

Debunking the Satanic Panic

A Report on the October 26 Meeting of NCAS, by Mike Epstein

Late arrivals for the October 26 NCAS meeting at the Bethesda Regional Library were shocked to find themselves listening, NOT to Robert Hicks of the Virginia Department of Justice and author of *In Pursuit of Satan*, NOT to Dr. Randy Lockwood, psychologist and Vice President of Field Services for the Humane Society of the United States, BUT to Officer Schmockworst of the Fireplug Police Department. A recent attender at a Satanism cult seminar and thus an expert on this terrifying and pervasive threat to the moral structure of our society, Schmockworst jolted the audience with the severity of the law enforcement problem presented by Satan and his followers. He indicated that there were some excellent books that described the growing threat, such as *Painted Black* by Carl Raschke and *Satan's Underground* by Lauren Stratford. Others, such as LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* and Crowley's *The Book of the Law*, led readers directly to Satanic worship or at best, such as Hicks' *In Pursuit of Satan*, glossed over the problem. "Books from the public library show our children how to caste spells and perform rituals," said Schmockworst. "The nature of the evidence is overwhelming." Graffiti, such as that found in the nearby town of Hydrant (and shown in figure 1), clearly presented Satanic imagery. "An unsolved homicide was found within two miles of one of these", he said. Rock performers are worshipping the Devil and rock music has been definitively linked to animal and human sacrifices. Many serial killers are Satanists. There is evidence that there are 50,000 human and millions of animal sacrifices to Satan every year. Satan is everywhere ... in magazines, in the games (Dungeons and Dragons) and music (AC/DC, etc.) our children play , in our government agencies, and particularly in our day-care centers, which are the soft underbelly of our society. "I have evidence", said Schmockworst, "that children, from our day-care centers right here in Fireplug, are being flown every day to a remote site where they are forced to participate in Satanic rituals (too offensive to describe in this article)." He cited the personal revelations of a witness, whose multiple personalities included Salina and Tufu the Demon Dog! "Why have we in Fireplug been chosen as a Satanic Ritual Center." "Because," said Schmockworst, "if you stick a pencil through Jerusalem on a globe, ***it comes out on the other side in Fireplug!***"

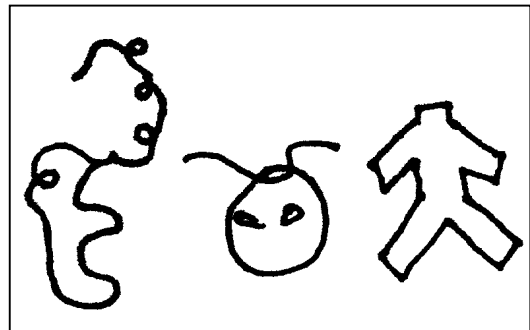


Figure 1. Satanist graffiti representing (from left to right) a griffin, the devil, and a headless torso (or anything else you might imagine).

Officer Schmockworst indicated that we must be constantly on our guard. Old phenomena, such as cemetery vandalism, must be seen in the new light of Satanism that has been revealed to us. While we should respect the first amendment, we have to keep an eye on these guys for the sake of our children. Find out who reads occult books and watches pornographic movies. Look for Satanic symbols at crime scenes. And above all remember that in years past we denied the abuse of children. Let's not now deny the threat of Satanism.

At this point, Robert Hicks emerged from his alter ego to present the same lecture in a different light and somewhat more rational manner. Going through all the slides again, he pointed out the obvious fallacies and misconceptions, and emphasized that similar slides are used by "experts" who lecture on Satanic cults. Mr. Hicks indicated that "They make their living off scare tactics ... with the intent of making money, making converts, or solidifying their congregation." Indeed, there is often a strong Christian-orientation to the lectures, with an emphasis that "spiritually-equipped" officers are best suited to handle such cases. Books presented as Satanist at cult seminars are often nothing of the sort, the lecturers never having bothered to read them. Satanic imagery is seen everywhere, because what is looked for is often found, whether in magazines, graffiti, or acts of vandalism. When "definitive" cases of Satanism are described, a careful examination of the evidence causes them to fall apart. A daycare school abuser turns out to be a dwarf doctor riding a motorcycle on the Saturday morning cartoons. The tunnels underneath the McMartin daycare center where Satanic rituals were performed turn out to be ditches from an old stable. Animal carcasses described as Satanic sacrifices turn out to be roadkill or trapper discards. A Christian magazine effectively debunks *Satan's Underground*, but not until it sells 2.5 million copies. The Matamoros, Mexico cult murder turns out to be a drug-running crime with media hype thrown in. A "straight-arrow" boy who commits a murder due to Satanic influences finally admits he was just a bad kid. A child commits suicide after playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, but what other problems did he have? The beat goes on, but *where is the evidence?*

Cult seminars are usually well-organized meetings with limited critical thinking. It becomes un-American (or un-Christian) to question the speaker. The audience is asked to suspend it's disbelief and not deny the problem. Examples of youthful behavior that is different from the norms of older generations (i.e., hard rock music) is linked to Satanic practices. Hysteria and fear prevail. Sound familiar? The Communist scares of the 1950s. The "Blood Libel" of the Jews throughout the centuries. The witch trials throughout our history. There's nothing new and the result is the same. Abridgement of human rights and the miscarriage of justice.

According to Mr. Hicks, when you have a crime, you investigate it and prosecute it. You don't throw in Satanism to confuse the issue. The smokescreen thrown up by Satanism can result in illegal searches or other abuses which will have a case thrown out of court.

The next speaker, Dr. Randy Lockwood, described the lack of evidence for ritualistic animal sacrifice carried out by Satanistic cult groups. In his job overseeing field operations of the Humane Society, he gets reports of unusual animal killings and works with local authorities to investigate. He has seen no evidence of the claimed 20 to 30 million animal sacrifices of dogs and cats each year. "Perhaps the 20 million dogs are being fed to the 60,000 children", said Dr. Lockwood. While animal cruelty does occur, ninety



Bob, I think what we have here is either an example of the decline of literacy in our schools or a cult of bizarre fabric worshippers.

percent of the time it is neglect. Of the remaining cases which represent blatant cruelty and mutilation, there are very few with trappings of Satanism and none has been traced to a formal Satanic cult.

Cultures throughout history have sacrificed animals to deal with an uncontrollable world and appease deities. Currently, tens of thousands of animals, mostly chickens, goats and turtles (and not dogs or cats) are being ritually slaughtered in the practice of the Santeria religion. A syncretic religion, Santeria combines beliefs from several sources and honors tribal gods described as Catholic saints. The sacrifices are meant to gain power, seek protection, divine the future, or propitiate the gods. The Humane Society has protested against the sacrifices based on the living conditions of the animals, the effect of the killing of animals on children, and the health and safety aspects of disposal. There is evidence that the religion is currently evolving away from animal sacrifice. But Santeria is not Satanism.

Dr. Lockwood pointed out that while animal cruelty is a crime that must be taken seriously, cult cops and religious groups are painting a simple continuity that starts with Dungeons and Dragons and Heavy Metal music, proceeds through animal sacrifice and ends in human sacrifice. The evidence does not exist to substantiate those claims. It is like claiming that exposure to Playboy and Penthouse magazines will lead to the practice of sexual harassment, and ultimately to appointment as a Supreme Court Justice. While it is true that almost all serial killers abused animals, a miniscule number of animal abusers become serial killers. Most cases of cruelty to animals involves adolescent or young adult men younger than 25. Motives include power seeking over an easily-controlled victim or rebellion against societal norms of parents and teachers who preach "be kind to animals". Animal abuse is an easy way to show rebellion or to vilify someone. An example is the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*: "I'll get you and your little dog too!". It is often part of initiation into peer groups. Dr Lockwood indicated that if he proceeded to bite the head off a hamster, he would definitely intimidate the audience. After all, if he did that, who knows what else he might be capable of. Many animal abusers were also abused children. Satanic dabblers are often adolescent boys who are rebelling and seek to shock their peers and their parents. Since sex and rock and roll don't scare parents today (many participated in those activities themselves), they use Satan to terrify them.

Attempts to tie Anton LaVey and *The Satanic Bible* into animal sacrifice are badly misplaced. Dr. Lockwood has had dinner with him several times and found him to be an animal lover, excellent musician, bright, and a bit of a recluse. LaVey does not believe in an entity called Satan and in *The Satanic Bible* says that under no circumstances would a Satanist sacrifice an animal or baby. He acts as an advisor to Humane Societies that are investigating animal cruelty and keeps detailed files on animal cruelty and religious crimes. He believes the only human sacrifices should be animal abusers (including hunters).

Many cases of claimed Satanic influence in crimes fall apart upon close examination. In the Newberry murder case (Joplin, MO, 1987), much of the evidence for Satanism was Peter Roland's Heavy Metal record collection, some of which Dr. Lockwood has in his own record collection. In fact, parental abuse and drug use were the primary causative factors. So much for those "nice, white middle-class kids". Other cases include: (1) the discovery of mutilated dogs

in Lynchburg, VA, initially sited as evidence of Satanic ritual, and finally discovered to be coyotes used in a biology experiment on decomposition; (2) a castrated and dehorned goat near Pontiac, MI, which turned out to be the victim of a dog attack instead of a Satanic sacrifice; (3) sixty-seven cats found mutilated with "surgical precision" and "completely drained of blood" were found, not to be victims of Satanic sacrifice, but of coyote teeth which, being as sharp as surgical instruments, can bisect a cat with one bite and afterwards, lick up the blood; (4) the carcasses of animals piled on a makeshift altar in Allentown, NH, turned out to be roadkills stacked up by highway workers. Indeed, Dr. Lockwood takes out his "large grain of salt" when he hears about "surgical precision" and "completely drained of blood". But the list goes on.

Finally, both speakers made the final point that the best way to investigate a homicide or case of animal mutilation with Satanic trappings is to investigate the crime and ignore the trappings. Take Satanism to be the sign of disturbed youth or aberrant behavior, not of a Satanic cult conspiracy. So many of these stories gain the status of fact by the retelling. The real fact is that Satanic seminars are just bad law enforcement.