2000s, reaching its height of cultural influence during the 1980s. It accompanied the broader rise of the evangelical Christian right-wing, which was aligned with the Neoconservative faction in the Republican Party.

Michelle Remembers & Back-masking

In 1980, Canadian Psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder and his patient, Michelle Smith, wrote a best-selling book. The book Michelle Remembers was plugged in People magazine and the National Enquirer. It discussed repressed memories
of sexual abuse and torture which Dr. Pazder claimed to have helped his patient uncover. In the book, Michelle Smith claims that as a child she was held captive by an underground group of devil worshippers who raped her, locked her in a cage, and otherwise abused her.

The book was a sensation across the US, with many TV programs highlighting Michelle’s claims and Dr. Pazder’s allegations that some kind of secret Satanic cult had infiltrated the US government and the highest levels of US society to wage war against Christianity and subject children to ritualized abuse.

However, after about a decade of spotlight and attention, the book was largely debunked. Michelle’s school records indicated that she had perfect attendance in school during the times she claimed to have been held prisoner in a cage. The locations and other logistical details in the text were also highly implausible. It has been noted that the methods Pazder used to “recover” the memories from Michelle Smith through hypnosis, could very well have simply been him implanting false memories into her mind. It should be noted that Pazder eventually married Michelle Smith, and when their romantic relationship began is also unclear.

In 1988, Geraldo Rivera produced a documentary entitled “Devil Worship: Exposing Satan’s Underground” in which he claimed that millions of Satanists operated within the United States, kidnapping children and engaging in behaviors similar to what the Pazder-Smith book claimed.

As Rev. Jerry Falwell and “the Moral Majority” were in full swing, aligned with Ronald Reagan, the war on drugs, foreign policy hawks and the “family values” mantra, the notion that “Satanists” had infiltrated the US government became very widespread among the rank and file believers. Popular culture, rock music, TV programs, and many aspects of US society were deemed to have coded satanic propaganda in them.

“Backmasking” of vinyl records became a central focus of religious opposition to Rock and Roll music. Ministers would play albums of the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and other rock bands in reverse, and amid the garbled sound hear words like “My sweet Satan” and “there is no escape.” These were said to be messages, designed to subconsciously program the listeners to oppose Christ.

Atheist, Seth Andrews described how as a teenager, he and his fellow evangelical youths, would burn rock albums in bonfires. As they heard the sizzling of melting vinyl amid flames, they believed this sound to be the screams of demons inside the record albums, crying out as they perished from the heat.

While many lectures, documentaries, and presentations mock and examine this hysteria about “Satan” that gripped communities across America, few, if any, seem to present an analysis of what drove the hysteria. Why did millions of Americans believe the devil was on the prowl? Why did widespread popular culture, TV programs, movies, books, the government and most especially, Rock music become the target of allegations of a Satanic plot?

“We Are More Popular Than Jesus” - The Politics Behind the Culture War

One of the first events of the era to spark the middle American religious revolt against popular culture, was a 1966 interview with John Lennon. The words sparked a wave of protest, record burnings, and threats of violence aimed at the Beatles group. The lead guitar player and lyricist for The Beatles was quoted by London’s Evening Standard on March 4th, 1966 as saying:

“Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first - rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me.”

These words infuriated the deeply religious people of the rural, midwestern, and southern United States. Record albums were burned in Christian revival meetings. The Ku Klux Klan protested the Beatles’ performances across the country. Radio stations refused to play Beatles music over the airwaves.

The 1966-1967 tour by the Beatles across the United States was tainted by threats of violence, hostile protesters, and interference from local governments who were offended by John Lennon’s words. When the Beatles performed in Memphis, Tennessee the band panicked as a firecracker was thrown on the onto the stage, leading them to believe they were being shot at. As a result of the fear and threats they faced, the Beatles ultimately gave up touring and focused on releasing studio albums.
However, behind the anger at the Beatles over John Lennon’s comments about Christianity, was a deeper political criticism. The Beatles openly opposed the Vietnam War and supported the US Civil Rights movement. Furthermore, as many Christian ministers realized, The Beatles’ concerts, in which teenage girls would sob and scream, and the sound of drums and loud music would emotionally transfix the audience, were very similar to Christian revival meetings. Rock and Roll music itself was based on African American gospel music, which had been adopted by born-again pastors and charismatic Christian denominations, both white and Black, as a method of inducing hypnotic trances and mystical religious experiences.

The very same methods the preachers themselves had used to win the loyalty and belief of congregants throughout the south in ceremonies that included snake handling, fire breathing, confessions, fainting, and staged “faith healings” were now being utilized by a British rock and roll band to sell tickets and records. Long tested methods for stirring up the faithful were being used to create an atmosphere of sexual promiscuity accompanied by a liberal political message.

The music of The Beatles, and the hysterical atmosphere at their concerts, the groupthink of screaming teenage mobs dubbed “Beatlemania” was the result of millions of dollars’ worth of marketing research. Following the Second World War, British and American intelligence agencies, as well as many commercial and private interests, such as the Rockefeller family, had investigated methods of persuasion. William Sargant, the author of The Mind Possessed and The Battle for The Mind had conducted a series of unethical experiments on psychiatric patients, attempting to treat mental illness, implant false beliefs, induce religious experiences, and otherwise “brainwash” people.

Amid the public’s fascination with allegations of “Communist mind control” and films like The Manchurian Candidate, all kinds of research into the art of persuasion and psychological manipulation had resulted in creating a musical sensation that was worth billions of dollars. The slick marketing campaign that resulted in millions and millions of people purchasing record albums containing very precisely edited and composed rock music was not merely the work of four talented composers and performers. The Beatles and the cultural explosion surrounding them were the result of psychological research centered around The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, previously known as the Tavistock Clinic during the Second World War.

**Chaos As A Strategy for Opposing Communism**

So, why were wealthy families like the Rockefellers teaming up with intelligence agencies to fund the research of Sargant and the Tavistock Institute? Why were so many conservatives horrified by Rock and Roll? Why did this manifest itself into a widespread delusion that “Satanism” was secretly embedded within US society?

The reasons can be found in geopolitics. At the end of the Second World War, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had begun. Before the war, Hitler, Mussolini, and other fascists had attempted to defeat Communism by creating a highly militarized, authoritarian society. The Fascists and Communists had faced off in Europe, and millions had died.

While Joe McCarthy and the “military-industrial complex” of US society advocated a similar strategy of military build-up and domestic authoritarianism during the opening of the Cold War, many of America’s wealthiest capitalists felt a different strategy would be best for defeating the reds. They argued for the opposite approach, saying that a wave of cultural instability could be utilized to sow unrest and tear down the Eastern Bloc.

On their website, the CIA brags about the Congress for Cultural Freedom, one of its most successful programs. In it, the US intelligence community covertly funded art galleries, musical concerts, and socialist magazines, all aimed at stirring up chaos and instability. A new form of Marxism that did not advocate building a state-run centrally planned economy, but instead favored deconstruction, promoting the virtue of chaos, was fomented. [SF1] When hired to direct the program, New York City Trotskyist Sidney Hook is quoted by the CIA as saying: “Give me a hundred million dollars and a thousand dedicated people, and I will guarantee to generate such a wave of democratic unrest among the masses--yes, even among the soldiers--of Stalin’s own empire, that all his problems for a long period of time to come will be internal. I can find the people.”

The Rockefeller family also promoted the work of Alfred Kinsey, the sex researcher based in Indiana who argued that homosexuality and other behaviors deemed immoral by traditional Americans were very widespread and not dangerous. The Kinsey Report filled the airwaves, and organizations advocating for the rights of homosexuals sprung up. The birth control pill was developed, and the use of contraception was promoted by Planned Parenthood, an organization previously known as the Birth Control League, funded by John D. Rockefeller and other Malthusians in the hopes of reducing “overpopulation.”
When the political turmoil of the 1960s and the early 70s reached its peak, millions of Americans felt deeply disenchanted with their country. Amid the wave of protests, cultural liberalism, cynicism, and nihilism, the beliefs of conservative rural Americans in the South and Midwest had been torn asunder. America was not “the land of the free” and “the home of the brave.” The family was not sacred, and the Bible might not be the literal word of God. The country needed to reconcile with the fact that it had been established by slaveholders and had committed genocide against the indigenous people.

Neo-conservativism and the rise of Reaganism was an attempt to reconstruct what the political turmoil of the 1960s had eroded. As midwestern families feared their children might become drug addicts or atheists, they rallied around Evangelical pastors and Neocon politicians in the hopes of being protected and restoring their belief in the USA as a “Shining City on a Hill.” Reagan’s slogan “Let’s Make America Great Again” and his constant references to the 1950s, were an attempt to reassure middle Americans they were safe from the cultural confusion. The “war on drugs” promised to wipe out the danger of addiction with mass incarceration. The escalation of military spending and US involvement in Central America promised to protect religious communities from foreign “atheistic communism.” The promotion of the military and private gun ownership promised to restore discipline and order to society.

The widespread belief that “Satanists” were kidnapping children and had infiltrated the government represented a vague understanding that the cultural liberalism and unrest was not purely fomented by outside influence. It wasn’t Soviet Communists who pushed Beatles music, non-marital sex, pornography, and drug use. Middle Americans seemed to know, consciously or unconsciously, that figures within the business and political establishments were intentionally promulgating ideas that they feared.

While the conspiracy theories and disproved claims about “satanic cults” were wrong, the perception that spurned them was not completely false. When the color revolutions of 1989-1991 toppled the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Leninist governments across Eastern Europe, it became very apparent that cultural liberalism was a very effective tool of American intelligence agencies and soft power. George Soros, Zbiegnew Brzezinski, and Henry Kissinger had pursued a strategy of manipulating the intellectuals and dissidents in socialist countries, enchanting them with the allure of American consumer culture and media, and utilizing them to create chaos in the name of “human rights.” While young people across the Eastern Bloc believed they were marching, not to restore capitalism, but to create a more egalitarian and open version of socialism, powerful forces seized upon the unrest. In country after country, socialist governments collapsed, and the IMF and World Bank proceeded to loot and impoverish entire populations with “shock therapy” economics and neoliberalism.

However, when one looks at middle America today, as one sees the rise of opioid addictions, de-industrialization, poverty, and so much suffering, it wouldn’t be surprising if the belief that “Satan” controlled the government and centers of economic power once again found its foothold in America and became widespread. The broadcasts of Alex Jones and others labeled “conspiracy theorists” seem to echo very similar claims as the claims made not so long ago by record-burning pastors.

However, the wave of middle American opposition that views the elites of US society as “satanic” does not favor more military interventions abroad. Isolationism seems to be the rallying cry of Middle America, as the endless wars around the world have been considered only to be further proof that the Prince of Darkness has his grip over Washington DC.

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