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Science and Pseudoscience

25 November 2014

Essay 5

He Defecated On My Head

You want to know what I heard today? Bob Smith, you know, that guy from work? He dismembers babies for fun. And, oh yeah! Have you heard about Kelly? She drowns them before Bob gets to them.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a moral panic was spreading throughout the United States and eventually many parts of the world. Much like the Red Scare or the Salem Witch Trials, powerful accusations and harsh punishments were handed down through the court system. The Salem Witch trials were a series of “witch-hunts”, ending in the mass murder of obviously-innocent lives. The Red Scare was a nationwide panic, resulting in the Communists party’s labeling of being anti-American and its members forcibly shamed. Both pitted neighbor against neighbor and ruined countless lives. At this time, worshippers of Satan were drawing unprecedented amounts of public attention.

Ritualistic Satanic Abuse is this late 20th century public scare. Allegations of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse involved reports of physical and sexual abuse of people in context of occult or satanic rituals. In an extreme form, conspiracy belief held each nation’s wealthiest and elite members at fault for the abduction of children for sacrifice, pornography, and prostitution. As it is a pseudoscience, every aspect of this theory proved controversial. So called “victims” of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse claimed the absurd, giving the theory of nationwide conspiracy a pseudoratioanl aura. Ritualistic Satanic abuse is one of many pseudoscientific public scares oppressing equality and stimulating detrimental mob-mentality through the use of general fallacies.

First off, for the sake of the clarity of this paper, I must give an account of Satanism. After its founding in 1966, the church of Satan, headed by Anton LaVey, grew in numbers. LaVey’s Satanic Bible drew large amounts of criticism for its unholy nature (Taub and Lawrence 1993). The Satanic Bible and LaVey’s documentary, *Santanis: The Devil’s Mass*, provided vision of satanic rituals and the praise given to demonic creation. However, even noting the church’s alternative views, the church remained virtually unknown until the first report of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse came about.

The public is often self-suppressant for advancement in the light of a moral panic; human nature dictates us as selfish beings who would greatly rather put ourselves before others. Public opinion plays heavily on a fallacy commonly referred to as *Pick and Choose*. *Pick and Choose* is a technique used in gathering evidence that supports a desired claim. The United States is a country where we take pride in individual civil liberties and if the public is to ask for equality, then there must be equality for all. We cannot expect to pick and choose who will receive equality in terms of moral belief; if a person does not agree with something, they cannot strip away another individual’ s civil liberties. Morally, fairness is fairness and if we don’t chose morality, then society it supporting hate. Consequently, a society in this situation is actually regressing. In the terms of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse, a public scare targeted a specific religious following for their ideas (Frankfurter 2003). Satanists became the worst of the worst and were commonly the victims of prejudice. Even now satanic condemnation exists; my peers often refer to Satanists as “crazy psycho cultists.” One would think that in such a contemporary setting, prejudice would not be handled so lightly. Satanists do hold belief in ideation that would, to a majority, be considered horrific. But this is modern day. During the period of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse, supporters of gender and racial equality were reaching for the stars. Our culture was changing, and our nation had been pushing for equality for some time now. Woman suffrage, and the end of Jim Crow laws surely marked the United States as progressive in terms of equality. The United States public has always had the stenotype of freedom. We are always trying to better establish equality. Yet, we still weren’t all the way there. We were still picking and choosing who would receive equality. Society must turn its back to this morally-selective prejudice for improvement. All can agree that equality is a step towards perfection, yet Ritualistic Satanic Abuse was our falling.

Other public scares mirror the above model. The Red Scare, most notably, saw the prosecution of peoples for their sociopolitical views. The public sought justice in the fear of a potential rise of communism in the United States. The people of the United States, who were promised equality and liberty for all, were actually willing to sacrifice the constitutionally-given rights of others. Accusations of communism were leveled at non-communists as well. It became a way to target an individual person, or group of people, and destroy their reputation. At one point the American people thought so poorly of communists that they needed to be separated from the rest of society through imprisonment or deportation. Ridiculously, the only thing stopping them was that the communist party or its followers hadn’t broke any laws. Prejudice was great during the Red Scare, and equality was not. During the time of public scares, society is in a retrogression.

Additionally, in the midst of a moral panic, the public contracts mob-mentality. Essentially, a person will adopt a certain behavior of a group because the greater anonymity existent within the group and the distribution of responsibility for the group’s actions create a sense of justification for the individual’s actions. As seen in the Red Scare, Joseph McCarthy started the bandwagoning by inciting fear within the public. At first, the public appealed to a higher power (the first in a set of fallacies) and believed McCarthy’s account of treason by the communist party. Then, the public appealed to bandwagoning (a group of people believe some idea, so others will believe it to be true based on the group’s judgment). Mob-mentality must establish a group before taking effect. In the case of Ritualistic Satanic Abuse, the recalled memories of Michelle Smith incited the movement. In her husband’s book, *Michelle Remembers*, Smith documents memories of events recovered during therapy. These events included satanic rituals she believed she was forced to attend. Smith had allegedly been tortured, locked in cages, sexually assaulted, and the witness to several murders. This book became well-known and a best-seller, meaning it came to the forefront of the public’s thoughts. It made the public aware of accusations against Satanism. Another book, *The Satan Seller*, was just fuel on the fire. It is the account of a supposed satanic cult leader who led 1500 followers into the dessert for rituals. Accusations resulting from the movement included defecating on children, drowning and dismembering babies in front of the children, killing dogs and cats in front of the children, transporting the children to Mexico to be sexually abused by soldiers in the Mexican army, dressing as pumpkins and shooting children in the arms and legs, putting the children into a pool with sharks that ate babies; putting blood in the children’s Kool-Aid, cutting the arm or a finger off a gorilla at a local park, and exhuming bodies at a cemetery, forcing children to carry the bones (McRobbie 2014).

In the onset of fear, society becomes irrational. We overlook the facts and jump straight to conclusion. These claims are fair out of this world. It is rather absurd to believe people participate in these sort of rituals. Now it is understanble and not irrational to say some people are heinous enough to commit these crimes, but Ritualistic Satanic Abuse claimed thousands were involved (Taub and Lawrence 1993). We even just look at the word Satanism and we immediately think they worship evil and that’s wrong. They don’t worship evil. Satanist worship Satan because he is a symbol for the importance of the individual. In fact, Satanists don’t even believe in Satan (Virginia Common Wealth University). They do indeed do rituals, but the whole notion of sacrificing children is a stigma associated with the faith originating from an association with Satan. Society is jumping to unwarranted conclusions and, consequently, is again in retrogression, because we lack critical analysis as a grouping.

Public Scares as a whole are a cause for much of society’s setbacks. Ritualistic Satanic Abuse is a strong example of pseudoscientific claims suppressing individual rights and dampening critical thinking. Our choices are made with flawed evidence that vacantly support moral approaches to problem solving. What we need is a change in our ways. Human nature needs to change.

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