

Fountain of Youth
Surviving Institutional Child Abuse in the Troubled Teen Industry

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, privately owned and operated residential programs for troubled youth have been at the forefront of national discussion on institutional child abuse in state-sanctioned carceral facilities. Survivors and their advocates have argued that these programs should be regulated by state agencies and closed because they are harmful to residents and divert resources from effective treatment options. In opposition to the survivor movement stand owners, practitioners, and “tough on crime” politicians, who claim that that state intervention in the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI) would curtail effective treatment options for families, and in the case of faith-based programs, violate their constitutionally protected religious freedoms. Guided by the fields of Mad Studies and Critical Prison Studies, this research offers a political history of the TTI, focused on the faith-based residential facilities of Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain. It also draws on first-person interviews with three survivors of a faith-based bootcamp called Bethel Boys Academy, of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs to delineate how these survivors make sense of their experiences before, during, and after being held captive. I conclude by arguing that the TTI survivor movement and prison abolitionists should cooperate to dismantle white supremacist political structures and improve access to meaningful treatment options for vulnerable youth.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the survivors of institutional child abuse at Bethel Boys Academy, the troubled teen industry, and the greater US carceral system. It is also dedicated to their loved ones, activists, scholars, artists, and other advocates, who concern themselves with healing the trauma of survivors, eliminating its sources, and extending resources to vulnerable children.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AA: Alcoholics Anonymous
ASTART: Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic and Appropriate Use of Residential Treatments
BBA: Bethel Boys Academy
BBHC: Bethel Baptist Home for Children
BDU: Battle Dress Uniform
BAG: Bethel Academy for Girls
DHHS: Department of Health and Human Services
EPCA: Eagle Point Christian Academy
FCCF: First Century Christian Fellowship
GAO: United States Government Accountability Office
GCA: Gulf Coast Academy
IFB: Independent Fundamentalist Baptist
IRS: Internal Revenue Service
LEAA: Law Enforcement Assistance Act
LGAT: Large Group Awareness Training
NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health
NATSAP: National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs
OG: Oxford Group
POW: Prisoner of War
PVA: Pine View Academy
PT: Physical Training
SERE: Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape
SICCA: Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act of 2022
START: Special Treatment and Rehabilitation Training
TACCCA: Texas Association of Specialty Child Care Agencies
TC: Therapeutic Community
TCADA: Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse
WASP: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant
WCFA World's Christian Fundamentals Association
WWASP: World Wide Association of Specialty Programs
USAF: United States Air Force

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The idea of using “tough love” to reform troubled kids goes back at least as far as the Bible. Modern “tough love” ... began as a philosophy for dealing with drug problems and spread outward to other behaviors. It can be summed up as the notion that love and freedom must be made contingent on good behavior.

-Maia Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 2006, 16.

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT:

The beliefs and practices among self-identified Christians in the United States, who made up roughly 65% population in 2021, vary widely within and among denominations and practitioners.¹ Throughout the history of the US, Christian ideology has been both a vehicle of domination and resistance among the populace, steadily resulted in a complicated relationship between religious groups and secular state institutions informed by democratic processes. Especially, in a political context where women, queer folk, and people and people of color have continuously been denied the same legal rights and other social protections of affluent, Christian, heterocisgender, white men.²

According to the first amendment of the US constitution, those persons granted citizenship are legally protected from the tyranny of a state religion forced upon its constituents. Yet, while the number of people who identify as Christian is in the steep decline,³ non-Christians continue to subject to the political will of the religious majority,

¹ Gregory Smith, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated,” December 14, 2021, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

² Stephen C. Finley, Biko Mandela Gray, and Lori Matrice Martin, eds., *The Religion of White Rage: Religious Fervor, White Workers and the Myth of Black Racial Progress*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

³ Ibid. According to poll of the US population in 2021, the number of self-identified Christians has fallen by 12% in the past decade.

both though their electoral power and other forms of political influence in society. So, while this faith is not formally recognized as the state religion of the US, it deeply informs the moral, political, and onto-epistemological conception of medico-juridical normality;⁴ a settler-colonial context where the sociogenic principle⁵ must be considered to understand how this political structure is reproduced by carceral institutions.⁶

The torturous beliefs and practices associated with Christian discourses are not universal within nor unique to this faith, nor to other organized religions, and torture remains central to the reproduction of the modern political order of the US through the violent and pedagogical effects of its institutions and culture. Christianity and the modern sciences have always, almost hegemonically, constituted the disciplinary techniques in carceral facilities in this context. Although they are less often articulated as regimes of

⁴ Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely, *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 122, 124, 10, *Kindle*. Through the lens of decolonial scientia, Sylvia Wynter contends that the dominant conceptions of humanity in the West have been dominated by three descriptive statements, which are defined in contradistinction to racialized others. Most dominant between the 5th and 15th centuries AD, *homo religiosus* (Pre-Man) demarcates the “True Christian Self” from the “Untrue Christian Others”—those who had failed or refused to become Christians—and could thus be seen as pagans, idolaters, infidels, witches, and “Enemies-of-Christ” who should be enslaved and exterminated. Formed between the 15th and 19th centuries during the age of discovery, *homo politicus* (Man 1) represents the species as the “Rational Man” who consents to be governed by the modern state, as opposed to the “Subrational Others” who are unable or unwilling to submit to colonial power. Emerging between the 19th and 20th centuries, the *homo economicus* (Man 2) is a model of genetic selection deserved of wealth accumulation, which is constituted in relation to the “dysselected” and “undeserving” subhuman. Though distinct, these descriptive statements share overlapping moral, political, and onto-epistemological features, which are simultaneously embodied by the body politic of the contemporary US. Also see Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2014), *Kindle*.

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press Inc., 1967), 115, *Kindle*. Fanon claims an analysis of ontogeny alone is necessary to understand the political structure of colonial societies and the psychology of their population, because it ignores the politics of epidermalization. Therefore, departing from European humanism, his analysis is modified according to the sociogenic principle, which rests at the interstices of phylogeny and ontogeny.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Random House LLC., 2020), 123. Foucault speaks to the pedagogical dynamism of the prison cell, the power of which aims to discipline subjects whose ways of knowing and being depart from medico-juridical normality and Christian morality. He argues that this technology produces multiple subjectivities at once, where he contends that the prison cell is “the instrument by which one may reconstitute both *homo oeconomicus* and the religious conscience” in the modern world.

truth,⁷ the residential programs for so-called “troubled youth” that emerged in the twentieth century are no different. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) acknowledges the existence of hundreds of for-profit and non-profit residential programs in North America,⁸ which gross billions of dollars in profits annually from parental guardians and state agencies.⁹ The exact number is unknown, because they are not monitored in any unified manner at the federal level, there is “no commonly recognized definition for residential treatment programs,” nor “standard definitions for specific types of programs.”¹⁰ For the purpose of this dissertation, I borrow the definition of youth residential programs within the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI) according to the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2015:

a private entity that, with respect to one or more children who are unrelated to the owner or operator of the program, purports to provide treatment or modify behaviors in a residential environment, such as—(i) a program with a wilderness or outdoor experience, expedition, or intervention; (ii) a boot camp experience or other experience designed to simulate characteristics of basic military training or correctional regimes; (iii) a therapeutic boarding school; or (iv) a behavioral modification program.¹¹

Largely unregulated by the state and federal government, children are sent by either their guardians’ decree or a judge’s order after having been convicted of a crime.¹²

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 133. Foucault writes that “‘truth’ is linked, in a circular relation, with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and extends it. A regime of truth.”

⁸ Gregory D. Kutz and Andy O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs: Concerns Regarding Abuse and Death in Certain Programs for Troubled Youth* (Washington, DC, 2007), 4, Accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-08-146t>.

⁹ Maia Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2006), 29, *Kindle* 2020.

¹⁰ Kutz and O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*, 2.

¹¹ “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2016,” HR 3060, 2016.

¹² Kutz and O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*, 4.

While captive in “tough love” facilities, children of five to 18 years old are subjected to a variety of disciplinary techniques, rooted in biblical scripture and the science of behavior modification, designed to conform their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, to an ideal subjectivity. Aside from eradicating substance abuse issues, mental health conditions, learning disabilities, queer tendencies, criminal behavior, or general sinfulness, these “tough love” programs claim the power to instill desirable values in children. In the words of researchers for the GAO, “residential treatment programs provide a range of services, including drug and alcohol treatment, confidence building, military-style discipline, and psychological counseling for troubled boys and girls with a variety of addiction, behavioral, and emotional problems.”¹³

The owners of these facilities, the practitioners who implement their therapeutic approaches, as well as those who advocate for them, claim the purpose of their work is to protect society from dangerous children, improve their lives, and save their souls. Yet, evidence suggests not only are they ineffective at fulfilling their discursive promises, but they are conducive to severe psychological and bodily trauma in participants,¹⁴ and many children have even lost their lives.¹⁵ Furthermore, as is the case with other state-

¹³ Ibid, 1.

¹⁴ Szalavitz, Maia, *Help at Any Cost*, 322; Quoting National Institutes of Health State-of-the-Science Conference Statement, “Preventing violence and related health-risking social behaviors in adolescents,” October 13–15, 2004, <http://consensus.nih.gov/ta/023/youthviolenceDRAFTstatement101504.pdf>, p. 27. The National Institutes of Health has stated that programs that claim to reduce delinquency through “tough love” treatment “don’t work and there is some evidence that they may make the problem worse... Such evidence as there is indicates that ... boot camps, and other ‘get tough’ programs can provide an opportunity for delinquent youth to amplify negative effects on each other.” Also see Scott O. Lilienfeld, “Psychological Treatments that Cause Harm,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2, no.1 (2007): 53–70; Hal Arkowitz & Scott O. Lilienfeld. *Facts and Fictions in Mental Health*. Chichester, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.

¹⁵ Kutz and O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*.

sanctioned policing and prison regimes,¹⁶ their violent and pedagogical effects produce subjects who enact overlapping racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based, political structures conducive to the reproduction and expansion of racial capitalism.¹⁷ On the one hand, children who belong to social groups that are already vulnerable to “premature death”¹⁸ in the US are exploited by owners and practitioners of these programs for profit. And, on the other, because this white supremacist regime’s¹⁹ onto-epistemological production of the troubled teen is entangled with the state’s interlocking directorates and technologies,²⁰ including those of the Cold War,²¹ War on Crime, and War on Drugs.

¹⁶ Dylan Rodríguez. *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the US Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 11, 44-45; Alan Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 162. A contemporary iteration of “white supremacist regimes,” the neoliberal “prison regime” constitutes the “free” and “unfree” worlds by “exerting control over the symbolic constructs of a discourse of respectability and “authority.” This takes place “through the mediating material of the prisoner: the abstracted/projected figure and living embodiment of the captive compose an immediately accessible terrain for state occupation and symbolic “appropriation,” perhaps the most profound example of the prisoner’s essential fungibility.” In other words, as Feldman points out, prison regimes do not merely assert power on incarcerated people, but also deploy their bodies to generate power through their violent and pedagogical effects.

¹⁷ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism and the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 2, 9. In the foreword to *Black Marxism*, Robin D.G. Kelley uses term “racial capitalism” to describe how “the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.” While Marx argues that the historical trajectory of capitalism was objectively oriented by material political-economic conditions and the subsequent superstructure it exhibited, Robinson maintains that its development has been and continues to be structured through the West’s imagined conceptions of nationalism and racial differentiation that have developed over the preceding millennia; the “social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization and exchange.”

¹⁸ Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 27.

¹⁹ Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, 11. Rodríguez describes white supremacist regimes “organic (if not unique) to the United States—from racial chattel slavery and frontier genocide to recent and current modes of land displacement and (domestic/undeclared) warfare—are sociologically entangled with the state’s changing paradigms, strategies, and technologies of human incarceration and punishment.” Rather than affecting everyone its power touches and embodies equally; the violent and pedagogical effects of “tough love” programs represent a white supremacist process that enacts “a logic of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized “human” difference.”

²⁰ Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, 11.

²¹ See William Blum. *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2012). In this dissertation, the term ‘Cold War’ not only speaks to a state of heightened tensions between “capitalist” and “communist” regimes around the world in the

Though not all are for troubled teens, it is estimated that around 200,000²² children reside in more than 6000 congregate care facilities across the country²³ today, in which African Americans are significantly overrepresented.²⁴ About 50,000 of these children were enrolled by their legal guardians rather than placed there by the state, which pays around \$23 billion dollars annually to private programs to treat troubled youth, children in the foster care system, and/or youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities in congregate care.²⁵ In addition to funding the incarceration of those children who were court ordered to complete these programs, the federal government provides vouchers for public school counselors to send children who are determined to have discipline issues,²⁶ pays for refugee resettlement and child welfare agencies to send children in their care,²⁷ and companies like VisionQuest that are contracted to hold undocumented immigrant children in California and Arizona.²⁸

Today, some of the largest networks of residential programs for troubled teens are Sequel Youth & Family Services, Aspen Education Group, Family Help & Wellness, as

nuclear age, but also how these discourses were used to justify US neocolonial projects in the so-called third world.

²² Kutz and O'Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*, 1.

²³ "The Troubled Teen Industry," Breaking Code Silence, 2022, <https://www.breakingcodesilence.org/>.

²⁴ Shamini Ganasarah, Gene Seigel, and Melissa Sickmund, "Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care." National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2017, 3, https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NCJFCJ-Disproportionality-TAB-2015_0.pdf.

²⁵ "The Troubled Teen Industry," Breaking Code Silence, 2022, <https://www.breakingcodesilence.org/>; Cathy Krebs, "Five Facts About the Troubled Teen Industry," Americanbar.org, October 22, 2021, <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/practice/2021/5-facts-about-the-troubled-teenindustry/#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20between,placed%20privately%20by%20their%20parents.>

²⁶ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 266.

²⁷ "The Issue," Unsilenced, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.unsilenced.org/>.

²⁸ Zoie Matthew, "A For-Profit Firm Accused of Child Abuse Wants to Open a Center for Migrant Youth in Los Angeles," June 9, 2020, Accessed August 28, 2021, <https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/visonquest-arleta-detention-center/>.

well as those associated with the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP), which collectively reap hundreds of millions in profits from private and public sources. Despite being deeply integrated into the US carceral system, however, privately owned and operated residential programs for children are only required to be licensed by state-level education and child welfare agencies in 33 states and faith-based schools are in 23 states exempt from identifying themselves to the state education departments.²⁹ Various laws have been passed to regulate the TTI in California, Montana, Oregon, Utah, and Missouri, but they apply to only specific issues and are unevenly enforced. Further, faith-based schools are in many cases treated as separate entities, which has allowed loopholes for abusive programs to reinvent themselves and continue operating.

Following the release of the 2007 GAO report, since 2009 there have been numerous attempts to enact legislation that would place regulate the TTI, but all have consistently failed to pass through the senate.³⁰ Yet, after decades of funding from the federal government, thousands of annual reports of abuse, no evidence of their efficacy, over 350 documented deaths of residents,³¹ and untold levels of trauma and associated

²⁹ Tyler Kingkade, “New Missouri Law Enables State Officials to Shut Down Abusive Boarding Schools,” *NBC News*, July 14, 2021. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-missouri-law-enables-state-officials-shut-down-abusive-boarding-n1273861>.

³⁰ “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009,” HR 911, 2009; “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2015,” HR 3060, 2015; “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009,” SB 3031, 2016; “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2017,” HR 3024, 2017. This legislation was aimed at prohibiting the physical, psychological, and sexual, abuse of children in these institutions, including the use physical and chemical restraints, as well as, depriving them of food, water, clothing, shelter, and medical care. It also would create hotline to report abuse, web resources for parents, and civil penalties for practitioners who violate health and safety regulations.

³¹ Heather Vogell, “Unrestrained,” ProPublica, December 10, 2015, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.propublica.org/article/advoserv-profit-and-abuse-at-homes-for-the-profoundly-disabled>; “Victims of the Troubled Teen Industry,” 1000placesyoudontwanttobe, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://1000placesudont>

suicides, there are currently no institutional policies in place for their oversight at the federal level and few at the state level. Consequently, residents are vulnerable to institutional child abuse in these facilities, within and beyond the program structure, whose owners “take advantage of a deeply fragmented and ill-equipped regulatory scheme.”³² Not only through “dangerous cost-cutting practices,”³³ but also attracting clients by claiming to have “credentials in therapy or medicine that they did not have, leading parents to trust them with teens who had serious mental or physical disabilities requiring proper treatment.”³⁴ Therefore, suggesting that these programs are not only ineffective, but also harmful to participants, who are exploited by the people who own these enterprises as well as the people who are employed there.

II. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Some of the people who have survived privately owned and operated residential treatment facilities have formed a movement to end institutional child abuse in the TTI. So far, perhaps, the most notable win for the survivor movement in recent history has been the dismantling of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs (WWASP) in 2010, which until then was the largest and most well-known umbrella corporation of private TTI services. WWASP Survivors is an advocacy organization co-founded by Bill

wanttobe.wordpress.com/victims-of-the-troubled-teen-industry/; “The Silent Deaths of American Children,” Lathly Lothbrook (blog), Accessed June 9, 2022, <https://lathropybrook.com/tti-deaths/>.

³² “Desperation without Dignity: Conditions of Children Placed in For Profit Residential Facilities,” National Disability Rights Network, 54, Accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NDRN_Desperation_without_Dignity_October_2021.pdf.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Kutz and O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*, 13.

Boyles and Chelsea Filer, constituted of those who experienced institutional child abuse in WWASP affiliated programs and are living with the resulting trauma.³⁵

The three-pronged mission of this organization is to “raise awareness of the true dangers of WWASPs, advocate for those still being held and abused in WWASP programs, and to provide validation and support to survivors of WWASP programs.”³⁶ WWASP Survivors seeks to raise public awareness of the history of the troubled teen industry and the struggles of survivors. Aside from researching and documenting the controversies surrounding defunct programs, they attempt to discourage parental guardians from enrolling their children in contemporary programs displaying “red flags”³⁷ of institutional child abuse.³⁸ The organization supports survivors of WWASP residential programs, who are a marginalized group, by facilitating an online community through a network of online spaces where survivors can share their experiences in a manner conducive to healing and social transformation. Finally, WWASP Survivors advocates for those persons currently subjected to residential programs for troubled teens, by working with lawmakers to bring about comprehensive reform and increased regulation by state and federal agencies, as well as improving the availability of medical care and substance abuse treatment for children in the US.

In solidarity with past, present, and future, victims of the TTI, the purpose of this dissertation is to advance the three-pronged mission of WWASP Survivors and other

³⁵ “Legislative Policies,” WWASP Survivors, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/legislative-policies/>.

³⁶ “About WWASP Survivors,” WWASP Survivors, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/about-wwasp-survivors/>.

³⁷ “Red Flags,” WWASP Survivors, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/red-flags/>.

³⁸ “Legislative Policies.”

survivor-led advocacy organizations concerned with abolishing institutional child abuse. To achieve this objective, it focuses on the history and legacy of a Christian³⁹ bootcamp-style behavior modification program called Bethel Boys Academy (BBA), which operated in Lucedale, Mississippi, between 1994 and 2005. BBA is identified by WWASP Survivors as a “closed WWASP program”⁴⁰ because, on the one hand, the program’s practitioners in many ways incorporated the features of other WWASPs and was advertised by the latter’s marketing arm Teen Help LLC. And, on the other, because the compound was purchased by WWASP administrator Narvin Lichfield in 2006, who reopened under the name Gulf Coast Academy and further adopted his organization’s structure and techniques into the program.

To support the survivor movement, this dissertation uses a historical approach to shed light on the history of BBA and other programs that shaped its discourses and practices, as well as to elucidate the experiences of survivors before, during, and after being held captive there. This chapter proceeds to describe my positionality as the primary researcher and study background, and the research design. Chapter two delineates the history of Christian fundamentalism, the development of faith-based and scientific behavioral technologies and their implementation by the US government, as well as their use influence on the privately owned and operated programs in the TTI. It provides historical context and background information for the chapters that follow; including the fundamentalist ideals of Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain, the

³⁹

⁴⁰ “WWASP Programs,” WWASP Survivors, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/wwasp-programs/>.

therapeutic approach pushed by the “tough love” movement, and how a market was created by the neoliberal⁴¹ restructuring of the US economy.

The third chapter is a political history of the life and ministry of independent fundamentalist Baptist (IFB) reverend Lester Roloff, whose faith-based residential programs inspired his protégé, Reverend Herman Fountain, to establish numerous programs in Mississippi. This chapter not only describes Roloff’s discourses and corresponding treatment approach, but also discusses the public controversies surrounding his programs and his legal strategies when faced with allegations of criminal child abuse, which were later adopted by Fountain. Similar to the previous, the fourth chapter interrogates the history and legacy of BBA, focusing on its techniques and disputes as well as those of the other programs that existed on the Lucedale property between 1978-2007, alongside nearby Bethel Academy for Girls (BAG) from 1999-2005. By tracing the historical formation of BBA and its afterlife, this narrative describes the evolution of the program from a fundamentalist church school with its roots in the Roloff Homes, to a behavior modification boot camp affiliated with WWASP. This narrative illustrates how state agencies have responded to allegations of child abuse and attempted to quell them, which demonstrates the frailty and dangers of reforming privately owned and operated residential programs for children. By building on the previous chapters, it foregrounds and contextualizes the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers, situating them alongside those of other people who survived BBA and other TTI programs.

⁴¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2. Harvey defines neoliberalism as a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneur freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”

Chapters five and six tell the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers before, during, and after being held captive at BBA in the early-2000's. Whereas previous chapters focus on the institutions themselves and give brief accounts of numerous survivors' experiences, these two chapters offer detailed stories about how these children came to be incarcerated at BBA, what it was like to be there, and how they were affected the program after leaving. Constructed using a narrative inquiry approach, these stories not only offer details about BBA's practitioners in the early-2000's, the compound's architecture, and the therapeutic approach of the program, but also the political structure it enacted within and beyond the compound, and how these dynamics shaped the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of residents.

The final chapter offers an overview of the contemporary TTI survivor movement and provides some considerations for their strategies to end institutional child abuse in residential congregate care facilities. Through distinct and overlapping frames of analysis, chapters two through six offer unique insights into the history and politics of the TTI that support the mission of WWASP Survivors. By drawing on what is revealed from overlapping political histories of the TTI and the residential facilities founded by Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain, as well as the narratives of Leroy and the Tipps brothers, it speaks to the politics, disciplinary techniques, and efficacy, the "tough love" programs for children. This metanarrative situates the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers alongside those who survived Fountain's ministry, the Roloff Homes, the TTI, and the greater US carceral system. I argue that "tough love" programs cannot be reformed given their fundamentally traumatic nature, that their ongoing existence detracts resources from

effective treatments, and that ignoring these facts threatens to legitimate and further embed them into the US criminal justice system.

III. RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY AND STUDY BACKGROUND

As the primary researcher, I identify as a neurodivergent, White, straight, cisgender male, with US citizenship. I have earned undergraduate degrees in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Eastern Kentucky University. I subsequently completed a master's degree in Justice Studies from Arizona State University by writing a thesis exploring the efficacy of intentional living communities and the theoretical limits of Western utopian thought. During my time as a doctoral student in Justice Studies at Arizona State University, I received more advanced training from scholars of the Black Radical Tradition with decades of experience as instructors in higher education, political organizing, and academic research centering on radical social movements. While completing my degree, I facilitated convivial spaces focused on the arts, history, and humanities, at Perryville State Prison for women with an organization called Humanities Behind the Walls. Together, these experiences have heightened my understanding of what is at stake in the success of radical democratic organizing and research, as well as the predicaments and ways of protecting vulnerable populations in the process.

This research was inspired by conversations with Leroy, who first introduced me to the TTI by informally sharing stories with me about how he makes sense of his experiences before, during, and after being held captive at BBA. Disturbed and inspired as I was by the fragments of memory he shared with me about BBA, I wanted to understand and share his story, and learn more about this Christian carceral formation and

others like it. In the fall of 2016, I formally interviewed Leroy about how he makes sense of his experience at BBA, extending it in the following years. It was through this process that I realized the severe and widespread harm caused by BBA and the greater TTI, prompting me to continue this research with the intention of producing knowledge that serves survivors of institutional child abuse, prevents people from undergoing it, and promotes extending the availability of alternative treatments to vulnerable children.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN:

A. GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The guiding theoretical framework for this dissertation reflects Sarah Golightly's article "Troubling the 'Troubled Teen' Industry."⁴² As a survivor of a US-based therapeutic boarding school and Mad Studies⁴³ scholar, she "envisions psychiatrisation as a form of oppression, and psychiatrised people as marginalised members of society."⁴⁴ From this perspective, she describes two core observations about the current state of knowledge on privately owned and operated residential programs for troubled teens. On the one hand, that research on therapeutic boarding schools has "so far has largely

⁴² Sarah Golightly, "Troubling the 'Troubled Teen,' Industry: Adult Reflections on Youth Experiences of Therapeutic Boarding Schools," *Global Studies of Childhood* 10, no.1 (2020): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619900514>.

⁴³ Peter Beresford, "Foreword," in *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*, Eds. Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies and Geoffry Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2013), ix. Mad Studies disrupts Western medicalized models that "colonize, subvert, and overshadow other cultural and societal understandings" of people with mental illness, who have in many cases found this framework to be "damaging and unhelpful."

⁴⁴ Sarah Golightly, "Troubling the 'Troubled Teen,' Industry;" Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 23-24. This model reflects Foucault's analytic insight that "concrete systems of punishment" should not be studied through the "juridical structure of society alone." He states that in order to explore punishment beyond the meanings offered by official discourse, "we must... rid ourselves of the illusion that penalty is above all (in not exclusively) a means to of reducing crime" and explore modern punishment as a complex social function, a political tactic, as part of an "'epistemologico-juridical' formation," embedded within socio-historical power/knowledge structures.

centred practitioner knowledge as the source of expertise” due to Adultism⁴⁵ and Sanism,⁴⁶ which position troubled teens to be “without legitimate insight into their own experiences and as lacking the capacity to determine their needs.”⁴⁷ And, on the other, in order to address this epistemic injustice there is a need to “disrupt practitioners as the central authority on, and gatekeepers of, research on therapeutic boarding schools ... by centring students and former students ... as ‘experts.’”

By exploring the experiences of survivors of therapeutic boarding schools, many affiliated with WWASP, Golightly produced knowledge about the TTI that is useful for “redress[ing] power imbalances in what and how experiences of psychiatrisation are presented and narrativized.”⁴⁸ Upsetting the epistemology of practitioners, Golightly uses “the term ‘troubled teen’ to reflect a social phenomenon of labelling, rather than as an individualised pathological problem.”⁴⁹ In other words, rather than viewing them as objectively possessing emotional or behavioral abnormalities, “young people who have been psychiatrised and labelled as ‘troubled teens’ have socially transgressed sanist–adultist expectations of behaviour and emotionality.”⁵⁰ From this perspective, therapeutic boarding schools are traumatizing spaces where “young people become ‘troubled’

⁴⁵ Ibid, 57; Citing Brenda LeFrançois & Vicki Coppock, “Psychiatrised Children and their Rights: Starting the Conversation,” *Children & Society* 28, no.3 (2014): 165–171; Jennifer M. Poole, Tania Jivraj, Araxi Arslanian, et al. “Sanism, ‘Mental Health’ and Social Work/Education: A Review and Call to Action,” *Intersectionalities* 1, no.1 (2012): 20–36. In the field of Mad Studies, the term ‘sanism’ is “used to describe interpersonal discrimination as well as broader cultural, social and systematic subjugation of psychiatrised people.”

⁴⁶ Ibid; Citing Michael L. Perlin, “There Must Be Some Way out of Here: Why the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Is Potentially the Best Weapon in the Fight against Sanism,” *Psychology and Law* 20, no.3 (2013): 462–476. As Golightly puts it, ‘Adultism’ speaks “to the social oppression of young people and children and the sociocultural centring of adulthood.”

⁴⁷ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 55.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 55.

through a process of psychiatrisation, as their emotional health collides with the expectations of the sanist–adultist world.”⁵¹

Rather than understanding the existence of “troubling” behaviors to be a consequence of “internal mental health problem[s], Golightly asks us to consider how “experiences of oppression and adversity, such as economic inequality and interpersonal violence, contribute to the conditions which create emotional distress” in children living amidst “neoliberal renditions of racism,⁵² classism, ableism, heterocisgenderism, colonialism.”⁵³ This insight is important to consider because “emotional distress and psychiatrisation are social processes that are unequally distributed and responded to, depending on a multitude of factors including a person’s social strata.”⁵⁴ This intersectional analysis is especially critical when thinking about power and gender in relation to the troubled teen in a cultural-context saturated with Judeo-Christian values; not only because the parameters by which a child is considered troubled are different for girls and boys, but also because the ideal subjects that TTI practitioners aim to produce depart along the lines of gender. Although the guiding theoretical framework for this

⁵¹ Ibid, 58, 60, 61.

⁵² Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, 27. The way I use this term diverges from liberal-to-progressive conceptions of “racial discrimination,” “racial inequality,” or “neo-nazi vigilante extremism,” which characterize ongoing white supremacy as anomalies yet to be inevitably resolved by conquest of liberal progress, rather than the intentional outcome of human actors and the political systems they enact. Instead, it is based on Gilmore’s articulation of “racism” as “the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely connected political geographies.”

⁵³ Ibid, 57-58; Citing Jayasree Kalathil and Nev Jones, “Unsettling Disciplines: Madness, Identity, Research, Knowledge,” *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* 23, no.3-4 (January 2016): 183-188. DOI:10.1353/ppp.2016.0016; Marina Morrow and Julia Weisser, “Towards a Social Justice Framework of Mental Health Recovery,” *Studies in Social Justice* 6, no.1 (October 2012): 27-43. DOI:10.26522/ssj.v6i1.1067.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 57; Citing Luigi Esposito and Fernando M. Perez, “Neoliberalism and the Commodification of Mental Health,” *Humanity & Society* 38, no.4 (July 2014): 414–442. DOI:10.1177/0160597614544958; Suman Fernando, *Institutional Racism in Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology: Race Matters in Mental Health*, (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

research acknowledges how the TTI reproduces heterocisgenderist and patriarchal relations, systematic analysis of the topic falls outside the scope of this study dissertation, which requires further research as discussed in the conclusion.

Contrary to the discursive promises of practitioners to improve the lives of participants in residential programs for troubled teens, the vast majority of Golightly's participants described having had "negative" or "very negative" experiences while in captivity,⁵⁵ where they both covertly and overtly resisted their captors at every turn.⁵⁶ The traumatic effects of these experiences lingered after they re-entered their communities, resulting in "chronic anxiety, ongoing nightmares about the schools, feelings of anger towards family members, struggling to make friends and trust people, and a need for ongoing counselling."⁵⁷ Many claimed that they only were able to manage and overcome how the program affected them "academically, socially, and emotionally, by reclaiming their stories and sharing them with other people."⁵⁸

Some survivors have since being released "organised public awareness campaigns, written news articles, filed joint action lawsuits against the schools and lobbied the government to enforce industry reform" with organizations like WWASP Survivors.⁵⁹ Without the moral, political, and onto-epistemological intervention of TTI survivors, the dominant representation of these programs will continue to be dominated by their owners and the practitioners who work for them. Consequently, in line with the

⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁸ Golightly, "Troubling the 'Troubled Teen' Industry," 61; Citing Lucy Costa, Jijian Voronka, Danielle Londry, "Recovering our Stories: A Small Act of Resistance," *Studies in Social Justice* 6, no.1 (October 2012).

⁵⁹ "About WWASP Survivors."

objectives of WWASP Survivors, this project aims to raise awareness of institutional child abuse in residential programs for troubled youth, to support survivors by providing an outlet for their stories, and produce evidence that can inform policy.

B. DATA COLLECTION

Chapters three and four draw on data collected from the publications of journalists, reports issued by government agencies, court documents, a biography of Lester Roloff's life and ministry, and TTI survivor advocacy websites. This data speaks to the history and legacy of the ministries of Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain from a range of perspectives at different moments in the 20th-21st centuries. In addition to providing the viewpoints of Roloff and Fountain, it also includes commentary from survivors and their guardians, practitioners, law enforcement and court officials, politicians, journalists, community members, and others. Thus, offering a range of contradictory and overlapping perspectives on these privately owned and operated faith-based residential programs for children, which speak to their histories, relationship to the state, as well as the nature, efficacy, and social consequences, of their disciplinary techniques.

The data from chapters five and six was compiled from primary sources. Specifically, four semi-structured interviews with three survivors of BBA and five follow up discussions between 2016 and 2021. After asking a series of demographic questions, I asked each participant a series of questions concerning their experiences before, during, and after being held captive at BBA. Upon constructing their narratives based on

interview transcripts, the participants reviewed drafts of how I represented their experiences to ensure that they were accurately characterized.

C. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process for chapters three and four involved identifying key events across multiple secondary sources and then synthesizing the information as chronologically as possible into a historical narrative. While constructing the historical narratives of Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain's ministries, I offered departing descriptions of the people, places, and events, that are discussed, as well as explanations for the relationship between them, in order to offer a more sophisticated interpretation.⁶⁰ While elucidating these structures and processes, I was careful to allow the known facts tell these stories without making abstract assumptions about their relationship to one another that are not already made abundantly clear by the evidence. This is not to say that I aimed to produce a politically neutral story by synthesizing other peoples' accounts of events over time, but rather that the story reflects the content of the data being examined and how I made sense of their relationship to one another based on the available data.

The research conducted in chapters five and six used a narrative inquiry approach, which is a form of ethnography that emerged in the twentieth century that allows researchers to "inquire into experience, to inquire into the stories that we live and tell,

⁶⁰ Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no.1 (February 1984), 2-3. What distinguishes "fictional" from "historical" stories is that content takes priority over form in the latter. As White puts it, "the content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events invented by the narrator," which "implies that form in which historical events present themselves to a prospective narrator is found rather than constructed." Therefore, a historical narrative is ideal when it "adds nothing to the account of representation, but is rather a simulacrum of the structure and processes of real events."

that we listen and respond to, that we watch being lived around us, that we live out in our own experiences.”⁶¹ Whereas empirical research methods rely on structured tests and systems of analysis, this one welcomes “the messiness of ordering stories into narratives, a process that is as much guided by re-listening, intuition and note-taking as by more systematic methods of coding.”⁶² Rather than aiming to produce objective conclusions, “narrative research does not claim to represent the exact ‘truth,’ it aims for the “appearance of truth or reality.”⁶³ In this way, narrative inquirers concern themselves not with studying historical events objectively, but with meaning people give to what happened and its relationship to their present lives.

In constructing the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers, I sought to satisfy the “three dimensions of inquiry,” which include temporality, place, and sociality.⁶⁴ These two chapters are a patchwork of stories from across geographic locations, which speak to both the subjects’ understandings of themselves and how they imagined their relationships to other people over time before, during, and after captivity at BBA. In addition to describing participants’ “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions,”⁶⁵ these stories also speak to their understanding of the social forces

⁶¹ Jean Clandinin, Vera Caine, Sean Lessard, Janice Huber, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiries with Children and Youth* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 13.

⁶² Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, “Writing the Ethnographic Story: Constructing Narrative out of Narratives,” *Fabula* 59, no.1-2 (2018), 3. While traditional ethnographers in anthropology and sociology seek “to turn stories into data” through fieldwork and analysis, narrative inquiry acknowledges the role played by the researcher in the sampling and construction of the stories they produce.

⁶³ Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova, *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

⁶⁴ D. Jean Clandinin, Vera Caine, Sean Lessard, and Janice Huber, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiries with Children and Youth* (New York, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 3.

⁶⁵ F. Michael Connelly & D. Jean Clandinin, “Narrative inquiry,” in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, eds. Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, and Patricia B. Elmore (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum), 477-487.

that shaped them. After the interview recordings were transcribed using a naturalized approach, I familiarized myself with the documents and established a timeline of key events, before constructing coherent narratives and exploring their relationship to one another.

Through distinct and intersecting frames of analysis, chapters two through six engage the history and politics of the TTI. This metanarrative situates the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers alongside those who survived Fountain's ministry, the Roloff Homes, the TTI, and the greater US carceral system. At stake in this research is how the reader understands the troubled teen as a political subjectivity, the therapeutic approaches used to untrouble them, and the social consequences of privately owned and operated residential programs for troubled teens.

CHAPTER 2:

CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM, BEHAVIORIAL SCIENCE, AND THE RISE TROUBLED TEEN INDUSTRY AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENIUM

I. INTRODUCTION

The experiences of the people who survived Bethel Boys Academy (BBA) cannot be understood without interrogating the deep-rooted influence of evangelical¹ fundamentalism² on the psyche of the US body politic³ in the neoliberal age. This influence is specifically evident in their understanding of the relationship between the disciplinary management of pain and pleasure in the process of raising pious and law-abiding children. This chapter offers a review of relevant literature and analysis of the convergence of Christian fundamentalism, behavioral science, and the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI) at the turn of the millennium. The purpose is to familiarize the reader with

¹ Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard, *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 17. For the purposes of this dissertation, ‘fundamentalists’ should be understood as a subset of evangelicals. The term ‘evangelicalism’ refers to “a set of beliefs, behaviors and characteristic emphases on the broad Christian religion.” It is distinct from ‘fundamentalism,’ but since they share many overlapping characteristics, the two groups are often aligned politically in US politics. However, fundamentalists are less accepting of other Christian denominations who stray from their own interpretations of God’s will. Perhaps, the most significant distinction is that while fundamentalists believe that salvation occurs through one’s degree of adherence to a strict set of beliefs outlined in the bible, evangelicals believe that it comes through grace alone (*sola gratia*) when a person is “born again” through conversion.

² Michael O. Emerson, William A. Mirola, and Susanne C. Monahan, *Religion Matters: What Sociology Teaches Us About Religion in Our World* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 80, 88. The definition of “Fundamentalism” is deeply contested, but at its core the word describes a reaction to secularization and modernity; the opposite of syncretism. It is the “rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world.” For the purposes of this dissertation, the term ‘fundamentalism’ refers specifically to the political movement that began in the US during the early twentieth century. It is an attitude held by certain Christians: “a conservative strain of Protestantism that developed in the United States, roughly from 1870 to 1925.”

³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28. Foucault describes the “body politic” as “a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge.”

the fundamentalist ideals that were adopted by Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain in the proceeding chapters, which will help to make sense of the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers regarding their experiences before, during, and after being held captive at BBA.

Central to Western Christian thought is the belief that humans are subject to God's all-powerful will, but at the same time are personally responsible for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. If humans are inherently sinful by design and must suffer to comply God's divine mandates in order to escape eternal damnation, then it can be said that this spiritual entity is devoted to torturing human beings in this life and the next, especially given that it could have conceived a state permanent bliss. Since all of human suffering is torture by God's hand, which is assured to greatly intensify in the afterlife for those who refuse to comply with his will, this world view functions as a technology of governance that harnesses human misery and the desire to avoid it. The spiritual seeds of Christianity, which are conducive to enacting a political order on earth, have bloomed in discursive shades of a secular sort in the modern age, but their metalogical roots remain deeply entangled below the surface in the US.

Mirroring how political relationships in Western Christendom are informed by the population's conviction in Christ's return and the promise of eternal life in heaven, the

modern state⁴ (in all of its forms)⁵ produce subjects through the “the twinning of faith and prophesy.”⁶ In other words, whereas Western Christian ideology functions by demanding faith in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and redemption of the pious; modern “developmentality”⁷ demands faith in the idea that “the successive stages of human history”⁸ will “draw out the potentialities of humanity, bringing about the end of history, the end of struggles, and the achievement of perfectibility.”⁹ Like two spirits possessing the same body, battling for dominance while collaborating to exorcise other essences, the outcome is an “American religio-necropolis;” a white supremacist nation state

⁴ Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund Inc., 2005); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London, UK: Penguin Publishers, 1968); Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, 1795 (London, UK: Bibliolife, 2009); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). The modern social contract theory developed amidst the Eighty Years War and the Thirty Years War. In 1625, Hugo Grotius published his influential book titled *De Jure Belli Ac Pacis*, which resurrected classical Greek ideas and the concept of “natural law” and the idea that society should be ordered by law rather than pure force. His ideas contributed to the formation of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which formed the foundation of international state system. Various forms of this theory developed during the 17th and 18th centuries in the work of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, which would later inspire the influential work of John Rawls in the neoliberal age.

⁵ Here I am speaking to the labeling of states as “capitalist,” “communist,” or “socialist,” depending upon how the relationship between the market and state are formally organized and their official discourses.

⁶ H.L.T. Quan, *Growth Against Democracy: Savage Developmentalism in the Modern World* (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2012), 24.

⁷ Ibid, 25: Citing Martin Jones, Rhys Jones, and Michael Woods, *An Introduction to Political Geography Space, Place, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 220. Extending Foucault’s conception of “governmentality,” or “the organized practices, including techniques and strategies that render subjects governable,” Quan articulates developmentality as a regime of truth that defines the “developed” (normative human) in relation to the “undeveloped” (abnormal sub-human) and the “undevelopable” (non-human).

⁸ Ibid; quoting Ronald L. Meek, *Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 16. The “Franco-Scottish view of socio-historical development,” which was introduced by French physiocrats in the 18th century and became deeply influential in the field of political-economy in the following centuries, theoretically represents an objective explanation of how all societies have and will inevitably become modern over time. According to this model, “Development should be regarded as proceeding through four normally consecutive stages, each based on a particular “mode of subsistence”— viz., hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. To each stage there corresponded different ideas and institutions to property; to each their corresponded different ideas and institutions relating to government; and in relation to each, general statements could be made about the state of manners and morals, the social surplus, the legal system, the division of labor, etc.”

⁹ Quan, *Growth Against Democracy*, 24.

impregnated with a civil religion that “requires,” “necessitates,” and “normalizes” the genocide of peoples deemed undevelopable¹⁰ and non-Christian through its institutions and culture of white supremacy.¹¹

Although Christian cosmology radically departs from the world described by medico-juridical discourses, both presume that God’s will and political-economic development command all human activity, but also that people are moral agents who can be molded in a disciplinary environment where compliance is incentivized and disobedience is punished.¹² In other words, both Western Christendom and the modern world are organized by racial capitalism’s terms of order;¹³ an eschatological view of

¹⁰ Ibid, 11, 15. Quan refers to this regime of truth as savage development, which “prioritizes aggressive capitalist expansion and the securing and justification of antidemocratic social and political forms (i.e., antidemocracy).” To illuminate this formation’s discourses, practices, and consequences in the twentieth century, she reconstructs the “imperial archive of development thinking,” including the discipline of political economy that emerged had in the 17th and 19th centuries alongside the other human sciences. Homo economicus is the etiological object from which modern the “ideational structure of modern thought” is abstracted; a conception of humanity articulated in modern social contract theory and the Franco-Scottish view of socio-historical development. With capitalism and the modern state situated the peak of human achievement, these mythologies reinforce belief that societies naturally evolve into a superior mode of relations as a consequence of the population’s degree of independent development.

¹¹ Stephen C. Finley, Biko Mandela Gray, and Lori Matrice Martin, “Race Religion, and Labor Studies: The Way Forward,” in *The Religion of White Rage: Religious Fervor, White Workers and the Myth of Black Racial Progress*, Finley, Gray, Martin, 229.

¹² Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 15; Cedric J. Robinson. *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1980), 84. Davis describes how prisons function as a racial where she states that: “The prison system naturalizes the violence that is enacted against racial minorities by institutionalizing a viciously circular logic: blacks are in prisons because they are criminals; they are criminals because they are black, and if they are in prison, they deserve what they got.” Just as the violent and pedagogical effects of policing and prison regimes uphold white supremacy in the US, Christianity links power and discourse through its institutions. Robinson speaks to this political dynamic where he states that: “Christianity was protected by its institutional development. The institutional structure, in turn, was protected by the doctrine of revealed truth, the Church’s version of objective reality. The irrationality of the Church was screened by its authority.”

¹³ Robinson, *Terms of Order*, 144, 113, 128. Cedric J. Robinson describes racial capitalism’s terms of order as the ideological “synthesizing” of the “physis, kratos, and arche” or “Nature, rule, and leadership.” The teleological model of modern progress is secular in nature, but “this fusion of aeonic-cyclical and historical-chronological time reckoning has come down to us as the story of salvation, in which myth and history form an undifferentiable whole, running from the beginning of creation through the Old and New Testaments down to the end of time.” Between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD, “Jewish historical experience crystallized from its conditions of possibility in the messianic paradigm which in mix

reality that grants authority to racial regimes¹⁴ on the basis that their subjection will manifest a utopia through the exploitation and annihilation of non-white and non-Christian peoples. Therefore, reflecting the political structure of US today, which is simultaneously reproduced by the population's consent to be governed by religious and secular regimes, as well as their subjugation to violent institutions and culture.

As was previously mentioned, the torturous beliefs and practices associated with Christianity are not universal within nor unique to this faith, and they have remained central to the reproduction of the religion and the modern state. In the US, it has long been the case that “parents have a right, and a duty under some religious persuasions, to discipline their children as they see fit,” that corporal punishment has been legal in every state because the “rights of children ... fall somewhere between those of protected citizen and property.”¹⁵ For parental guardians who hold fundamentalist convictions, at stake in maintaining their integrity is not only the eternal damnation or salvation of their own souls in the afterlife, but also those of children they are responsible for raising in accordance with God's will. Since the belief that suffering produces “higher levels of moral or spiritual development” is “very much part of the American Judeo-Christian

with the penetration of Greek thought brought forth the Christian expression of political society as the instrumentation through which men could achieve experiential and transcendental order.”

¹⁴ Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), xii; James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes from a Native Son* (New York, NY: Random House Books, 1961), 82. Within a colonial context, Robinson articulates dominant regimes of truth as “racial regimes,” or “constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for relations of power.” The political aesthetics of this phenomenon are exemplified in Baldwin's writings, where he describes how technologies racial segregation in the US “allowed white people, with scarcely any pangs of conscience whatever, to create, in every generation, only the Negro they wished to see.”

¹⁵ Wanda K. Kohr, “Still Shackled in the Land of Liberty: Denying Children the Right to be Safe from Abusive “Treatment,” *Advances in Nursing Science* Vol. 32, no.2 (June 2009), 179. DOI:1b0.1097/ANS.0b013e.3181a3b16f.

ethic,”¹⁶ a market for treatments that discursively articulate America’s children as morally depraved and capable of redemption through extreme discipline was attractive to parents concerned with correcting undesirable thoughts and behaviors. Especially in the era of neoliberalism, a particularly competitive environment¹⁷ where people who are labeled as criminal, learning disabled, or mentally ill are stigmatized and often discriminated against.

As authoritarian regimes around the world were experimenting with brainwashing¹⁸ technologies to advance their geopolitical interests in the mid-twentieth century amidst the Cold War, there was in the US “a widespread public interest in ... whether people’s beliefs, behavior, and even their personalities could be changed by controlling their environment and the rewards and punishments it delivered.”¹⁹ The TTI swelled alongside the expansion of the US criminal justice system and the deinstitutionalization²⁰ of the state’s mental health services, “at a time in which crime was seemingly at an all-time high” and parents feared both criminalization and the

¹⁶ Ibid, 178; Murray A. Strauss and Denise A. Donnelly, *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (Minneapolis, MN: Lexington Books, 1994).

¹⁷ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 10, 109. As a technology of governance, as Brown puts it, “neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic.” During the process of “economization,” the state and citizenry are transformed in both “identity and conduct, from figures of political sovereignty to figures of financialized firms.” And in turn, the citizen subject’s freedom is diminishingly defined by their relationship to the state, as they are converted into individual “human capitals” in competition with one another in a global market as laborers and consumers.

¹⁸ Timothy Melley, “Brainwashed! Conspiracy Theory and Ideology in the Postwar United States,” *New German Critique*, no.103 (2008): 147, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27669224>; Quoting Edward Hunter, “Brain-Washing’ Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of Communist Party,” *Miami Daily News*, September 24, 1950. The term “brainwashing” first appeared in this 1950 newspaper article that was published by CIA-backed journalist named Edward Hunter three weeks after the start of the Korean War, where it was used to describe China’s ability to “change a mind radically so that its owner becomes a living puppet—a human robot—without the atrocity being visible from the outside.”

¹⁹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2006), 133. *Kindle*.

²⁰ Liat Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 112.

influence of cosmopolitan culture.²¹ In response, disciplinary programs rooted in fundamentalism and behavior modification were instituted in residential facilities for adults and children to destroy the pathologized features of participants and instill positive ones.

To elucidate how this conjuncture of forces enabled the rise of the TTI, this chapter begins by introducing the early years of fundamentalism at the start of the twentieth century, as well as, how their discourses shaped the history, politics, and culture of the US. The first section discusses the history and practices of Frank Buchman's ministry and how it inspired the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to establish their own disciplinary programs, which became deeply integrated into the US criminal justice system.

The second section describes how Chuck Dederich formally integrated the principles of behavior modification into the AA's therapeutic model when he established Synanon in the 1958. It explains how the scientific discourses of behaviorism and their application by authoritarian regimes in carceral institutions around the world during the Cold War. The story moves on to explain how the principles of behavior modification and AA were in combined by the founder of Synanon, Chuck Dederich, whose therapeutic approach was quickly employed in state-sanctioned carceral facilities across the US, including the TTI. This section presents evidence and illustration of how Synanonian therapy came to be implemented in early forms of residential programs for troubled youth. It begins by discussing how fears of non-White youths in the White

²¹ Tabitha Echevarria, "The Effects of WWASPs Institutionalizing the Lives of Troubled Teens: A Retrospective Qualitative Analysis," Dissertation (Widener University, 2019), 1; Citing J. Healey, *Crime and Justice* (Rozelle, NSW: Spinney Press, 2001).

imaginary fueled the expansion of the US criminal justice system in the 1960's, which allocated additional funding from the US government to experimental drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs like Daytop Village and Phoenix House. The discussion turns to the history of the earliest iterations of residential programs for troubled teens called CEDU and Élan School, before discussing the rise and fall of notorious The Seed program.

The next section engages the convergence of White evangelical fundamentalism and the “tough on crime” movement in 1960's-70's, which fueled the expansion of the TTI. Before and after Synanon became recognized as a religion by the federal government, there were radical changes in the organization's mission, political structure, and use of violence. Around this time, Synanon's Santa Monica community began facilitating a residential youth bootcamp program, where children convicted of crimes could be court ordered to attend, and the founder was incarcerated for ordering an assassination of a political opponent.

The third section describes how The Seed was reborn in Straight Incorporated, which exploded in influence alongside the expansion of the criminal justice system in the 1980's; because its discourses and practices were consistent with Christian morality, as well as, the US government's directives in Cold War, War on Crime, and War on Drugs. After this section engages the controversies and legacy of Straight Inc., it delineates the rise and fall of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs (WWASP) and its afterlife, before during, and after, BBA was affiliated with the organization.

Finally, the chapter concludes by laying out the overarching narrative discussed in the previous sections. In addition to laying out a rich and complex historical

representation of the US carceral system at the height of its global power, this chapter offers insights into the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture. In the chapters that follow, the stories of the fundamentalist ministries and the stories of survivors fit within distinct and overlapping segments the geo-temporal context discussed in this one. The purpose is, through a wide frame, to offer necessary details surrounding each of these scales of analysis, which will foreground these stories, draw their connections to the surface, and situate the struggles of survivors within the movement to abolish the TTI and improve access to effective treatments.

II. FUNDAMENTALISM AND ADDICTION TREATMENT IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

This section explains the history and theology of the early fundamentalist movement and how it has shaped the meaning and treatment of addiction and substance abuse through OG and AA. The dominionist Christian cosmology of the crusades in north Africa²² and internal colonization²³ of Europe, oriented Great Britain's colonial projects around the world, including the enslavement and genocide of indigenous peoples and kidnapped Africans in the Americas. In the outcome of the counterrevolution of 1776,²⁴

²² Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 11, *Kindle*. The encounters between European Christians and Muslim peoples from Northern Africa were both common and culturally significant throughout history, largely because of the crusades between the 7th and 13th centuries. In turn, according Bethencourt, "phenotype features, forms of dress, and/or hairstyles linked to religious beliefs became the obvious criteria for identification- the first step in the assessment of different peoples."

²³ See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism and the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

²⁴ Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 240. While Christian Europeans have all shared a self-prescribed mission to expand God's kingdom to furthest corners of the earth, the colonization of North America has been fraught with fierce competition between Catholics and Protestants

the US was established as a nation of WASP²⁵ men seeking to expand Western Christendom and amass vast wealth by exploiting dark-skinned non-Christian peoples associated with Islam, Satan, and the mark of Cain.²⁶

Following the Civil War, however, those who sided with the US federal government²⁷ and those with the former confederacy²⁸ disagreed on whether the country still had the same structure envisioned by its founders. In response to northern incursions of cosmopolitan culture, political and economic systems, as well as the newfound competition from free Black workers, Southern WASPs mobilized in the post-reconstruction era through both legal means²⁹ and extrajudicial terrorist campaigns

with complicated allegiances to European states. This struggle has shaped the political, cultural, and economic architecture of the US since it was established by the colonial bourgeoisie, who sought national independence to protect the security and profitability of transatlantic slave trade and plantation economy from regulation by the metropole and burgeoning rebellions of indigenous peoples and kidnapped Africans. Also see Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 27.

²⁵ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction*, 27; Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*, 240.

²⁶ Genesis 4:9-27, 4:15 (King James Version). The “mark of Cain” has its roots to the story of Noah, when his son Ham was cursed by God for encouraging his brothers to stare upon their father’s naked body as he lay unconscious and intoxicated. After Noah awoke, he stated “Cursed be Canaan; a servant and servants he be to his brothers.” Since the Ham’s name is translated in Hebrew as “dark” or “black” and Cain had been cursed with a black mark for betraying his righteous brother, the association was by some interpreted as the divinely appointed right to enslave to perpetually enslave the dark-skinned peoples of Africa represented as the Canaanites. Also see L.A. Newby, *Jim Crow’s Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 89-90.

²⁷ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” in *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, ed. Lionel Caplan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 180. For Black Southern Baptists and many northern evangelicals who “considered their faith to be the normative American creed,” the defeat of the confederacy “seemed evidence of God’s endorsement of the sacred character of the union and constitution.”

²⁸ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11, 13. In the case of WASPs living in the former confederacy, the union’s military occupation by and their enforcement of federal policies shaped by northern Protestant heretics, Catholics, and African Americans, were contrary to “intention of the drafters of the constitution,” who had envisioned that the “central government” be “subordinate to the states” and their distinct religious character.

²⁹ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2006). The convict leasing system grew quickly as means to recapture freed Black people, often through making fraudulent claims, and subject them to slavery as is permitted by the 13th amendment.

orchestrated by vigilante groups.³⁰ At the turn of the century, amidst a national resurgence in the Ku Klux Klan, the fundamentalist movement spawned as “a discernible pattern of religious militancy which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors.”³¹

The significance of the word “fundamentalism” has since spread “beyond its original matrix” to describe other religious and even secular political movements,³² but it “originated in a very specific theological context of early 20th-century Protestant America.”³³ Leading up to the first World War, like minded figures to the Southern Baptist minister William Bell Riley,³⁴ also known as “the Grand Old Man of Fundamentalism,” were calling for a return to foundational Christian values threatened by modern incursion. On the one hand, this movement was framed around their belief that

³⁰ Comer Vann Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65, 80; Comer Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 211; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 85-87. Aside from the political and economic pressures of federalism, Southern WASPs established the convict leasing system and Jim Crow laws on the discursive basis that Black people were cursed by the mark of Cain, that the former confederacy was blessed by God, and white supremacy is God’s will.

³¹ Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalism Around the World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 17.

³² David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood, “Introduction,” in *Fundamentalism Perspectives on a Contested History*, eds. David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 3. Since the word has extended beyond its original use, “it is helpful to distinguish ‘global fundamentalism’ from ‘historic fundamentalism,’ which is specific to American Protestantism.” The emergence of global fundamentalism was “primarily triggered by the so-called Islamic revival of the 1970s and the Iranian Revolution in 1979.” Also see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 250.

³³ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

³⁴ William Bell Riley, “The Jew and Communism,” October 18, 1935, University of NorthWestern St. Paul: Bernsten Library Collection, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://cdm16120.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/riley/id/4894>. Riley and other fundamentalists claimed that communism was a global conspiracy controlled by an atheistic Jewish cabal that was degrading the character of churches and US government institutions.

“liberal theology and the ‘higher criticism’ school of Biblical studies were working together to reduce the supernatural and miraculous elements of Christianity in order to appeal to what was taken to be the mind of the modern scientific world.”³⁵ And, on the other, they were critical of the “replacement of concern with personal salvation and righteousness by a desire to improve the social and political world,”³⁶ arguing that “if individuals were ‘saved,’ the world inadvertently improved.”³⁷

The convictions that came to define fundamentalism had been central the core of evangelical Christianity since the first Great Awakening, but the term came to describe a specific movement that is widely considered to be named after a series of essays titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*³⁸ that were published between 1910 and 1915.³⁹ Edited by conservative Protestant leaders like Rueben Torrey, Amzie Clarence Dixon, Louis Meyer, and Robert E. Speer, these pamphlets at their core “admonished Christians to reject heretical ideas,⁴⁰ cling to the truths that were set forth in the bible, and dedicate themselves to disseminating those truths throughout the world.”⁴¹ The

³⁵ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 179.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Rueben Archer Torrey, Amzie Clarence Dixon, George Campbell Morgan, et al., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* Vol. I-IX (Kerry, IE: CrossReach Publications, 2022); Daniel Hoffman Martin, George Osborne Troop, Thomas Boston, et al., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* Vol. X (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing, 1910); Thomas Whitelaw, Dyson Hague, and Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* Vol. XI (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing, 1910); Munhall, Leander Whitcomb, Stone, John Timothy, and Charles Gallaude Trumball, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* Vol. XII (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing, 1910).

³⁹ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 179; Ruthven. *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction*, 21.

⁴⁰ Catherine A. Lugg, “Reading, Writing, and Reconstructionism: The Christian Right and the Politics of Public Education,” *Educational Policy* 14, no.5 (November 2000): 623-624, DOI:10.1177/0895904800014005006. Fundamentalists were particularly critical of Catholicism and Mormonism, as well as late 19th century scholarship suggesting that the bible was written by “various and largely unknown authors who provided contradictory accounts of events.”

⁴¹ David Harrington Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920’s and 1930’s,” in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, eds. David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 2014), 19.

fundamentalist movement gained steam during the first World War, culminating in 1919 when “six thousand people assembled in Philadelphia to take part in the creation of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA).”

The all white men of the WCFA shared convictions that at least three signs of the end times prophesied in the bible were appearing before them and it was more necessary than ever to be faithful in Christ.⁴² First, they viewed looming threat of another great war as fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in the book of Matthew, which suggests that the apocalypse would be preceded by “wars and rumors of war.”⁴³ Second, they viewed the capture of Palestine of the British in 1917, who declared it the Jewish homeland, as evidence of the forthcoming Armageddon. Third, fundamentalists contended that the establishment of the League of Nations would result in the rise of “a charismatic world leader who was actually the Antichrist,”⁴⁴ as described in Daniel 11:36⁴⁵ and Revelations 19:15.⁴⁶

In the face of the apocalypse, the WCFA was led by men who “believed many of America’s denominations included ministers and seminary professors who had rejected the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.”⁴⁷ They “hoped that the WCFA would protect Christians against the baneful influence of such men” who were believed to be “a terrible threat to the cause of Christ.”⁴⁸ Members of the WCFA “strove to live their lives

⁴² Matthew Avery Sutton, “The Day Christian Fundamentalism Was Born,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 2019, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/25/opinion/the-day-christian-fundamentalism-was-born.html>.

⁴³ Matthew 24:6 (King James Version).

⁴⁴ Sutton, “The Day Christian Fundamentalism Was Born.”

⁴⁵ Daniel 11:36 (King James Version).

⁴⁶ Revelations 19:15 (King James Version).

⁴⁷ Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920’s and 1930’s,” 19.

⁴⁸ Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920’s and 1930’s,” 19.

in accord with the truths revealed in the Bible, and they endeavored to convince others that ignoring those truths was a dangerous thing to do.”⁴⁹ In other words, they were Christians “who refused to accept the new thinking. They continued to insist that the Bible was the word of God, that miracles really happened, that unless one had experienced religious conversion one was destined for an actual hell, and so on.”⁵⁰ Binding them together in their convictions, participants in this event signed a statement that “affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, the inerrancy of the Christian scriptures, the virgin birth, Christ’s substitutionary atonement for humankind’s sins, the physical resurrection of Christ, and the imminent return of Christ to earth to inaugurate a thousand-year reign of peace.”⁵¹

While those persons who identified as fundamentalists began as a singular movement, “as it became clear that the majority of Protestants would not be diverted from their apostate ways, the fundamentalists withdrew to form their own conservative Protestant denominations.”⁵² One example of such an off-shoot was the ministry of a Lutheran Priest named Frank Buchman, who was drawing on fundamentalist writings to develop a faith-based approach to improve the world through the moral repair of individuals. After having a spiritual experience,⁵³ Buchman evangelized throughout Britain for several years before formally instituting these ideas in 1921 through an organization he founded called the First Century Christian Fellowship (FCCF). Focused

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 179.

⁵¹ Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920’s and 1930’s,” 19.

⁵² Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 180.

⁵³ “Our Story,” Initiatives of Change, Accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.iofc.org/en/our-story>.

The Pennsylvania native claimed his approach was rooted in the divine knowledge he acquired during a spiritual experience he had while participating in a ritual Keswick, England, in 1908, when he felt himself fully surrender to God and realized that “moral clarity is the prerequisite for building a just society.”

on alcoholism and other moral issues, the FCCF “sponsored house parties, and practiced a program which included prayers, confession of wrongs, seeking guidance, and making restitution, and a life changing outreach to others.”⁵⁴

Contrary to the “socioeconomic analyses of suffering championed by Social Gospel and other more liberal groups of the day,” at the center of the OG’s individual and social approach was the fundamentalist “belief that human suffering is caused by individual sinfulness” which can only be overcome through “confession, accepting individual responsibility for one’s actions, and complete surrender of the ego to God.”⁵⁵ People who perfectly conformed to his ideal model of spiritual morality through these methods were understood as those who had fallen under “God control,” or the “superhuman power” that is “needed to change the thinking of the ordinary man and those who lead, which transcends class, party, faction, and nation.”⁵⁶ As will be discussed in this chapter, some of Buchman’s followers would establish AA, which drew heavily on the former’s discourses and practices but replaced the language of God Control with submission to a higher power.

Having long supported prohibition, the fundamentalist movement quickly grew in the south during the 1920’s through their dual campaign to unseat modernists from positions of authority and prevent the teaching of evolutionary biology in public schools.⁵⁷ The movement was relatively unknown to the US population early on, but it

⁵⁴ T. Willard Hunter and Mel B, “AA’s Roots in the Oxford Group,” Accessed May 30, 2022, <http://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/aas-roots-in-the-oxford-group-mel-b/>.

⁵⁵ Susan Sered and Maureen Norton-Hawk, “Whose Higher Power? Criminalized Women Confront the “Twelve Steps,” *Feminist Criminology* 6, no.4 (October 2011): 312, DOI:10.1177/155708511420557.

⁵⁶ Frank N.D. Buchman, *Remaking the World: The Speeches of Frank N.D. Buchman* (London: Blandford Press, 1955), 111-112.

⁵⁷ Watt, “Fundamentalists of the 1920’s and 1930’s,” 22.

drew national attention through media representations during what became known as the Scopes monkey trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, when a biology teacher named John Scopes was tried by a fundamentalist⁵⁸ prosecutor⁵⁹ for charges related a state law banning the teaching of evolution in public schools.⁶⁰ The law was upheld and the defendant was not convicted on a technicality, but the modern sciences began leaking into the curriculum of public schools, fundamentalists started establishing their own educational institutions, including colleges and private schools for children throughout the Southern US. However, Buchman's ministry would have little influence in this context until the following decades, when the morality of the modern world was challenged by a conjuncture of political and economic crises.

Following Buchman's visit to South Africa in 1928, to evangelize with a group of students from Oxford University, the name of FCCF was changed to the Oxford Group (OG). Soon after, Buchman's theology was formally expressed in the "Four Absolutes" of morality; honesty, unselfishness, purity and love.⁶¹ The embodiment of which, he claimed, would save the souls of individuals and their personal conduct would enact a global Christian utopia. Simply put, this is a moral framework for achieving humanity's

⁵⁸ Ronald L. Numbers, "The Creationists," in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, eds. Martin E. Marty and Walter de Gruyter (New York, NY: K.G. Sauer, 1993), 255; Citing T. T. Martin, *Hell and the High School: Christ or Evolution, Which?* (Kansas City, KS: Western Baptist Pub. Co., 1923), 164-165. One fundamentalist who worked with Riley, T.T. Martin felt so agreed with this issue he argued, as expert on the history of science and medicine Ronald L. Numbers put it, that: "the German soldiers who killed Belgian and French children with poisoned candy were angels compared with the teachers and textbook writers who corrupted the souls of children and thereby sentenced them to eternal death."

⁵⁹ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction*, 26. The prosecutor was a democrat and populist named William Jennings Bryan, who reiterated the concerns of fundamentalists at WCFA when he condemned Scopes on the basis that "German militarism, the ultimate cause of the First World War, had been a by-product of Darwin's theory of natural selection combined with Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas about the human Will to Power."

⁶⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁶¹ "Our Story," Initiatives of Change.

accordance with God's will.⁶² The Four Absolutes were drawn from the writings of Buchman's mentor Henry Wright,⁶³ who reduced Jesus' teachings in the bible to these four standards. Wright had derived his ideas from Robert E. Speer's book *The Principles of Jesus*,⁶⁴ who was also a major contributor to *The Fundamentals*. So, while Buchman's ministry is not typically associated with the fundamentalist movement in North America, his discourses, strategies, and objectives, are deeply entangled in many ways.

Even as they "attracted less press attention" in the 1930's, fundamentalists continued "working to create social institutions that would permit them to reproduce their own culture sheltered from modernizing influences," and began establishing churches, colleges, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and eventually television programs.⁶⁵ Throughout this decade, with "rise of the Nazi party and Stalinists," the "optimism about human nature" and "self-righteous idealism" of liberal WASPs in the US "collapsed" to the advantage of the fundamentalist movement.⁶⁶ Largely because of their anti-communist sentiments, fundamentalists characterized Franklin D. Roosevelt as the Antichrist, "if not "consciously or unconsciously executing the Antichrist's conspiratorial plans," for his passage of the New Deal at the peak of the Great Depression.⁶⁷

⁶² Garth Lean, *Frank Buchman, A Life* (London: Constable & Robinson, 1985).

⁶³ Henry Burt Wright, *The Will of God and a Man's Life Work* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018).

⁶⁴ Robert E. Speer, *The Principles of Jesus: Edited & Revised* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

⁶⁵ Bruce, "The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society," 180.

⁶⁶ Eugene Joseph Dionne Jr., *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics After the Religious Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 31.

⁶⁷ Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157.

The OG grew in popularity among the middle and upper classes of Britain and the US during the 1930's-1940's, largely because Buchman opposed labor organizing⁶⁸ and atheistic-communism; on the basis that Jesus is world's spiritual savior and he favored the powerful rather than the oppressed. However, the organization also faced growing criticism⁶⁹ from the liberals and leftists due Buchman's pro-fascist sentiments and association with the Nazi party.⁷⁰ Additionally, medical understandings of substance abuse and addiction were emerging that raised questions about the efficacy of a purely faith-based approach, leading to the rise of AA and experiments in scientific experiments in behavior modification.

On June 10, 1935, a few months after Buchman accompanied Herman Göring to the 1934 Nuremberg Rallies,⁷¹ AA was founded in Akron, Ohio, by Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, who were both members of the OG. Wilson had been attending Oxford Group meetings at the Calvary Church Rescue Mission in New York City for several years previously, which were led by the head of the US OG headquarters by an episcopal priest named Samuel Moor Shoemaker. Despite attending these meetings, however, the OG's therapeutic approach failed to cure Wilson's alcoholism and when his health was reached a state of critical decline he sought out alternatives. During his third stay at the Charles B. Towns Hospital for Drug and Alcohol Addictions in 1934, the hospital's

⁶⁸ Labor Correspondent, "Free Trade Unions Condemn Moral Rearmament: "Blind" Obedience to Dr. Buchman," *The Manchester Guardian*, September 22, 1953, *ProQuest*.

⁶⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity Power Politics* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1969), 160. Among other figures, the influential theologian Reinhold Niebuhr claimed that a "Nazi social philosophy has been a covert presupposition of the whole Oxford Group enterprise from the very beginning."

⁷⁰ Lean, *Frank Buchman, A Life*, 237. Buchman attended the 1936 Berlin Olympics as Heinrich Himmler's guest, with the intention of meeting with Hitler. He was also close friends with Ernst Hanfstaengl, the Harvard graduate who was a friend and supporter of Hitler to escape after his failed coup d'état in 1923 and became his foreign press secretary years later.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 233.

director, Dr. Duncan Silkworth, put Wilson under the influence of a psychotropic cocktail called the Belladonna cure⁷² for four days while members of the Oxford Group prayed around him. During this treatment, Wilson claims to have found God and be liberated from addiction to alcohol,⁷³ and subsequently came to understand alcoholism as medical disease as well as a moral/spiritual malady.⁷⁴ Dr. Bob Smith's path towards sobriety was entangled with Wilson's, but unlike the latter, he reached his destination in 1936 through his wife's efforts and a conversation at his house with Wilson about the meaning of addiction.⁷⁵

The OG formed the foundation of AA's discourses and practices,⁷⁶ but Wilson and Smith split with Buchman in 1937 due to differences in their understanding of alcoholism and the objectives of their organizations. While AA's founders were focused on treating individuals deemed medically ill and morally depraved by coaxing them to surrender to a higher power, Buchman grew more outspoken about use his growing influence to establish a global fascist-Christian order. Buchman had publicly praised

⁷² Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor* (Baltimore, MD: The John Murphy Company, 2015), 2100, *Kindle*. Consisting of dissociative, psychedelics, and deliriants, the medicine "was quite literally a witches brew, because belladonna and henbane had been used for centuries by witches, sorcerers, and shamans to produce scary drug-induced mental states."

⁷³ Bill Wilson, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of AA* (New York, NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1957), 63. Wilson described this experience in detail at the 1955 AA International Convention.

⁷⁴ Kalett, "Twelve Steps, You're Out (Of Prison), 140. Because he had achieved sobriety through a medicinally induced psychedelic experience, Wilson's understanding of alcoholism was reframed from being a moral and spiritual issue, as well as a medical pathology. Dr. Silkworth taught Wilson to understand alcoholism as a psychological and biological disease, which he described as an "obsession of the mind that compels us to drink and an allergy of the body that condemns us to go mad or die."

⁷⁵ "AA's Beginnings," Alcoholics Anonymous Houston, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://aahouston.org/about-aa/aas-beginnings/>.

⁷⁶ Wilson, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 39. While he was also deeply influenced by Dr. Silkworth, Wilson would later attest that "the early AA got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Group and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America, and from nowhere else."

Hitler for his war on communism,⁷⁷ as well as the Nazi party's domestic policies to curb the use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.⁷⁸ Two years before he shifted the OGs name to Moral Rearmament in 1938,⁷⁹ Buchman had publicly declared his hope to harness the power of the Nazi war machine⁸⁰ for his cause by submitting Adolf Hitler to God control,⁸¹ which brought his organization under the surveillance of the Gestapo.⁸²

⁷⁷ Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Amazon.com Services LLC., 2010), 1455-14620, *Kindle*. Aside from the eugenicist arguments perpetuated by Nazi scientists like Otto Reche and Hans F.K. Gunther, Hitler rationalized the holocaust by characterizing communism as a Jewish conspiracy that would bring about the apocalypse if left unchecked by his regime. He warned readers that “if, through his Marxist faith, the Jew conquers the peoples of this world, his crown will be the death and destruction of all mankind. Earth would again move uninhabited through space as it did millions of years ago.”

⁷⁸ Johnathan Lewy, “A Sober Reich? Alcohol and Tobacco Use in Nazi Germany,” *Substance Use and Misuse* 41, no.8 (2009), 1179, DOI:10.1080/10826080500514479. One of Buchman's reasons for supporting the Nazis, who discursively were concerned with proliferating and enhancing the Aryan race, was that Hitler had tightened policies surrounding the use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes, as they “did not fit well with the National Socialistic aesthetics.”

⁷⁹ Buchman, *Remaking the World*, 46. In the wake of Roosevelt's New Deal, Buchman renamed the OG as “Moral Rearmament” in a public speech in London on May 29, 1938. While addressing the crowd, he articulated his strategy for manifesting a fascist-Christian utopia by submitting humanity to God control: “The crisis is fundamentally a moral one. The nations must re-arm morally. Moral recovery is essentially the forerunner of economic recovery... Human problems aren't economic... They could be solved within a God-controlled democracy, or perhaps I should say a theocracy, and they could be solved through a God-controlled Fascist dictatorship.”

⁸⁰ Lean, *Frank Buchman, A Life*, 239; Quoting William A.H. Birnie, “Hitler or Any Fascist Leader Controlled by God Could Cure All Ills of World, Buchman Believes,” August 26, 1936, *New York World-Telegram*. In addition to Buchman's interaction with high-ranking members of the Nazi party, his support for the Third Reich was evidenced by his comments to William A.H. Birnie, a reporter for the *New York Telegram*, in 1936. When asked about his recent experience at the Berlin Olympics, Buchman explained his position on the Third Reich: “I thank Heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defense against the anti-Christ of Communism.”

⁸¹ *Ibid*; Quoting Birnie, “Hitler or Any Fascist Leader Controlled by God Could Cure All Ills of World, Buchman Believes,” August 26, 1936. Speaking to his fundamentalist influences, Buchman stated that he believed Hitler's antisemitism was rooted in his hatred for Karl Marx, an ethnic Jew, who here is singled out as the bringer of the antichrist. He then described the political potential of Hitler surrendering to God Control, which presumably would give him the power to destroy communism: “My barber in London told me Hitler saved Europe from Communism. That's how he felt. Of course, I don't condone everything the Nazis do. Anti-Semitism? Bad, naturally. I suppose Hitler sees a Karl Marx in every Jew ... But think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to the control of God ... through such a man God could control a nation overnight and solve every last, bewildering problem.”

⁸² *Ibid*, 235. The Nazi party's suspicion of the threat posed by Buchman and the Oxford Group were made clear the next year, on May 20th, 1937, when “the North West headquarters of the Gestapo reported that ‘the Group is beginning to spread effectively through Germany and is trying, apparently with success, to gain influence in Party circles’” and that “the Reichsführer SS has ordered the maintenance of the strictest observation of the movement.”

Although the founders of AA had split from Buchman, their program would be implemented in the US during the Cold war, War on Crime, and War on Drugs, towards the same end: improving the world through reforming individuals by coaxing their submission to God. Reflecting the house parties of its predecessor, at the center of the AA therapeutic approach are daily meetings where participants gather to discuss their addiction and critique one another's perceived weaknesses at the core of their alcoholism. Participants in these groups share "personal stories about what addiction was like, what happened, and what life is like now are recited again and again. Group cohesion is meant to emerge based on shared experiences, and a common narrative of recovery is meant to be internalized by participants."⁸³ In a decentralized network of affiliated groups, the people who attend these meetings have the option not to reveal anything about their identities and are asked to be discreet about what others share about themselves. Members support or "sponsor" one another's sobriety and hold them accountable to the program's tenets, so they can earn "chips" designating how long they have been sober. Because the AA philosophy characterizes addiction as an identity rather than "a temporary behavior or reasonable response to suffering," they are encouraged to continue participating in the program and to sponsor others to maintain their abstinence.⁸⁴

Another AA group was seeded in New York in 1936 and quickly spread to Cleveland, which was in Wilson's words: "where it was originally proven... that sobriety for great numbers could be literally mass produced."⁸⁵ AA truly blossomed after 1938,

⁸³ Sered and Norton-Hawk, "Whose Higher Power?," 312.

⁸⁴ Sered and Norton-Hawk, "Whose Higher Power?," 310-312. The discursive efficacy of the twelve "steps rest on the notion that alcoholism is a spiritual disease that requires a spiritual remedy and that an alcoholic has to remain permanently committed to total abstinence to avoid "relapse."

⁸⁵ "Central Bulletin," Alcoholics Anonymous Cleveland, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.aa>

when the founders gained financial backing from Friends of John Rockefeller Jr., which allowed them to formalize the organization and open an office in New York. The next year this office began distributing the program's official book titled *Alcoholics Anonymous*,⁸⁶ in which Bill Wilson formalized the organization's philosophy and therapeutic approach.⁸⁶ Also known as the "Big Book," this publication outlined the 12-Step program for achieving and maintaining sobriety while under guidance of more senior members.⁸⁷

The first 11 steps ask participants to accept their powerlessness to addiction, submit to God through methods of personal growth, and make amends to people they have wronged. Reaching the 12th step is signified through a "spiritual awakening" that leads to their lifelong devotion to the principles of the group, including mentoring other members of the group. Throughout the duration of their involvement in the AA program, participants are asked to uphold the organization's structural and ethical code referred to as the 12-Traditions, which were first published in the *Grapevine Magazine* in 1942.⁸⁸ This system speaks to maintaining the group's "spiritual foundation" of anonymity, sustaining a leaderless structure, and keeping the organization's mission autonomous from the influence of other institutions.

There is little convincing research indicating that the therapeutic approach of AA outlined here is effective for treating addiction.⁸⁹ What is clear is that AA held broad

cle.org/for-members/central-bulletin/.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

⁸⁷ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women have Recovered from Alcoholism* 4th Ed. (New York, NY: The A.A. Grapevine Inc, 2001), 59.

⁸⁸ Bill Wilson, "Twelve Suggested Points For AA Tradition," *The Grapevine Magazine*, May 6, 1942, <https://www.aanoc.org/twelve-suggested-points-for-aa-tradition/>.

⁸⁹ Sered and Norton-Hawk, "Whose Higher Power?," 309.

appeal to the cisgender male WASP population and court system. Yet, evidence suggests that people of color, women, and LGBTQ+, are more likely to have negative experiences in the program due to both its underlying Christianity, discrimination from other participants, and being forced to participate after having been convicted of a crime.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, thousands of meetings popped around the country in the following decades, within and beyond the walls of state-sanctioned carceral facilities, and it remains the most prevalent and well-known substance abuse treatment option to this day.⁹¹ As a low-cost treatment approach⁹² that appeals to Christians across denominations, the most prevalent religion of the US population, AA was attractive to court and corrections officials in the neoliberal age.

Aside from often being the only option for people who desire treatment for substance abuse and addiction while incarcerated since the 1940's,⁹³ those who are convicted of a drug or alcohol related offense can be ordered by court officials to attend

⁹⁰ Jolene M. Sanders “Seeking Acceptance: LGBTQ and Membership in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA),” *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 38, no.4 (2020): 430, DOI:10.1080/07347324.2020.1738295; Rudolph H. Moos and Christine Timko, “Outcome Research on 12-step and Other Self-Help Programs,” in *Textbook of Substance Abuse Treatment* 4th Ed. eds. Marc Galanter and Herbert D. Kleber (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Press, 2008).

⁹¹ Alcoholics Anonymous, “AA Around the World,” Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.aa.org/aa-around-the-world>. Today AA, Narcotics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous are the most widely implemented addiction recovery programs in the US There are more than 123,000 groups documented around the world and AA literature is printed more than 100 languages.

⁹² Brian Grim and Melissa E. Grim, “Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 58 (July 2019): 1713, DOI:10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w. According to Grim and Grim, AA and similar “faith-based volunteer support groups contribute up to \$316.6 billion in savings to the US economy every year at no cost to tax-payers.”

⁹³ Ibid. In their 2019 study on the role of faith and rehabilitation, Grim and Grim found that “73% of addiction treatment programs in the USA include a spirituality-based element, as embodied in the 12-step programs and fellowships initially popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous, the vast majority of which emphasize reliance on God or a Higher Power to stay sober.”

these meetings within⁹⁴ or beyond their walls as part of their sentence.⁹⁵ Thus, shifting the original power dynamic whereby people participated by their own volition⁹⁶ by appealing to the logic of the modern social contract, which presumes people consent to be reformed by state institutions if their thoughts and behaviors depart from dominant medico-juridical discourses.⁹⁷ There are dozens of other groups⁹⁸ that emerged in the twentieth century for people seeking to manage various pathologized conditions (other than alcoholism), such as curing their participants addictions to criminalized

⁹⁴ Bob P., “Manuscript of AA World History,” Unpublished Manuscript (1985), Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/manuscript-of-a-a-world-history-1985-by-bob-p/>. Bill Wilson founded the first prison-based AA group in San Quentin prison in 1942, as Warden Clinton Duffy believed that a rehabilitative penological approach, even one including “education, vocational training, medicine, psychiatry and religion,” would be useless if someone was still addicted to alcohol. As word spread to people imprisoned in other carceral facilities, the organization started getting requests on how to start their own groups, leading to the creation of an instructional pamphlet titled *AA in Correctional Facilities* that has since been widely circulated.

⁹⁵ Ethan G. Kalett, “Twelve Steps, You're Out (Of Prison): An Evaluation of “Anonymous Programs” as Alternative Sentences,” *The Hastings Law Journal* 48, no.1 (November 1, 1996): 131, 147-149, DOI:10.1177/15570851114205.57. Kalett contends that for state officials, “the AA program is more attractive than other intermediate sanctions because it is generally approved of by addiction treatment professionals, is of virtually no financial cost to the criminal justice system, and is available anywhere in the United States.”

⁹⁶ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Corrections Workbook* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1995), 46, 23, https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/m45i_WorkbookCorr.pdf. Soon after Wilson brought his program into carceral facilities, AA Corrections Committees were formed. The purpose of which, according to the *AA Corrections Workbook*, is to “coordinate the work of individual AA members and groups who are interested in carrying our message of recovery to incarcerated alcoholics.” This is achieved by “bringing meetings and literature into facilities, raising awareness of the Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.) among “inside” and “outside” AA members, and helping inmates transition to a local AA” By 2006, AA estimated they were facilitating groups in “more than 2,527 correctional facilities throughout the United States and Canada.”

⁹⁷ Just as people are court ordered to attend AA after having been convicted of crimes where the defendant’s inappropriate consumption of alcohol was determined to be a contributing factor to their behavior, people who have been convicted of drug related crimes can be court ordered to attend Narcotics Anonymous. AA’s integration into the US criminal justice system represents the installation of a disciplinary mechanism directed at conforming the character of criminalized and psychiatrized participants to an ideal subjectivity, one that is discursively constructed by the law and the human sciences, by attempting to convince them that doing so will result in their spiritual redemption. Since these programs characterize a person who completes the 12-step program as living accordance with God’s will; it is implied that the moral character of a law-abiding citizen is spiritually righteous and the mission of the US criminal justice system is pious.

⁹⁸ A few examples are Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Heroin Anonymous, Nicotine Anonymous, Gambling Anonymous, and Sex Addicts Anonymous, which organize independently.

psychoactive substances, gambling, hoarding, and sex, that have adapted AA's therapeutic approach towards their own needs.

III. COLD WAR "BRAINWASHING" AND THE RISE OF SYNANON

In the same context that Frank Buchman and AA's founders were encouraging participants to redeem themselves by submitting to God and the state; others in Europe and the US were simultaneously researching and implementing scientific behavioral technologies to control people. The scientific field of behaviorism had first emerged when the US psychologist Edward Thorndike conducted experiments on dogs, cats, and chicks, to study the behavioral patterns of living organisms.⁹⁹ Contrary to the widespread belief that the behavior of living organisms was guided by their moral agency alone, his work in *Animal Intelligence: Experimental Studies*, Thorndike concluded that it is determined purely by whether the subject associates the outcome of their behavior with reward or punishment.¹⁰⁰ Soon after, the Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov famously demonstrated that by conditioning dogs to associate the sound of a metronome with access to food, he could induce salivation through the sound of the device alone.¹⁰¹

These early experiments inspired the research of American psychologist John. B. Watson in 1913, who first used the term "modifying behavior" and popularized the idea that the behavior of living organisms is not shaped by their internal mental state, but

⁹⁹ Edward Thorndike, *Animal Intelligence: Experimental Studies* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1911).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ivan P. Pavlov, *The Work of the Digestive Glands* (London: Griffin, 1902).

rather a reflexive response to external stimuli.¹⁰² In 1938, American psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner outlined the core principles of radical behaviorism in *The Behavior of Organisms*,¹⁰³ which offered a theory for studying and manipulating the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, of animals and humans alike. Through operant conditioning techniques, which account for the subject's internal mental state as it has been predetermined by a combination of socialization and genetics, Skinner built upon his predecessor's anemic theories of association and discipline by pursuing coercion. While these experiments were taking place in the US, Great Britain, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Nazi scientists conducted experiments on unwilling human subjects in eastern European concentration camps between 1933 and 1945, where they attempted to manage, deter, and convert, enemies of the state (mostly communists).¹⁰⁴

The momentum of behavioral science and evangelical fundamentalism carried into the decade following the Holocaust and widespread destruction caused by the Axis powers in World War II,¹⁰⁵ when the previous warnings of fundamentalists about the dangers of evolutionary science and the Nietzschean will to power¹⁰⁶ were affirmed

¹⁰² John B. Watson, "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It." *Psychological Review* 20, no.2 (1913): 158–177.

¹⁰³ Burrhus Frederic Skinner, *The Behavior of Organisms* (Boston, MA: D. Appleton & Company, 1938).

¹⁰⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," *Abnormal and Social Psychology* 38, no.4 (October 1943): 418-419, DOI:10.1037/h0061208. Between 1933 and 1945, members of the Nazi party deployed and advanced the machineries in concentration camps like Dachau and Buchenwald, which were used as laboratories for uninhibited behavior modification experiments on political prisoners (mostly communists), with the intent to "break the prisoners as individuals and to change them into docile masses... useful subjects to the Nazi state."

¹⁰⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 81064-81098, *Kindle*. The criticism of Nazi Germany was ironic coming from fundamentalists living in an apartheid society praised by Hitler in his memoir. Also see James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 8, 328, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999); Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York, NY: Random House, 1967); Jacob Golomb, Robert S. Wistrich, Nietzsche, *Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ:

because of their association with Nazism.¹⁰⁷ Throughout this decade, with the “rise of the Nazi party and Stalinists,” the “optimism about human nature” and “self-righteous idealism” of liberal WASPs in the US “collapsed” to the advantage of the fundamentalist movement.¹⁰⁸ Further, the formation of Israel in 1948 “vastly strengthened” the credibility of dispensational millennialist interpreters, who “universally agreed that the USSR would, with Arab support, lead the invasion of Israel¹⁰⁹ in the cataclysmic events of the last times and the fateful Battle of Armageddon.”¹¹⁰

Evangelicals had been spreading their gospel via radio within and beyond the borders of the US since the 1920’s, but by the 1950’s, in addition to radio proselytization, fundamentalist televangelists like Billy Graham began hosting widely-popular television programs.¹¹¹ For most WASPs in the US at the start of the Cold War and late into the 1950’s, “communism stood not only for atheism, totalitarianism, and a nuclear threat from abroad, but also at least intimated the menace of atheistic secularism promoted by big government at home.”¹¹² Within this context, amidst escalating revolutionary

Princeton University Press, 2002). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche speaks to the idea that all living things are driven by the “will to power” or the desire to dominate others either through cruelty or kindness. In opposition to the image of Christian cosmology, Nietzsche encourages the human species to pursue the condition of *Übermensch* (overhuman) by focusing on earthly matters and establishing new values accordingly. Following his death, his sister adulterated her brother’s philosophy in *The Will to Power*, through which the concept of the *Übermensch* was coopted and by fascist regimes like the Nazi party to rationalize their ambitions to dominate the planet and populate it with the Aryan master race.

¹⁰⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Eugene Joseph Dionne Jr., *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics After the Religious Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 31.

¹⁰⁹ Jason D. Berggren and Nicol C. Rae, “Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no.4 (December 2006): 619, DOI:10.1111/j.1741-5705.2006.02570.x. More than Catholics or mainline Protestants, evangelicals in the United States tend to view Israel and the Middle East through the lens of the Bible and Bible prophecy.”

¹¹⁰ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 249-250.

¹¹¹ “This Date in History – the 75th Anniversary of Television,” The Billy Graham Library (blog), April 30, 2014, Accessed May 30, 2020, <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/this-date-in-history-the-75th-anniversary-of-television/>.

¹¹² Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 40.

movements both domestically and abroad, American patriotism took on a “Manichean” character; split between the evils communism as evil and the virtue of the “American Way of life,” which was most “often associated with family values and “Christian,” or increasingly “Judeo-Christian” heritage.”¹¹³ In the following decades, the behavioral technologies that were established leading up to the second World War, while sometimes coupled with AA, would in the age of development,¹¹⁴ be harnessed by the US government to advance the interests of corporations both domestically and abroad.¹¹⁵

Drawing on the findings of Nazi scientists in Dachau and Buchenwald,¹¹⁶ the communist POW camps in China and North Korea, the field of classical behaviorism, and ongoing research of radical behaviorists like Skinner, the US military, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began conducting behavioral experiments and institutionalizing their findings in the Cold War. These agencies were interested in developing these programs not only to train their operatives to

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 2009), xvi. Harry Truman harkened in the “age of development” during his inauguration speech on January 20, 1949. Through this radical declaration, the new president resurrected the Franco-Scottish historical model of the development, so as to publicly position the US socio-historical formation “at the top of the social evolutionary scale,” while simultaneously demarcating the mostly non-white people of the global south as “undeveloped.”

¹¹⁵ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 63-65. The recovery of Japan and Germany’s industrial capacities drove the down the profitability of manufacturing, the US economy moved toward financialization and expanded its labor pool to less expensive markets through the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as, the international policy planning organizations formed during the Bretton Woods agreement; including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization. The formation of the CIA and Office for Strategic Services occurred during this period to implement the US government’s plans for global development.

¹¹⁶ Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 43. The US drew heavily on the records recovered from the experiments performed by Nazi scientists at Dachau, as well as the researchers themselves, in violation of the 1947 Nuremberg medical code, which had been established to prevent such atrocities from recurring. Consequently, the methods used at Dachau were “mimed across a broad spectrum of Cold War experiments on, literally, tens of thousands of unwitting human subjects- for atomic, chemical, biological, and psychological warfare,” including the use of LSD on more than 6,700 unknowing subjects.

resist interrogation, but also to coercively recruit and collect information from foreign agents. In the wake of the Chinese Revolution, Stalin's show trials, and start of the Korean war,¹¹⁷ the US government became increasingly weary and envious of communist "brainwashing" programs and intensified their efforts to defend against and wield these technologies both domestically and abroad.¹¹⁸

To advance the political and economic interests of the nation's elite in the face of nuclear apocalypse, the US government continued to research and implement behavior modification technologies into its foreign and domestic disciplinary institutions. The first was the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) program,¹¹⁹ which was designed to train US Air Force (USAF) pilots to respond tactically if they are shot down behind enemy lines, including techniques for resisting interrogation if they are captured

¹¹⁷ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 725-744, *Kindle*; Joost AM Meerloo, *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (San Diego, CA: Progressive Press, 2009), 19. The topic of "brainwashing" grew in the public spotlight after 1953, when Marine Corps. Colonel Frank H. Schwable to the US in 1953, an American USAF pilot signed a confession that the US was conducting biological warfare on the Chinese people, after months of psychological conditioning in a POW camp. This example was not isolated, as thousands of other American POWs also displayed ways of knowing and being that were attributed to brainwashing, including a desire to end the war, and newfound communist allegiance. Given that the POWs were subjected to torture, the question of whether the US military was using biological warfare is still debated. While I mention how Chinese, North Korean, and German behavioral technologies influenced scientists in the US, the core principles had long been present and this was not a unidirectional exchange. The primary reason North Korean "brainwashing" is mentioned so frequently in the literature surrounding behavioral science in the US is because of the influence of CIA propaganda suggesting the immense capacity and threat it posed to the "free thinking" minds of US citizens.

¹¹⁸ Matthew R. Gildner, "Psychological Torture as Cold War Imperative," in *The Trauma of Psychological Torture*, ed. Almerindo E. Ojeda (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2008), 24-25. After the 1954 Hoover Report on Government operations called for an abandonment of "fair play" in the Cold War, and contrary to Truman's promise that development would occur through "democratic fair dealing," the CIA further intensified their "extensive, often clandestine research into the behavioral and cognitive sciences to develop more effective methods of counterintelligence interrogation" and "brainwashing."

¹¹⁹ Laurel E. Fletcher and Eric Stover, *Guantánamo and Its Aftermath: US Detention and Interrogation Practices and their Impact on Former Detainees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 10. The SERE program "subjects military personnel to stress positions, forced exercise to the point of exhaustion, sensory deprivation or sensory overload, and other forms of psychological duress—all to prepare them for the possibility of abuse and torture by foreign intelligence services."

by the enemy.¹²⁰ In the following decades, other noteworthy behavioral science projects were established, such as CHATTER,¹²¹ BLUEBIRD/ARTICHOKE,¹²² and MKULTRA,¹²³ which studied the behavioral effects of psychoactive drugs, sensory deprivation, hypnosis, psychotherapy, electroshock therapy, and other techniques, on thousands of witting and unwitting subjects.¹²⁴ Skinner and other behavioral scientists received contracts to conduct these types of experiments for the US government, which between 1963 and 1984 formed the core of the CIA's KUBARK Interrogation Manual.¹²⁵

Within this context, at a time when the US population held a distinct and profound public interest and belief in the power of brainwashing, these behavior modification technologies would merge with the faith-based approach of AA through the

¹²⁰ Davis J. Morris, "Empires of the Mind: SERE, Guantanamo, and the Legacies of Torture," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2009): 211, <http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/empires-mind-sere-guantanamo-legaciestorture/docview/205345772/se-2?accountid=4485>.

¹²¹ Gildner, "Psychological Torture as Cold War Imperative," 24. The final report on Project CHATTER, which was issued by the Church Committee presented in 1950, described the FBI and CIA's research on "the identification and testing truth drugs for use in interrogation and the recruitment of agents."

¹²² Ibid, 25. In 1950, the same year Joseph Stalin established the Scientific Council on Problems of Physiological Theory of the Academician I.P. Pavlov, the CIA started Project BLUEBIRD to study "unconventional" interrogation techniques such as hypnosis and a variety of drugs, including sodium pentothal, mescaline, LSD, THC, and heroin." The next year, they "shifted the focus of the project from experimental to operational and renamed it ARTICHOKE."

¹²³ Ibid, 26. Perhaps, the most well-known of this period, the MKULTRA experiments studied the behavioral effects of drugs, alcohol, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, polygraphs, psychotherapy, brainwashing, and electroshock therapy.

¹²⁴ Albert D. Biderman, "Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions from Air Force Prisoners of War," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 33, no.9 (September 1957): 619. The technologies that emerged from these experiments crystallized in the KUBARK Interrogation Manual in 1963 and later iterations, which almost mirrored the "basic communist techniques of coercive interrogation" that the renowned social scientist Albert D. Biderman had laid out for the senate subcommittee on Investigations, Communist Interrogation, Indoctrination and Exploitation of American Military and Civilian Prisoners in 1956. The techniques, which are listed and described in Biderman's panel paper titled "Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions from Air Force Prisoners of War," included isolation, monopolization of perception, induced debilitation exhaustion, threats, occasional indulgences, demonstrating "omnipotence" and "omniscience," as well as, enforcing trivial demands.

¹²⁵ Gildner, "Psychological Torture as Cold War Imperative," 26.

work of Chuck Dederich, who founded world's first¹²⁶ Therapeutic Community (TC) called Synanon. An alcoholic since the age of 12, Dederich became a popular AA speaker in the Santa Monica area while living on the streets there between 1955 and 1957. Aside from his participation in the program, Dederich's decision to work with alcoholics after reading Waldo F. Emerson's book titled *Self Reliance* during a bout of paranoia.¹²⁷ His ambition was reaffirmed and expanded after and having a spiritual experience during an experiment at the University of California, Los Angeles, which explored "whether LSD¹²⁸ might produce insights that would serve to remove psychic blocks that were preventing people from feeling more spiritually alive."¹²⁹ As he spent more time in a local public library reading about, among other topics, behavior modification technologies, "his AA speeches changed from typical religious overtones to a psychological/philosophy slant."¹³⁰

Funded by a "\$30 unemployment check and charity from others," Dederich rented a space in Venice Beach to facilitate a group called The Tender Loving Care Club in 1958.¹³¹ With much opposition from the people who were addicted to alcohol that

¹²⁶ George De Leon, "Therapeutic Communities for Addictions: A Theoretical Framework," *International Journal of the Addictions* 30, no.12 (February 1995), 1611, DOI:10.3109/10826089509104418. What distinguishes TCs from other therapeutic approaches, is "the purposive use of the community as the primary method for facilitating social and psychological change in individuals' as it blends confrontation and support to help residents undergo the arduous changes that are necessary."

¹²⁷ Paul Morantz, "The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich," *Paulmorantz.com*, 2009, Accessed May 30, 2022, <http://www.paulmorantz.com/cult/the-history-of-synanon-and-charles-dederich/>.

¹²⁸ Ernest Kurtz, *The Collected Ernie Kurtz* (Wheeling, WV: The Bishop of Books, 1999), 39-51. Dederich took LSD less than a year after Bill Wilson experimented with the drug with Aldous Huxley on August 29, 1956. Wilson subsequently became a strong advocate for its use in the treatment of alcoholism, much to the chagrin of other AA members who continued to push the idea that sobriety came through surrender to a higher power.

¹²⁹ "Janet Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers: A Systemic Problem," Human Earth Liberation Mission, August 14, 2011, 51, <http://www.heal-online.org/unjp2011.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Paul Morantz, "The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich."

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

attended Dederich's groups, he also invited drug users to participate in his group sessions that he claimed would help participants to manage and cure their addictions. Based on his interactions with people who abuse highly addictive drugs like heroin and cocaine, Dederich came to believe that AA's therapeutic approach was not aggressive enough to be effective, so the program took on a more intense and confrontational character in response.

Rather than trying to help participants submit to a higher power to achieve sobriety as had been the case in AA, the therapeutic approach of Synanon that was developed by Dederich incorporated principles of behavior modification to create a program to coerce their submission to the group and therefore, be cured of their addiction.¹³² The most influential rehabilitative technique on the TTI developed by Dederich during this period was called the "game," where participants would sit in a circle and criticize one another in brutal exchanges, sometimes for hours or days during "marathon" sessions. During these game sessions, "anyone was allowed to say anything, true or not, to someone to cause an effect ... only the threat of violence was prohibited ... it was a game because one being gamed could turn the game on another."¹³³ This exercise formed the foundation of "attack therapy," an approach would come to be offered in both government-funded and for-profit residential facilities for youth and adults:

Attack therapy is an approach of treatment that emphasizes confrontation of the client in an effort to address dysfunctional behaviors and low self-esteem. This approach concentrates on providing negative feedback to the client as a motivation to change ... This approach uses verbal abuse,

¹³² Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 27. Synanon's therapeutic approach flipped this framework on its head, placing the decision to participate in treatment on the shoulders of guardians and the state. Increasingly "over time, this authoritarian position firmly ensconced in American addiction treatment, especially for young people."

¹³³ Morantz, "The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich."

humiliation and shame, denouncing, and demoralizing techniques by the therapist toward the client or group members.¹³⁴

After several participants stopped using drugs for various lengths of time, Dederich saw his therapeutic approach as effective, so following a dispute with AA about his inclusion of drug users in his group and departure from traditional techniques, he incorporated his own organization called Synanon¹³⁵ on September 18, 1958.¹³⁶ Thus, laying the foundation for the “tough love” treatment approach that would emerge in the following decades.¹³⁷ In 1959, Dederich purchased a property in Santa Monica and opened the first Synanonian residential community, where for the first ten years, clients who claimed to have substance abuse issues paid to live there and planned recover in less than three years.¹³⁸ Although they were largely ineffective at their discursive objectives,¹³⁹ thousands of other Synanon-based Therapeutic Communities (TC) were established around the nation in the following decades. Aside from a positive response to

¹³⁴ Felicia D. Pressley, “Attack Therapy,” *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy*, ed. Edward S. Neukung (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015): 80-81.

¹³⁵ George Pendle, “Shaved Heads, Snipped Tubes, Imperial Marines, and Dope Fiends: the Rise and Fall of Chuck Dederich and Synanon,” *Cabinet Magazine* 48, Winter 2012-2013, <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/48/pendle.php?fbclid=IwAR3ylqZAdcMyWxYrb6p-k9aRh8rYTKsBk9I0wn5DAKHU-B1wZzWAeMCGAU>. At one of these meetings, the word ‘Synanon’ was first used “when one addict slurred the words seminar and symposium together ... It was a word redolent of “sin,” “Zion,” and, of course, ‘Alcoholics Anonymous.’”

¹³⁶ Richard Ofshe, “The Social Development of the Synanon Cult: The Managerial Strategy of Organizational Transformation,” *Sociology of Religion* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 110, DOI:10.2307/3709903.

¹³⁷ Lipton, “Therapeutic Community Treatment Programming in Corrections,” 217; Citing Naya Arbiter, “Presentation on the history of the therapeutic community,” Amity Foundation at Therapeutic Communities of America, Annual Meeting, Tucson, AZ, June 1992. According to Lipton “in the United States, current TCs for addicted persons (both alcoholic and drug addicted) derive from Synanon.” The “immediate roots” of Synanon “are in the Oxford movement and Alcoholics Anonymous, with earlier prototypes existing in religious, temperance and communal healing communities in North America and Abroad.”

¹³⁸ Morantz, “The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich.”

¹³⁹ Ofshe, “The Social Development of the Synanon Cult,” 110. Reliable information about the effectiveness of Synanon’s therapeutic approach is unavailable, but “according to the organization’s figures” only 65 of the 6,000 to 10,000 people who were a part of Synanon first ten years were considered to be rehabilitated.

the Synanon film, the organization was largely praised by journalists, its therapeutic approach to curing addiction became widely accepted by experts, and it was extolled as a “breakthrough” in criminology.¹⁴⁰

The core structure of Synanon’s therapeutic approach involves working in the community within a rigid “chain of command” between staff members and residents, who effectively hold rank the program according to their level of experience and progress.¹⁴¹ New arrivals are first placed in low status positions, often with the most undesirable responsibilities and living conditions to incentivize their advancement.¹⁴² Progress is measured through demonstrations of “increased competency and emotional growth,” whether the participant has internalized the program’s values, or “make believe they accept the basic TC values and rules conduct” in order to reap the benefits.¹⁴³ After ceasing the consumption of all psychoactive substances “cold turkey” upon entering, participants theoretically “progressed from detoxification through menial work to a more responsible job in the community, to an outside job and inside residence, and finally either to outside residence and outside work (rehabilitation) or to a staff position with the organization (absorption).”¹⁴⁴

Dederich later acknowledged that his therapeutic approach was influenced by brainwashing techniques, which psychotherapist and Sociologist Lewis Yablonsky¹⁴⁵ likened to those described by Air Force psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton in his research on

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Lipton, “Therapeutic community treatment programming in corrections,” 218.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ofshe, “The Social Development of the Synanon Cult,” 110.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis Yablonsky, *The Tunnel Back: Synanon* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965).

the thought reform technologies used on captured USAF pilots in North Korean and Chinese Prisoner of War camps.¹⁴⁶ An amalgamation of behavior modification techniques and the faith-based approach of AA, Synanon's therapeutic approach was "based on the plan of "breaking" new initiates with isolation, humiliation, hard labor, and sleep deprivation," and then replacing pathological thoughts and behaviors with desirable ones.¹⁴⁷ Though its power was first contained to the group itself, this technology was soon adopted by policing and prison regimes in the US to suppress democratic social movements during the Cold War, War on Crime, and War on Drugs, in the following decades.

IV. BRAINWASHING TECHNOLOGIES IN US CARCERAL FACILITIES

Synanonian therapy was rapidly deployed in early iterations of residential programs for troubled youth alongside the expansion of the US criminal justice system. Since the early 19th century, US federal prisons had largely "operated on the assumption that incarceration could rehabilitate inmates if prisons offered a combination of discipline, order, and the right incentives."¹⁴⁸ Beginning in the early 1960's, however, amidst burgeoning rebellions within and beyond the walls of federal penitentiaries, "prison authorities augmented their reliance on science with more controversial techniques: brainwashing, sensory deprivation, medication, and prolonged isolation."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York, NY: Norton, 1961).

¹⁴⁷ Ofshe, "The Social Development of the Synanon Cult," 15.

¹⁴⁸ Alan Eladio Gómez, "Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972," *Radical History Review* 96 (Fall 2006): 62, DOI:10.1215/01636545-2006-004.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Contributing to this shift was a presentation made by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and researcher Dr. Edgar Schein in 1962, when he was called to present “his theories on brainwashing and the application of such techniques to modify behavior within the prison population” at the Federal Bureau of Prisons Conference in Washington, DC.¹⁵⁰ Since he presented a group dynamics theory¹⁵¹ based on interviews with survivors of Chinese and Korean prisoner of war (POW) camps,¹⁵² which almost mirrored the strategy of Synanonian TC therapy, the latter was viewed as a desirable means to control dissenting Muslims¹⁵³ and political radicals.¹⁵⁴ That same year, the first Synanon group was established at Terminal Island Correctional facility in 1962,¹⁵⁵ but in line with this new approach, its techniques were also adopted by the US Bureau of Prisons and residential homes for troubled youth outside of Dederich’s control, which are discussed further in the chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the US Prison Regime*, 62. During Schein’s presentation titled “Man against Man: Brainwashing,” according to Rodríguez, the former proposed that the “brainwashing techniques used by the North Korean and Chinese communists against US soldiers in Korean POW camps offered a solution to the problems of rehabilitation and control within the US federal prison system.”

¹⁵¹ See Kurt Lewin, “Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Equilibrium and Social Change,” *Human Relations* 1, no.1 (1947): 5, DOI: 10.1177/001872674700100103.

¹⁵² Edgar H. Schein, “Coercive Persuasion” (New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 1961). The tactics Schein revealed were based on his 1953 interviews with USAF pilots, who had been captured and subjected to brainwashing techniques in Chinese and Korean POW camps, described a system for breaking down the captive’s personality (Unfreezing), transforming it (Change), and then deeply entrenching the desired traits (Freezing).

¹⁵³ Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary,” 67. In this article, Gómez describes how the “Chairman of the symposium, Bertram S. Brown of the National Institute of Mental Health, responded warmly to [Schein’s] presentation” and “encouraged the prison administrators to experiment with these new techniques on the black Muslim inmate populations on returning to their respective institutions.”

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵⁵ Rowdy Yates, Rod Mullen, Naya Arbiter, and Robert Teltzrow, *Prison-Based Therapeutic Communities (TCs): A Handbook for Prison Administrators Treatment Professionals and Trainers*, Council of Europe (May 2021), 18, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/pompidou/tctraining>.

Following an eruption in domestic urban rebellions erupted across the US in the 1960's, in period of racial apartheid and numerous assassinations of Black leaders,¹⁵⁶ President Johnson, who launched the War on Crime and War on Poverty in the preceding years, publicly attributed these "riots" to the dangerous influence that civil rights organizers and black nationalist groups held over black youth¹⁵⁷ and propounded that expanding the criminal justice system was the solution. In 1964, one week before the Voting Rights Act went into effect, he passed the Law Enforcement Assistance Act (LEAA),¹⁵⁸ which "offered a response to the threat of future disorder by establishing a direct role for the federal government in local police operations, court systems, and state prisons for the first time in American history."¹⁵⁹ As will be discussed further in this chapter, this new allocation of money would be used to fund the establishment of Straight Inc. in 1976, which is remembered as an abusive, homophobic, sexist, and racist, program by survivors.

Outside of Synanon communities, the first independent iteration of its therapeutic approach was an experimental drug rehabilitation program for children and adults called

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2016), 68, 14. After police assaulted a pregnant Black woman during a traffic stop, the most significant of the more than 250 urban rebellions during Johnson's presidency erupted, which has largely been remembered as the Watts riot. The rebellion occurred in August of 1965 for six days in Los Angeles. While 70,000 spectators stood by, more than 35,000 people participated in the destruction of over 261 (mostly white owned) businesses, causing more than \$200 million in damages. More than half of these urban rebellions occurred after Reverend Martin Luther King's murder on April 4, 1968.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 12, 13. Even before the Watts rebellion took place, there was a "growing consensus of policymakers, federal administrators, law enforcement officials, and journalists," who drew discursive lines that linking social dissent to non-white people, criminality, poverty, and communism. Afterwards, "the Johnson administration believed that African American men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, influenced by civil rights activists increasingly advocating for self-determination and community control, were primarily responsible for the unrest."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 13. Following this unprecedented expansion of the resources available to policing and prison regimes, the budget of the LEAA continued to increase from \$10 million dollars in 1965 to \$850 million by 1983.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 1-2.

Daytop Village.¹⁶⁰ Established in 1964, the program was founded by a Roman Catholic Priest William B. O'Brien, alongside psychiatrist Dr. Daniel H. Casriel, Brooklyn's chief probation officer Joseph Shelly, and a social worker and criminologist named Alexander Bassin.¹⁶¹ After O'Brien and Bassin visited a Synanon community in Connecticut, they secured a \$390,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to establish a residential facility on Staten Island that utilized a Synanonian approach to address the localized drug and crime issues. Dozens of other programs were established throughout the country in the following decades, which "became a model for substance abuse treatment centers around the world."¹⁶²

In 1966, the Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act was passed, which "provided that addicts charged with violating Federal laws could opt for treatment under the care of the surgeon general," and that the charges could "be dropped if improvement was shown within 3 years," which incentivized the establishment of private rehabilitation programs that could fulfill this.¹⁶³ In 1967, three years after Daytop Village emerged, a rehabilitation facility for adults and children called Phoenix House was formed by Dr. Mitch Rosenthal, the deputy commissioner of New York City's Addiction Services Agency. After examining the Synanon community in Santa Monica, he adopted its

¹⁶⁰ The name is an acronym for "Drug Addiction Yields to Persuasion," speaking to the aggressive nature of the therapeutic approach.

¹⁶¹ Paul Vitello, "Msgr. William O'Brien, 90, Dies; Innovator in Treating Drug Abuse," *New York Times* (August 25, 2014), Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/26/nyregion/msgr-william-b-obrien-90-is-dead-helped-start-drug-rehabilitation-agency.html>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ SB Friedman, G.L. Horvat and R.B. Levinson, "Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act - Its Impact on Federal Prisons," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 11, no.1 (Spring 1982): 101-111, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/narcotic-addict-rehabilitation-act-its-impact-federal-prisons>.

therapeutic approach in this privately owned and operated residential setting, which has since spread to 150 facilities in ten states.

The same year Phoenix House was established in 1967, another rehabilitation program exclusively for youth called CEDU was established in Running Springs, California, by former Synanonite Mel Wasserman and his wife Brigitta, as well as other people who had been involved in Synanon.¹⁶⁴ In addition to other CEDU programs that operated in California and Utah, including Boulder Creek Academy, Rocky Mountain Academy, and the ASCENT Therapeutic Adventure Program, off-shoots like the Academy at Swift River were also started by former CEDU employees.¹⁶⁵ Widely considered the first network of private residential programs exclusively for troubled teens, the therapeutic techniques at these programs “include lengthy, confrontational large-group sessions called “Propheets” similar to Synanon’s “game,” as well as other forms of encounter seminars.¹⁶⁶ Unlike Daytop and Phoenix House, which relied on the police to handle unruly children and runaways, CEDU employees set a precedent by using restraint and isolation¹⁶⁷ to control and manipulate the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, of children.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 132.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Nikki Graf, “Most US Teens See Anxiety and Depression as a Major Problem Among their Peers,” *Pew Research Center*, February 20, 2019, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>; Mason, Michael, Jeremy Mennis, Michael Russel, et al., “Adolescent Depression and Substance Use: the Protective Role of Prosocial Peer Behavior,” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 47, no. 6 (June 2019): 1065–1074. DOI:10.1007/s10802-018-0501-z. In a context where roughly 70 percent of children view depression and anxiety as a serious issue amongst their peers and the health of their social networks has been found to be a significant determinant in whether these issues lead to substance abuse and addiction, it can be said that subjecting children to unnecessary residential treatment is destructive to individuals and society and society at large.

¹⁶⁸ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 282-283.

Seven years before Synanon had developed their own program for children, its therapeutic approach was being implemented in residential programs for troubled youth like Daytop Village, Phoenix House, and CEDU. Another program, the Élan School for troubled boys, was started on a rural 33-acre property in Poland, Maine in 1970.¹⁶⁹ Named from the French word for “momentum, energy, style, [and] enthusiasm,” this behavior modification school was founded by child psychiatrist Gerald Davidson and a former-heroin addict named Joseph Ricci.¹⁷⁰ In the mid-1960’s, the latter had attended Daytop Village as an alternative sentence to serving seven years in prison for robbery. After attaining sobriety at Daytop, Ricci set out to start his own Synanonian therapeutic community that addressed these issues and added its own spin, including isolating groups of children in the wilderness.

A unique innovation to the attack therapy approach at Élan was called “the ring,” in which a student being confronted would be made to wear boxing gear and fight fresh opponents until he verbally agreed with whatever the group had said about him. The opponents were fellow program participants forced to fight on the “side of good” and impose compliance.¹⁷¹ In addition to being prohibited from smiling without authorization, “students were reportedly forbidden from taking a shower longer than three minutes, being in the bathroom for too long, writing without permission, looking out the window, or simply rubbing staff members the wrong way.”¹⁷² If they were not sent to the ring,

¹⁶⁹ Kevin Wack, “New York Seeks Change at Elan School,” *Portland Press Herald*, March 25, 2007, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://pressherald.maintoday.com/news/state/070325elan.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 133. The technique gained national recognition after Michael Skakel, the cousin of Robert F. Kennedy, admitted to murdering 15-year-old Martha Moxley in 1975 during his first ring session.

¹⁷² Kaleena Fraga, “The Controversial Story Of The Élan School, The ‘Last Stop’ For Troubled Teens In Maine,” *allthatsinteresting*, January 12, 2022, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/elan-school>.

many were “forced to wear humiliating signs or costumes,” or were outright beaten¹⁷³ by staff members. Students who failed to uphold the program’s expectations could be subjected to form of attack therapy called a “general meeting,” where the children would be ordered to gather and consecutively berate the person who had violated the rules.¹⁷⁴

Just as CEDU had recruited most of its residents from parents “who thought that medications allowed kids to avoid responsibility and continue bad behavior due to their “diseases,” Élan “capitalized on the antipsychiatry movement, eschewing diagnoses, individualized treatment, and especially the use of psychiatric medication in favor of a group regime designed simply to improve behavior.”¹⁷⁵ Although there is no scientific evidence that this approach is effective,¹⁷⁶ these programs are particularly attractive to parents concerned with the “tremendous stigma attached to psychiatric disorders” and criminality, and are in turn interested treatments that “do not imply mental illness” and allow them to avoid committing crimes that might land them juvenile detention facilities.¹⁷⁷ Rather than attributing their undesirable thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to how they were raised, economics, criminalization, or inherent psychopathologies, the discourses used to market these private residential programs frame their participants as a morally depraved and in need of extreme discipline.¹⁷⁸

com/elanschool#:~:text=First%20opened%20in%201970%20and,promised%20to%20rehabilitate%20troubled%20teens.

¹⁷³ When I use the word “beatings,” I am describing instances where someone, either using a part their own body (hands, feet, etc.) or with an object, struck another person at least once.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 134.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 12-13.

Amidst the War on Crime, War on Drugs, and the hot Cold War, “tough love” philosophy was also attractive to state officials concerned with reducing substance abuse and youth recidivism, which led to their support and funding for disciplinary programs for troubled youth. Additionally, subjecting children to these programs pedagogically produced the “troubled teen” cultural designation as victims of criminals, communists, and other enemies of the state, to bolster public support for the strategies and objectives of the US government’s foreign and domestic policies. In 1970, the same year Élan was founded as a for-profit business, Art Barker received \$230,000 from the NIMH and \$35,000 from the LEAA to establish a youth rehabilitation program called The Seed, and conduct research on its efficacy.¹⁷⁹ After Barker had witnessed Synanon’s treatment approach while homeless in New York, the former alcoholic and failed standup comic established the first facility in a warehouse in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and deployed his own expression of attack therapy.

During the first phase of the program, newer participants labeled “seedlings” would stay at a “host home” nearby and commute to the warehouse, but as they advanced would be permitted to live at home.¹⁸⁰ In isolation from their own family and community, seedlings were locked in the home under intense surveillance and rules enforced by the host family. By controlling their control of food and sleep, these children were susceptible to the thought reform process. While in the warehouse, participants “spent twelve hours a day sitting on blue chairs, waving with great intensity” under the guidance

¹⁷⁹ Judith Miller, “The Seed: Reforming Drug Abusers with Love,” *Science* 182, no.4107 (October 5, 1973): 40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1736222>.

¹⁸⁰ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 46.

of counselors and more senior members, as they participated in exercises intended to coercively conform their character as individuals to an ideal subjectivity:

...intensive pressure is often placed on the individuals to accept the attitudes of the group. More intensive forms of encounter groups begin first by subjecting the individual to isolation and humiliation in a conscious effort to break down his psychological defenses. Once the individual is submissive, his personality can begin to be reformed around attitudes determined by the program director to be acceptable.¹⁸¹

Techniques such as coerced “confession of one’s past bad behavior and surrender to a ‘higher power’” were drawn from AA; but like Synanon, the Seed both prescribed itself as the “higher power” and coerced participants to submit.¹⁸² If seedlings refused to submit to the group’s demands, the more veteran participants, often children and young teens, would “aggressively” throw them to the ground and restrain them.¹⁸³ The purpose of this exercise being to deter and punish non-compliance, as well as give credibility to the program by characterizing the more senior participants as reformed, obedient, and committed to The Seed’s mission. In the early 1970’s, court officials, politicians, journalists, and many parents of participants, praised Barker as “the savior” of the children who participated¹⁸⁴ and additional Seed facilities were subsequently established in other major cities. However, a 1972 report released by a state agency smashed the program’s claim of having a “90 percent success” rate, and the following year research was published “suggesting that such encounter groups could cause lasting emotional damage.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁸² Ibid, 45.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 46-47.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 46.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

The Seed was also criticized by Senator Sam Ervin in November of 1974, when he condemned the use of “federal funding for human experiments on prisoners, mental patients, juvenile delinquents, and others”¹⁸⁶ to “develop new methods of behavior control capable of altering not just an individual’s actions but his very personality and his manner of thinking.”¹⁸⁷ Ervin was particularly concerned by The Seed for multiple reasons. First, because many participants in these programs experienced “depressions severe enough to require hospitalization, suicidal thoughts, manic and psychotic episodes, and reductions in self-esteem.”¹⁸⁸ Second, it utilized techniques similar to those deployed by the North Koreans in the 1950’s to treat drug users,¹⁸⁹ which were so powerful that some participants had come to believe they had serious substance abuse issues even though they had never tried drugs or alcohol. Third, because these experiments were conducted without notifying or asking for permission from the parents of participants, the results of which had never been published despite having received funding to do so.¹⁹⁰

The Seed continuously lost influence in the decades following the Ervin report, but its therapeutic approach was mirrored in Straight Inc. by the guardians of a former participants of the former in the late-1970’s. This would occur alongside a period of intense WASP reactionary activity, the expansion of the US criminal justice system, and integration of Synanonian brainwashing technologies into federal prisons amidst the Cold War, War on Drugs, and War on Crime. Synanon’s techniques had long been

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁸⁷ The Staff of the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of Committee on the Judiciary, “Individual Rights and the Federal Role of Behavior Modification,” (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974), III, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED103726.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 32-33.

¹⁸⁹ “The Staff of the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of Committee on the Judiciary, “Individual Rights and the Federal Role of Behavior Modification,” 15.

¹⁹⁰ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 61.

implemented in other residential programs for troubled youth by the mid-1970's, when the Santa Monica compound took on a cult-like character, began facilitating what is considered to be the first boot camp for troubled youth, and Chuck Dederich was removed as leader for serious crimes.

V. WASP REACTIONARIES AND THE FALL OF SYNANON

The “people who called themselves fundamentalists did not play an especially prominent role in American culture”¹⁹¹ until the cultural and political shifts of the 1960's and early 1970's.¹⁹² Fundamentalists been creating their own institutions and shaping policy for decades, including constructing the moral framework of the OG and it's off-shoots that deeply entrenched into the criminal justice system as discussed throughout this chapter, but largely remained outside of politics of at the federal level. Yet, “a number of events, including the desegregation of public schools¹⁹³ (and the larger civil rights movement) and the banning of state-sponsored religious practices, triggered a reevaluation of the doctrine of political noninvolvement.”¹⁹⁴¹⁹⁵ As “cosmopolitan culture”

¹⁹¹ Wood and Watt, “Introduction,” in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, 3.

¹⁹² Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 240-246. Particularly alarming to Southern evangelical WASPs, were the election of a John F. Kennedy (a Catholic), the domestic political opposition to the Vietnam war, shifting “standards for public decency,” sexual freedom and the family structure, second-wave feminism, federal civil rights statutes criminalizing racial apartheid, and the “Supreme Court ruling against Bible reading in public schools.”

¹⁹³ Gregory Jaynes, “Unbending Bob Jones U. Is Again Focus of Furor,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 1982, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/01/14/us/unbending-bob-jones-u-is-again-focus-of-furor.html>. Fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell and Bob Jones, who had for decades been outspoken against desegregation, refused to comply with these laws in their educational institutions by denying admission to non-whites and whites who supported interracial marriage, causing the Internal Revenue Service to threaten their tax-exempt status in 1976.

¹⁹⁴ Lugg, “Reading, Writing, and Reconstructionism: The Christian Right and the Politics of Public Education,” *Educational Policy* 14, no. 5 (November 2000): 624, DOI:10.1177/0895904800014005006.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 624.

pierced the “Bible Belt” and was destroying the traditional US WASP culture across the country,¹⁹⁶ as had had occurred following the Civil War and the “revolution in mores in the 1920’s, campaigns to counter that trend gained new urgency.”¹⁹⁷

WASPs had been staunchly united in their national identity since the counterrevolution of 1776, but near the end of the of the Vietnam war a movement of “white power religious radicalism emerged as part of Cold War understandings of communism as a threat to Christianity.”¹⁹⁸ In the same national context, there were also influential scientific discourses emerging that were used to rationalize the reproduction of white supremacy following the end of racial apartheid, which would directly bolster the market demand for the TTI for influence on US politics. The American public was captivated by the theories of criminality offered by social scientists like Moynihan, Edward C. Banfield,¹⁹⁹ and James Q. Wilson²⁰⁰ in this historical moment. These were social scientists who, with minor distinctions, explained “black poverty as a fact of American life and crime and violence as somehow innate among African Americans,”

Especially, after the outcome of Roe vs. Wade in 1973, which led to increased political contestation and “explosive growth in fundamentalist church membership and increased interest by the general public.” This attitude was in great part linked to the ideals of WASPs who saw abortion as a threat to the perpetuation and dominance of the white race. Also see Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, 159.

¹⁹⁶ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 180.

¹⁹⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 240.

¹⁹⁸ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 6-7. Ideologies of Christianity, capitalism, white identity, and patriotism, were so entangled in US culture that “a large contingent of white power activists in the post-Vietnam moment believed in white supremacy as a component of religious faith.” Racist churches contended that white people “were the true lost tribe of Israel and that nonwhites and Jews were descended from Satan or animals,” and that God’s people would not be raptured if they did not destroy non-whites and Jews before Christ returned. In order to preserve and expand their ethnic group, many US WASPs began to “amass arms and train themselves to take part in a coming end-times battle that would take the shape of race war.”

¹⁹⁹ Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and the Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Colchester, UK: The Book Service LTD, 1974).

²⁰⁰ James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1970).

and in turn called for “divestment from community action programs and other social welfare initiatives” and growth of police and prisons.²⁰¹

With Daniel Patrick Moynihan²⁰² as his special advisor on urban affairs, President Richard Nixon declared the War on Drugs and in 1968 passed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act and the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act. The “new federalist’s”²⁰³ campaign advisor and aide on domestic affairs, John Ehrlichman, later recalled that these policies were part of a racist dog whistle strategy²⁰⁴ through which Nixon aimed to obscure his strategy to suppress Black power and the anti-war movement by further criminalizing drugs and associating these groups with their use and sale.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 21.

²⁰² Ibid, 59; Citing Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, US Department of Labor, March 1965). Hinton explains how Moynihan’s influential book titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, “drew in equal measure on social science research and psychological theory to argue that delinquency, crime, unemployment, and poverty resulted from unstable black families and what he called the “pathology of post-industrial society.” This report claims that African Americans were plagued by their history as slaves, which had been “transmitted from one generation to the next, producing high rates of unemployment, failing school systems, and neglected housing.”

²⁰³ Ibid, 137-138, 135. Throughout Nixon’s presidency, the “vast majority of the \$2.4 billion that federal policymakers invested in law enforcement and criminal justice institutions ... went to local police departments.” This “New Federalism” allowed the Nixon administration to focus the growth of policing and prison regimes on non-white people in urban areas without explicitly saying so explicitly, by putting resources in the hands of “criminal justice planning agencies at the local level that would design and implement new patrol and surveillance programs.”

²⁰⁴ Harry Robbins Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), 53. Nixon’s racism is, perhaps, best exemplified in the words of his chief of staff, HR Haldeman, who in one of his diary entries detailing an interaction with Nixon as his Chief of Staff recalled the former stating: “you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to. Pointed out that there has never in history been an adequate black nation, and they are the only race of which this is true. Says Africa is hopeless.”

²⁰⁵ Dan Baum, “Legalize it All: How to Win the War on Drugs,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April, 2016, 22, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://archive.harpers.org/2016/04/pdf/HarpersMagazine-2016-04-0085915.pdf>. Evidence of this white supremacist strategy emerged in a 1994 when Dan Baum interviewed Nixon’s domestic policy adviser John Ehrlichman, who stated: “The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them

As it became evident that “white ‘youth in trouble’ were inadvertently being affected by the “punitive climate” at this time, however, “congress intervened to decriminalize certain offenses that policymakers associated with white children and teenagers.”²⁰⁶ While, at the same time, passed new legislation targeting “youth of color who had family members with arrest records, attended public schools, lived in public housing, or received welfare benefits.”²⁰⁷ Policies fueled by white America’s fears of urban black youths caused rates of homelessness and incarceration rates to soar while the availability of publicly funded mental health services simultaneously receded.²⁰⁸ In this context, the potential of privately owned and operated residential facilities became an attractive alternative for (mostly white and wealthy) parents who feared their children would develop substance abuse issues or be convicted of a crime.

Despite the demand for a solution, however, there were few options available until Synanon’s techniques evolved and were implemented in residential programs for troubled youth around the country, which were funded through private sources and state agencies. Beginning in 1968, Dederich transformed Synanon’s conception of addiction to an incurable pathology that can only be managed through perpetual residency in the community.²⁰⁹ After thousands of non-addicts who lived outside the community visited Synanon to participate in game sessions in the previous years, its popularity drove Dederich to shift the character of the program from a substance rehabilitation facility to a

night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.” The comprehensive Drug Abuse and Prevention Act of 1970, the commencement of the War on Drugs in 1971, and the establishment of the DEA in 1973 can be seen part of this campaign of control. Also see Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 135.

²⁰⁶ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 3-4.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*, 112.

²⁰⁹ Ofshe, “The Social Development of the Synanon Cult,” 112.

futuristic and experimental commune.²¹⁰ Rather than treating “addiction” as a standalone pathology in this community, Synanon became focused on rooting out “character disorders” in its members, which were framed as the root of addiction and made living there viable for people without substance abuse or addiction disorders.²¹¹

In the following decades, these techniques spread beyond the confines of Synanon communities to state-sanctioned carceral facilities, where authorities conducted experiments in “low-intensity physical and psychological torture as a means to control political activity” within and beyond their walls.²¹² Synanonian techniques were first weaponized in the federal prison system in 1967 through program called Asklepion, which was copied in at least 10 other facilities after beginning in Marion Federal Penitentiary.²¹³ Funded in-part by the LEAA,²¹⁴ these programs represent an attempt “to use therapeutic communities to rehabilitate all manner of inmates within the prison and not just those who were identified as drug users.”²¹⁵

In the 1970’s, radical social movements²¹⁶ continued to rage domestically in the free and unfree worlds alongside the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam,²¹⁷ when there

²¹⁰ Ibid, 113. One innovation that came during this period, was the policy that children would be separated from their parents at six months old to be raised in a “peer group dormitory.”

²¹¹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 27.

²¹² Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” 60.

²¹³ Lipton, “Therapeutic community treatment programming in corrections,” 220.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” 60.

²¹⁶ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 9.

²¹⁷ Alan Eladio Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico: Chicano/a Radicalism, Solidarity Politics, & Latin Social Movements* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 2016), 4. By the 1970’s, political movements departed from the demands of civil rights movements as they came to understand that “changing political laws did not necessarily alter behaviors or lead to equal economic opportunities, fair treatment, or freedom from state-sanctioned and extralegal violence.” Movements calling for “armed self-defense” were enflamed during this period, including the Revolutionary Action Movement, the American Indian Movement, the Black Liberation Army, and the Young Lords, to defend their communities amidst the growing capacities of policing and prison regimes.

was a “reinvigoration the connections between “First” and “Third” world liberation projects” in Asia, Mexico, Latin America, and Africa.²¹⁸ A month after the Attica Prison rebellion began on September 9, 1971, Nixon attended the National Conference of Corrections a month later, where he worked with experts to develop a “Long-Range Master Plan” for building prisons²¹⁹ aimed to stifle anti-colonial revolts and otherwise repress communities of color²²⁰ through their violent and pedagogical effects.²²¹ One such example was the notorious Special Treatment and Rehabilitation Training (START) program at Marion Federal Penitentiary,²²² the techniques of which were drawn from behavioral scientists like Schein and Skinner, but some were adopted directly from Synanon,²²³ including attack therapy sessions.²²⁴ The next year, the Nixon administration passed the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act, which established the Special Action

²¹⁸ Robinson. *The Terms of Order*, xv.

²¹⁹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 74. Within next two years, the federal government spent around \$3 billion dollars on more than 430 new prisons, and by 1980 had worked with state governments to plan the construction of 2,000 more carceral facilities across the nation.

²²⁰ Ibid, 174. Following this line of thought, in 1974, corrections expert for the National Council on Crime and Delinquency named William Nagel said, “We must conclude, therefore, that the new prisons are for blacks.”

²²¹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 174.

²²² Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” 61, 67, 59. The START program was a “dumping ground” for “problem inmates” in the federal prison system that began in 1972. Gómez likens it to a “prison-based, Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) – like set of tactics that included surveillance, infiltration, and disruption.” Among others, Black Muslims, Chicanos, Puerto Riqueños, radical Native Americans, as well as members of the Black Liberation Army and the the Republik of New Afrika, were tortured, drugged, and experimented on. By Edgar Schein’s recommendation 10 years previously, prison authorities believed that “by isolating them in the same institution and employing a series of behavior-modification techniques, as well as physical and psychological torture, they could control dissent.” Over the next six years, iterations were established in Attica, Leavenworth, McNeil Island, Terre Haute, Soledad, Atlanta, and others.

²²³ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 27; Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” 64. Reflecting Synanon’s strategy of “breaking people down with attack therapy, isolation, and rigid restrictions, and gradually restoring limited freedom and positive affirmation to those who complied;” the techniques used at START “all shared the common strategy that by playing on weaknesses or supposed faults, prisoners were broken down (or broke themselves down) and then were given a new image of themselves.”

²²⁴ Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” 70.

Office for Drug Abuse Prevention and authorized the official establishment of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Thus, extending the federal implementation and funding for AA and Synanonian techniques in the War on Drugs, War on Crime, and Cold War, through their implementation in US carceral facilities for adults and youth alike.

As Synanon continued to evolve and grow in power and influence in the mid-1970's²²⁵ alongside the US criminal justice system, the organizational leadership took steps to avoid paying taxes or being regulated by state entities. When Dederich estimated that the organization controlled over \$30 million in 1975,²²⁶ the board of directors proclaimed Synanon as a religion "to secure church organization status from the Internal Revenue Service" (IRS).²²⁷ Subsequently, Dederich's authority rose to the level of divinity in the eyes of his followers as leader of the Church of Synanon, after he was publicly named as the "highest spiritual authority" and promulgator of "laws and decisions of the group."²²⁸ Ushering in the most violent period of the organization's history, Synanon ceased to graduate residents, who aside from being threatened with "starting a financial life and career from scratch,"²²⁹ were told they would "return to addiction, become prostitutes, be institutionalized for insanity, or die if they left."²³⁰

²²⁵ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 40, 140. There were six Synanon communities in California by the middle of the decade, as well as others in Detroit, New York, Seattle, Washington, DC, Chicago, Puerto Rico, Berlin, and Malaysia. Aside from contributions from members and selling advertising and promotional items, the operation was funded by a "hustling" operation whereby members sold products and sought donations in goods (such as food and building supplies) and cash from individuals, businesses, and other organizations, around the country.

²²⁶ Lipton, "Therapeutic community treatment programming in corrections," 113.

²²⁷ Ofshe, "The Social Development of the Synanon Cult," 113.

²²⁸ Ibid, 113.

²²⁹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 42.

²³⁰ Ibid, 41.

Amidst a bizarre and cult-like shift, Synanon became integrated into juvenile justice system.²³¹ The community in Santa Monica had been criticized by local and national media for abusing children throughout the early-70's; but after winning a series libel suits and a 1976 investigation, triggered by reports of runaways, found no evidence of these crimes, members "went so far as to chide the county probation department for not mandating local delinquents into it."²³²

Synanon's therapeutic approach had already been adopted in private and government funded substance abuse centers by this point, but in 1977 Synanon established its own bootcamps for troubled youths called the "Punk Squad." Most of the residents of which had been sentenced to attend after having been convicted of crimes as an alternative to being incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities.²³³ Considered to be "the first of their kind," these bootcamps subjected children to "rigorous physical training and severe punishment for noncompliance."²³⁴ While a central component of the Synanon "game" was physical non-violence, the abuse of children in these bootcamps paved the way for the organization to become more brutal towards members and outsiders who defied Dederich's decrees:

Juveniles in the 70's were often sent to Synanon by juvenile agencies or by courts on juvenile officers' recommendation. Synanon wanted the kids to try to keep their tax free status and placed them in a militaristic "Punk Squad" (forerunner of Scared Straight and other failed camp programs). As these juveniles did not want to be there, Synanon methods failed. Violence was then permitted upon them, breaking for first time Synanon's "non violent rule." Children were struck across the face, knocked down,

²³¹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 322.

²³² Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 40-41.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

otherwise punished and then “gamed.” Soon the OK on violence would spread to “splitees,” suspected thieves and perceived spies and enemies.²³⁵

The creation of these bootcamps shifted the character Synanon, largely because the organization began to receive funding from the state to run them and Dederich determined that the presence of other children these communities were a “financial drain.”²³⁶ While they had previously had the right to have sex or form relationships with others at their own will, Synanon residents were required to ask veteran members called “elders ... for permission to date and were forced to follow a strict and celibate dating ritual.”²³⁷ The leadership mandated that all male residents of five years or more have vasectomies and women to have abortions or be forced to leave, many of whom were supposedly “bullied into it during lengthy “game” sessions.”²³⁸ Not only were they monitored within the confines community itself, but also in the local area where a “Synanon police force patrolled the nearby streets looking for members who might be breaking the rules.”²³⁹ So while members were allowed to leave at any time, there were mechanisms in place to ensure that those who stayed were conforming to Dederich’s demands while interacting with non-members.

The organization fell under unprecedented public scrutiny in 1978, just one year after the bootcamp program was established, when it was discovered that the leadership had purchased \$60,000 in firearms and ammunition to stockpile in the Santa Monica

²³⁵ Morantz, “The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich.”

²³⁶ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 42.

²³⁷ Pendle, “Shaved Heads, Snipped Tubes, Imperial Marines, and Dope Fiends: the Rise and Fall of Chuck Dederich and Synanon.”

²³⁸ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 42.

²³⁹ Pendle, “Shaved Heads, Snipped Tubes, Imperial Marines, and Dope Fiends: the Rise and Fall of Chuck Dederich and Synanon.”

compound.²⁴⁰ Dederich was never convicted of any charges related to children, but in 1978 was arrested while drunk in Europe, before being convicted of assault and conspiracy to commit murder.²⁴¹ Synanon faced numerous criminal investigations and public criticism in the years that following Dederich's arrest, based on allegations of brainwashing, slavery, sexual exploitation, false imprisonment, stockpiling weapons, forced sterilization, tax evasion, murder and assault, making violent threats, embezzlement of charitable donations by corporate officers, and child abuse.²⁴² While the last Synanon community ceased to exist in 1991 due to owing outstanding taxes to the IRS, its legacy was carried forth in TTI programs like Straight Inc. and WWASP despite widespread criticism of The Seed.

VI. STRAIGHT INCORPORATED AND THE "TOUGH LOVE" MOVEMENT

In the aftermath of the Ervin report, the Seed's power continuously declined as former participants came forth with allegations of "beatings, extended isolation and restraint, public humiliation, food deprivation, sleep deprivation, forced exercise to the point of exhaustion sensory deprivation, and lengthy maintenance of stress positions."²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 41.

²⁴¹ Ofshe, "The Social Development of the Synanon Cult," 121; Morantz, "The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich;" Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost: How to the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids*, 42-43. Dederich had drawn attention from law enforcement officials after ordering his followers to assassinate Paul Morantz, an attorney and social critic of Synanon who had won a \$300,000 suit for a former Synanon resident in 1978. Three weeks later, an assassination attempt was carried out by a group Synanon's militant members known as the imperial marines. They transported a four-foot long rattlesnake, with the rattler removed so the victim had no warning of the deadly venomous snake's presence, to Morantz home and stuffed it in his mailbox. This case drew special attention because Morantz survived being bitten by the snake one month before the Jonestown massacre, when the media had stirred up the world's fear of violent cults.

²⁴² Ofshe, "The Social Development of the Synanon Cult," 121; Morantz, "The History of Synanon and Charles Dederich;" Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 40.

²⁴³ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 6.

Despite public criticism of the Seed and its leader by former participants and their parents, as well as journalists, psychiatrists, and others, many people still believed in the efficacy of the program's therapeutic approach, and set out to create "a new program with the same structure, with greater professional supervision and a different name."²⁴⁴

This came to fruition in 1976 when real estate developer Frank Zappala and shopping mall owner Mel Sembler, who believed The Seed had helped his son, founded a program in St. Petersburg, Florida, called Straight Incorporated²⁴⁵ with a \$50,000 LEAA grant.²⁴⁶ Whereas The Seed had been funded by the state, throughout Straight Inc.'s existence between 1976 and 1993 it operated as a non-profit organization that ran on donations. Yet, down to using blue plastic chairs like The Seed, the methods used at Straight Inc. "were virtually identical to those of The Seed and quite similar to Synanon."²⁴⁷ Like its predecessors, this new iteration clearly reflected the brainwashing technologies used on USAF pilots held in Chinese and North Korean prison camps in the 1940's-50's, as Maia Szalavitz points out,²⁴⁸ which were simultaneously being used in the federal prison system to suppress radical social movements.

²⁴⁴ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 61.

²⁴⁵ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 62-63.

²⁴⁶ "Report Says Straight Fulfills its Purpose, Urges More Training," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 23, 1978, 6-8, Accessed June 9, 2022, http://survivingstraightinc.com/StPetersburgFLnewspaperArticles/5-23-1978-Report-says-Straight-fulfills-its-purpose_Combined.pdf.

²⁴⁷ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 33.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 79-84; Yablonsky, *The Tunnel Back: Synanon*; Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China*. Just as Yablonsky had compared the Synanonian therapeutic approach to the brainwashing techniques to which USAF pilots were subjected to in Chinese prison camps during the Korean War, Szalavitz demonstrates that the therapeutic approach of Straight Inc. reflects all of the "themes" of brainwashing identified by Lifton.

Attack therapy at Straight Inc. was conducted by “unsupervised and unqualified staff,”²⁴⁹ many of whom were former participants in the Seed and their parents.²⁵⁰ During these “rap” sessions as they were called, participants were broken down through harsh verbal abuse and those who refused to comply with the program were violently restrained.²⁵¹

The “misbehavior,” as Straight labeled such people, would be placed on his back, while other participants literally sat on his abdomen and legs. A participant would be assigned to control each limb and a fifth person would often hold the misbehavior’s head, sometimes slamming the teen’s mouth closed and restricting breathing to force compliance.

New arrivals were under constant surveillance, even while using the restroom or taking a shower. They had to ask for permission from “oldcomers” from to walk and be guided to their desired location while holding their chaperone’s belt loop.²⁵² Like the Seed, participants who were new to the program continued living in host homes, locked in bedrooms with the windows sealed so they could not escape.²⁵³ The therapeutic approach involved boys being “constantly called “cocksuckers” and “faggots,” especially if they confessed to have been molested by men.²⁵⁴ They were also told that sex before marriage was “masturbating inside girls,” who were frequently referred to as “sluts” and “whores.”²⁵⁵ In this way, the staff members at Straight Inc. used culturally-inscribed notions of gender and sexuality rooted in Christianity, in order to guilt and shame the captive children to conform to their moral and medico-juridical discourses.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 62-63.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 33.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 26.

²⁵² Ibid, 34.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 52.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 82-83.

The parents of residents were not informed by administrators that the program was experimental,²⁵⁷ but instead were “told that if their children do not graduate, they will return to their prior bad behavior and almost inevitably die.”²⁵⁸ From this perspective, drug abuse “was not just dangerous or unhealthy, it was evil” and must be defeated “by any means necessary,” even “if that meant breaking the law, beating a child, [or] kidnapping someone.”²⁵⁹ According to the Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic and Appropriate Use of Residential Treatments (ASTART) reports, this discourse of urgency is central to the marketing strategy of recruiters to this day, who are trained to gaslight parents into enrolling their children using a discourse similar to the following:²⁶⁰

You’ve called just in time. We’ve seen this before. You need to enroll your child without delay. If you don’t, your child is on a path to jail, a mental hospital, the gutter, or the morgue. It sounds like you’ve lost control as a parent, and the only way to get control back is to let us impose discipline in a controlled environment. Let me take your application—right now. Remember, your child is in danger and there is no time to lose.

Straight Inc. was framed as a life saving measure for parents and tough on crime advocates, but it’s effectiveness quickly came into question after several former counselors quit the first year it was opened. They brought their criticisms of the program to the press²⁶¹ and “complained to authorities that Straight was maltreating children.”²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 62-63.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 169-171.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 81-82.

²⁶⁰ “Deceptive Marketing in the “Troubled Teen” Business,” Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic & Appropriate Use of Residential Treatment, October 2011, 5, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://astartforteens.org/assets/files/ASTART-Deceptive-Marketing-Oct-2011.pdf>.

²⁶¹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 63; Citing William Nottingham, “Drug Program Allegedly Used Coercive Tactics to Control Clients,” *St. Petersburg Times*, February 12, 1978, http://www.survivingstraightinc.com/StPetersburgFLnewspaperArticles/2-12-1978-Drug-Program-Allegedly-used_coercive_combined.pdf. One counselor from Straight Inc. described how their desire to help children had backfired to a reporter for the *St. Petersburg times*, stating: “The program was getting ... so bad that I felt it was hurting more kids than it was helping.”

²⁶² Ibid, 62-63.

These criticisms did not, however, disqualify the utility of Straight nor discourage parents from enrolling new participants. While the War on Crime and War on Drugs were causing unprecedented rates of arrests and incarceration in urban communities of color, there were only “three black youths and two other minority children” in the Straight Inc. program in 1978.²⁶³ Rather than being sent to juvenile detention centers, jails, or prisons, like their non-white counterparts, many children were sentenced to attend Straight Inc. for having been convicted of drug-related crimes.²⁶⁴ Thus, shielding them from the stigma of criminalization, while at the same time projecting the idea that non-white criminals in urban areas was creeping into wealthy white communities. This implicit dynamic made residential programs for troubled teens like Straight Inc. particularly useful to Ronald Reagan’s presidential campaign and policy discourses in the following decade.

After first witnessing the Synanonian therapeutic approach while visiting Daytop Village in 1980,²⁶⁵ Nancy Reagan became an advocate for aggressive drug rehabilitation programs for children and adults like Straight Inc. She began her “Just Say No” campaign soon after, which organized in conjunction with the parent-led anti-drug movement.²⁶⁶ Aligned with the Christian epistemology of the fundamentalist-led Moral Majority²⁶⁷ that

²⁶³ “Report Says Straight Fulfills its Purpose, Urges More Training.”

²⁶⁴ Cyndy Etler, *Dead Inside: A True Story* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Fire), 274, *Kindle*; Citing Joe Childs, “Straight Inc. New Drug Program Set For Sept. 1.,” *The Evening Independent*, July 27, 1976, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=OEdQAAAAIABAJ&sjid=nlgDAAAIBA J&pg=1924,2181239>.

²⁶⁵ William F. O’Reilly, “My brief encounter with Nancy Reagan,” *The Sun Chronicle*, February 15, 2022, Accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.thesunchronicle.com/opinion/columns/guest-column-my-brief-encounter-with-nancy-reagan/article_fc105d79-6983-5e4c-adcf-77e26f38a670.html.

²⁶⁶ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 29.

²⁶⁷ Bruce, “The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society,” 183. In an effort “to mobilise conservatives irrespective of party affiliation,” Jerry Falwell was made the leader of the

was supporting her husband's presidential campaign, she advocated an approach that presumes drug use is immoral and reduces human behavior to rational choices that can be molded through strict discipline.

The belief that “tough love” was required to raise moral, healthy, law-abiding, children had long saturated the psyche of Christian parents at this point, but the sense of its necessity was revitalized and intensified by the 1982 bestselling book titled *Tough Love*.²⁶⁸ The authors were counselors named Phyllis and David York, who based on the AA principle of not enabling alcoholics to perpetuate their addiction, contended that “if a child refuses to stop taking drugs, the rest of the family should withdraw from him completely and expel him from home until he quits.”²⁶⁹ Because their ideas fit the false and sensationalist media representations of the unprecedented dangers teens faced at the time, which proliferated “warning signs” of substance abuse that were common teenage behaviors, while obscuring the fact that most people simply grow out of them, hundreds of parents “tough love” support groups were formed around the country.²⁷⁰ Almost immediately, this approach to child-rearing would be directly integrated into state policy.

In a political climate of rapid carceral expansion,²⁷¹²⁷² roughly eight months before her husband declared the War on Drugs, on October 14, 1982, Nancy Reagan

Moral Majority 1979; a coalition of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, that aimed to “sensitize conservative Christians to political issues and their need to get involved.”

²⁶⁸ Phyllis York, *Toughlove* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1982).

²⁶⁹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 16-17.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 5. In the two decades between the commencement of the War on Crime and Reagan's declaration of the War on Drugs in 1982, the US criminal justice system had “added 251,107 citizens to the prison system” as a consequence of “tough on crime” policies at the state and federal level.

²⁷² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 63. Alexander estimates that between 1981 and 1991, that

called Straight her “favorite” privately funded youth rehabilitation after visiting a facility in Florida.²⁷³ After this trip, she released a series of check lists for parents describing the “warning signs” of teen drug abuse, which included normal behaviors.²⁷⁴ These lists were “published in the media and distributed by anti-drug groups, like Straight” and other rehabilitation programs for troubled teens,²⁷⁵ which made them attractive options to parents in a context “where there were few options for parents or teens.”²⁷⁶ At least discursively, not only did these programs offer substance abuse treatment and prevention, but also a means to prevent, disrupt, and repair the influence that post-war decadence, urban culture, drug use, and atheistic communist ideology, had on America’s children.²⁷⁷

While Synanon communities continuously declined during his presidency, Ronald Reagan’s criminal justice reforms²⁷⁸ were conducive to the widespread use of its therapeutic approach in US prisons and the TTI. Rates of drug abuse and addiction had gone down in the years leading up to his election, but the Reagan administration garnered public support for his War on Drugs through media representations characterizing drug

Department of Defense antidrug spending increased from around \$33 million dollars to \$1,042,000, while the DEA’s grew from \$86 million to \$1,026,000, and the FBI from \$38 million to \$181 million.

²⁷³ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 17-18.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 28-29. Some of these included “living in filthy bedrooms and saying it is their room and they can do what they want,” “leaving dirty dishes around and claiming they did not do it,” “sullen, uncaring attitudes and behavior,” as well as “staying out late,” “defiance” and “all black dress.””

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 71, 28-29.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 71.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 106-107.

²⁷⁸ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 311, 316, 317. Characterizing the USSR and other “communist” regimes as part of an “evil empire,” Reagan’s administration dismantled the LEAA and passed Military Cooperation with Civilian Law Enforcement Agencies Act his first year of office. This was in an effort “to seal off the US from “undesirable influences” within the rest of the Western Hemisphere,” effectively “opened up what had previously been a domestic War on Crime to the military by extending surveillance and patrol to the nation’s borders.” Reagan continued this trend with the passage of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, tripling the amount of federal funding for drug enforcement through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (also known as the Drug Free America Act), and signing into law the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. He also allocated funding towards drug treatment and substance abuse education in public schools through their “Just Say No” legislation and advocated for Straight inc.

trade and addiction in urban communities of color to be a serious threat to White suburbia.²⁷⁹ Reagan's vision of social reality compelled in his supporters a desire to inoculate traditional WASP values in a generation of young people who were being affected by cosmopolitan culture.²⁸⁰ The widespread marketing and strong endorsement for the mission of Reagan and other conservative figures fueled the establishment of Straight programs in "Atlanta, Cincinnati, Boston, and Detroit; Orlando, Florida; Springfield, Virginia; and Southern California," between 1981 and 1989.²⁸¹

In addition to filtering White children out of the swollen criminal justice system,²⁸² their participation in the program pedagogically exacerbated the imagined threat posed by racialized criminals through the production of troubled teens as misguided victims of modern culture who are capable of redemption if they choose it. Straight Inc. achieved this by generating the ideological existence of troubled teens and the social forces causing their deviance, as well as, effectively traumatizing participants to the degree that they develop troubling behaviors that had not previously been present;

²⁷⁹ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 317; Henry H. Brownstein, *The Rise and Fall of a Violent Crime Wave: Crack Cocaine and the Construction of a Social Crime Problem* (New York, NY: Harrow and Heston, 1996); Ted Chiricos, "Moral Panic as Ideology: Drugs, Violence, Race and Punishment in America," in *Justice with Prejudice: Race and Criminal Justice in America*, eds. M. Lynch & E. B. Patterson, 19-48 (New York, NY: Harrow and Heston).

²⁸⁰ "Wikileaks: Nicaragua's Ortega 'financed by drugs money,'" *BBC News*, December 7, 2010, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-11934372>. This was especially true in a context where it was discovered that the communist Sandinista regime was drawing funds international drug traffickers like Pablo Escobar, which domestic US media sources widely associated with the criminal culture of communities of color in urban areas.

²⁸¹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 63.

²⁸² Jessica Pfaffendorf, "Wayward Elites: From Social Reproduction to Social Restoration in a Therapeutic Boarding School," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 82, no.2 (April 26, 2019), DOI:10.1177/0190272519831978; Heather Mooney and Paul Leighton, "Troubled Affluent Youth's Experiences in a Therapeutic Boarding School: The Elite Arm of the Youth Control Complex and Its Implications for Youth Justice," *Critical Criminology* 27, no.1 (December 2019): 611-626, DOI:10.1007/s10612-019-09466-4. Privately owned and operated residential programs for troubled teens serve the function of filtering children of wealthy families out the criminal justice system and neutralizing the stigma attached to their identities by training them to reproduce redemption narratives.

including “diagnosed psychological disorders such as post traumatic stress disorder, severe depression, social phobias, panic disorders.”²⁸³ This bolstered public support for the expansion of the criminal justice system targeting non-white communities, which were characterized as being source of troubled teens’ ills.

Throughout its existence, Straight was fraught with the same controversies as its predecessors, related to licensing, criminal investigations for abuse, neglect, and wrongful imprisonment, lawsuits from former residents, licensing issues, and criticism from organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union, which in 1982 referred to the Atlanta program as a “concentration for throwaway kids.”²⁸⁴ Nonetheless, even after Reagan left office, Zapala and Sembler continued to garner advocacy and support from the federal government, largely because they donated a total of \$250,000 to George H.W. Bush’s presidential campaign in 1988, for which they were made ambassadors to Australia and Spain.²⁸⁵ Thus, suggesting that government officials were more concerned with re-election and support for their domestic policies than the well-being of the nation’s children, who were by the thousands experiencing institutional child abuse.

By 1990, in the middle of Bush’s presidency, more than 50,000 teens had gone through Straight programs which were raking in more than \$10 million dollars annually as survivors continued to surface with horrific and tragic stories.²⁸⁶ Despite allegations of abuse in all its programs, among other issues, Straight seemed immune to investigation

²⁸³ Thaddeus Camlin, “Teen Boot Camps: America’s Legacy of Torturing Children,” *Practical Recovery*, September 29, 2017, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.practicalrecovery.com/prblog/teen-boot-camps-treatment-torture/#:~:text=Torture%20results%20in%20PTSD%2C%20not,industry%20was%20worth%20%242%20billion>.

²⁸⁴ Ibid; Quoting Molly Moore, “‘Straight’ to Open Area Chapter,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1982.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 68-69.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 65.

and prosecution largely because of Reagan and Bush's support for the program.²⁸⁷ However, the downfall of Straight began after a survivor and ex-counselor named Richard Bradbury, who after years of publicly criticizing Straight and breaking into the St. Petersburg facility in 1988 to draw attention to the abuses taking place there, appeared on a local talk show called *Eye on Tampa* in 1992. After Bradbury presented a massive amount of devastating photographic evidence of bruised children to a local talk show while accompanied by 50 former participants with supporting testimonies, Bush rescinded his support for Straight and the programs across the country were shut down by the end of 1993.²⁸⁸

Yet, this was not the end of Straight's influence on the US population. On the one hand, many former participants of Straight programs were traumatized and subsequently suffered long term psychological issues. And, on the other, Straight's therapeutic approach was carried on in other programs. For example, the former national clinical director of Straight, Miller Newton, founded a network of for-profit youth residential facilities called KIDS almost immediately after the organization ceased operations, which mirrored Straight's therapeutic approach down to the blue chairs. Former staffers also established a program called SAFE in the Orlando Straight facility the day after it closed that also used almost identical techniques.²⁸⁹ Further, the organization also spawned hundreds of "tough love" programs, wilderness adventure programs, behavior modification facilities, boarding schools, and bootcamps, "which either directly copied or indirectly arrived at many of the same abuse tactics and legal and antiregulatory

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 68-69.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 69.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 70.

strategies used by Straight.”²⁹⁰ Although these programs use(d) distinct discourses and incorporated a “phase” or “level” system,²⁹¹ their therapeutic approaches have also been based around “attack therapy, rigid rules, and complete isolation from the outside world.”²⁹²

VII. THE EMERGENCE OF WWASP AND IT’S AFTERLIFE

A manifestation of WASP culture in the US in the 1980’s, the “tough love” movement led to the proliferation of privately owned and operated programs that employed a therapeutic approach reflecting the belief that subjecting children to extreme punishment and neglect will improve their moral character. Throughout the 1980’s and early-90’s, wilderness adventure and bootcamp programs thrived across the Western US, including North Star and VisionQuest, which received federal funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, despite research demonstrating they were ineffective at reducing recidivism and harmful to participants.²⁹³ Wilderness programs thrust groups of children into remote outdoors environments for weeks or months with staff members to participate learn survival skills to build their discipline and repair their moral integrity. Bootcamps achieve this end by subjecting children to an intense and rigid training regimen by focused on intense exercise and drills on a mock military base. Aside from thousands of allegations of abuse, dozens of participants have died²⁹⁴ in these

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ “What is a WWASP Program?,” *WWASP Survivors*, Accessed May 30, 2022, <http://WWASPsurvivors.com/what-is-a-WWASP-program/>.

²⁹² Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 70.

²⁹³ Peter W. Greenwood and Susan Turner, “The VisionQuest Program: An Evaluation,” US Department of Justice (November 1987), <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/109581NCJRS.pdf>.

²⁹⁴ Kutz and O’Connell, *Residential Treatment Programs*.”

programs mostly due to untrained staff, lack of adequate nourishment, and reckless or negligent operating practices,²⁹⁵ resulting in many closures. However, new residential programs, like those affiliated with WWASP, continued to be established in their shadows.

Neither Robert Browning Lichfield nor Karr Farnsworth have college degrees or are qualified to be therapists,²⁹⁶ but they had been involved in the TTI in various capacities long before they incorporated WWASP in 1998. These Mormon men had been employed at a behavior modification program for youth called Provo Canyon between 1971 and 1988,²⁹⁷ when the school was facing numerous legal attacks²⁹⁸ for overmedicating children, subjecting them to extreme isolation, strip searches, and polygraphs, in addition to dangerous restraint techniques like dragging them by their hair and piling staff members on top of them.²⁹⁹ After Lichfield attended Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) seminar in the mid-1980s that was led by David Gilcrease, a former trainer for the Synanon-inspired organization LifeSpring, the two set out to build a “network of schools for troubled kids that would center their emotional growth” programming on such seminars.”³⁰⁰ All the while, ignoring the fact that LifeSpring seminars had “long been linked with psychological casualties, including psychotic breaks

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 14.

²⁹⁶ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 145.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Jessica Miller, “Provo Canyon School’s history of abuse accusations spans decades, far beyond Paris Hilton,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, September 20, 2020, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2020/09/20/provo-canyon-schools/>.

³⁰⁰ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 145.

in previously normal adults,” and that they were particularly traumatic for emotionally vulnerable children.³⁰¹

In 1987, Lichfield formed an umbrella of services called Teen Help LLC as part of the early WWASP network, which would later market BBA to potential clients. Soon the umbrella organization would “encompass a collection of behavior-modification schools and related services, such as marketing, referral services, and “escorts” to bring unwilling teens to the facilities.”³⁰² While Teen Help was the “marketing arm,” R&B Billing handled accounting and payments, and Teen Escort Service that would transport the clients from anywhere in the country.³⁰³ These interlocking nodes were also connected with “Gilcrease’s Resource Realizations, which would provide seminar leaders as needed.”³⁰⁴ In addition to these, there were other loosely associated legal entities³⁰⁵ that traded titles and ownership between “J. Ralph Atkin, the founder of SkyWest Airlines, ... Brent Facer, Ken Kay, Jay Kay (Ken’s son) and Narvin Lichfield (Bob’s brother).”³⁰⁶

Four years after Robert Lichfield’s brother-in-law opened Majestic Ranch Academy in Rudolph, Utah, Lichfield opened his first residential program, Cross Creek Manor, in La Verkin in 1990.³⁰⁷ In 1993, Robert Lichfield “signed a contract with the Utah Alcoholism Foundation, which owns Brightway Adolescent Hospital, to run and

³⁰¹ Ibid, 157.

³⁰² Ibid, 145-146.

³⁰³ Ibid, 16.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 145-146.

³⁰⁵ “WWASP History,” *WWASP Survivors*, Accessed May 30, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/about-wwasp/wwasp-history/>.

³⁰⁶ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 146-147.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 146.

manage that facility,”³⁰⁸ which allowed him to funnel clients into his businesses. That same year, a former LifeSpring participant who had subsequently been institutionalized for two years after a training seminar won a \$75,000 lawsuit. Nonetheless, the LGAT seminars would be administered internationally beginning in 1994, when the first foreign WWASP facility was established in Samoa called Paradise Cove. By the time WWASP shut down in 2010, there had existed affiliated programs in Mississippi, Montana, Colorado, South Carolina, New York, and California, as well as abroad in Jamaica, Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Czech Republic.³⁰⁹

In many cases, WWASP residential programs required that children progress through six levels or seminars between an 18-month and three-year period while living in the facility. At the first level of the program, they began with minimal privileges and amenities, including the right to speak or be alone. However, through proving their complicity with the program, participants could gain access to more desirable living standards and responsibilities.³¹⁰ For those children court ordered to attend these programs, their release was contingent on completing the program, so their freedom depended on obedience. Little is known about the criteria used by staff members to determine child’s progress, but the decision ultimately was in the hands of the children’s legal guardians who paid anywhere from \$2000-4000 per month.

Despite the high tuition costs, the living accommodations were meager, the clothing and footwear inadequate to protect the residents from the rugged environments.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 143.

³¹⁰ Echevarria, “The Effects of WWASPS Institutionalizing the Lives of Troubled Teens,” 17.

Food was often scarce, prepared in unsanitary conditions, and low-quality.³¹¹ One resident at Paradise Cove described becoming ill from the drinking water, but was denied serious medical attention, as well as their tonsillitis and scabies infestation.³¹² Each day children attend “self-directed schooling,” which mostly involves watching videos and completing packets, but there were no qualified teachers.³¹³ At High Impact, a bootcamp in Tecate, Mexico, captive children described being forced to exercise 5-7 hours a day, including holding stress positions on concrete and running thousands of laps around a dirt track in the hot sun without proper footwear.³¹⁴

Children in WWASPs would also attend LGAT seminars together, which were “composed primarily of attacks by the kids on one another.”³¹⁵ Based on Synanonian attack therapy, these exercises coerced participants to confess their weaknesses and faults, then being given brutal feedback by the facilitator and other participants about how their problems were their own fault. By harnessing group dynamics, they “are designed to produce profoundly emotional experiences” in participants and in turn transform their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.³¹⁶ The purpose was to penetrate the “fixed emotions” and “fixed behaviors” of the children and their parents, in order to unleash their inner “magical child,” who is “spontaneous and always intuitively right.”³¹⁷ Thus, amidst mounting evidence that it often causes long term trauma in participants, it

³¹¹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 147-151.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 150-151.

³¹³ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 150.

³¹⁴ “High Impact,” *WWASP Survivors*, Accessed May 30, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/wwasp-programs/high-impact/>.

³¹⁵ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 150.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

commodified an aggressive technique for the treatment of vulnerable children, often administered without oversight from medical professionals.

The strategy of WWASP seminars was to coerce participants to take full responsibility for their own circumstances, which reflects the Christian epistemology of free will as well as the rational agency of the modern subject. This way of thinking is delineated by an LGAT seminar poster that stated: “based on the results, you have exactly what you intended.”³¹⁸ This type of thinking “promote[s] an infantile belief in one’s own Godlike powers—not a healthy respect for what an individual can and cannot control.”³¹⁹ In other words, this therapeutic approach presumes that individuals are in complete control of their lives and they deserve anything that happens to them; including victims of domestic abuse or sexual assault, as well as persons who are LGBTQ+ or suffer from mental illness.

Like Straight Inc., children in WWASP programs who admitted to having been sexually abused during seminars were verbally shamed by staff members who subjected them to humiliating practices. For example, a 16-year-old girl was made to wear a name tag that read “SHAMEFUL SLUT” on revealing clothes with “SLUT. 25 CENTS” written on her shirt in lipstick.³²⁰ The man who had ordered her to do this then asked if she gave “blow jobs,” before he forced her to her knees in front of him.³²¹ Some programs run by Narvin Lichfield such as Cross Creek and Carolina Springs were also

³¹⁸ Ibid, 163.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 164.

³²⁰ Ibid, 190.

³²¹ Ibid.

known to use conversion therapy,³²² which aims to transform the sexual desires and gender identities of children who identify as LGBTQ+. This framework characterizes queer identity to be an immoral choice rather than a longstanding and engrained feature of the human species. Since queer identity is framed as malleable and pathological through this epistemology, even though this is not objectively the case, conversion therapy is simply fetishized torture known to cause long-lasting trauma in participants who are twice as likely to attempt suicide afterwards.³²³

As had been the case with The Seed and Straight Inc., WWASP counselors did not inform parents that research on LGAT seminars suggests they are ineffective and harmful to participants.³²⁴ Participants able to report abuse to their families because all communications of residents were limited, monitored, and subject to censorship.³²⁵ The more senior participants are often ordered to serve as leaders and guides for new arrivals, which allowed the owners to avoid hiring more staff members and maximize their profits. To get from one part of the facility to another, captive children were required “to move

³²² See Peggy Stack Fletcher, “Dallin Oaks Says Shock Therapy of Gays Didn’t Happen at BYU While He was President. Records Show Otherwise,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 16, 2021, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/11/16/dallin-oaks-says-shock/>; Harry Shukman, “Inside the ‘troubled teen’ school so disturbing it still gives ex-students nightmares,” *Babe*, July 27, 2018, Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/11/16/dallin-oaks-says-shock/>; Max Ford McBride, “Effect of Visual Stimuli in Electric Aversion Therapy,” Dissertation (Brigham Young University, 1976). Conversion therapy was practiced at Provo Canyon School where Lichfield got his start in the TTI. The direct relationship between these two institutions is unclear, but it is well documented that conversion therapy using electroshock therapy and other methods were experimented with and employed on students between 1970 and 1980 at the nearby Church of Latter Day Saints’ Brigham Young University.

³²³ John R. Bloshnich, Emmett R. Henderson, Robert W.S. Coulter, et al., “Sexual Orientation Change Efforts, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Suicide Ideation and Attempt Among Sexual Minority Adults, United States, 2016–2018,” *American Journal of Public Health* 110, no. 7 (July 1, 2020): 1024-1030, DOI:10.2105/AJPH.2020.305637.

³²⁴ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 149; Yechiel Klar, Richard Mendola, Jeffrey D. Fisher, et al., “Characteristics of Participants in a Large Group Awareness Training,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 58 no.1 (1990): 99-108. DOI:10.1037//0022-006x.58.1.99.

³²⁵ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 12-13.

from place to place in straight lines, saying Excuse me” to any adult they passed and keeping their eyes down.”³²⁶ At Royal Gorge Academy in Colorado, a staff member admitted using pepper spray on captive children “more than two times a day” to discipline them.³²⁷ Failure or refusal to obey instructions would result in a variety of punishments, depending on the severity of the offense:³²⁸

If participants continued to refuse to comply with lower-level punishments or if they couldn’t complete required exercise, they were sent to some form of solitary confinement. More serious transgressions, such as fighting or planning to run away, resulted in higher-category punishment. This meant immediate solitary confinement without intermediate consequences.

A former resident of a WWASP program called Paradise Cove³²⁹ reported being demoted or forced to listen to motivational recordings, typically Tony Robbins or Stephen Covey, while alone in a small room for minor offenses.³³⁰ The use of stress positions common across WWASP, which a former staff which an employee at Dundee Ranch likened to those used by the US military in Abu Ghraib.³³¹ For more serious violations, children were known to have been locked in a box of three-foot length dimensions, sometimes for weeks on end.³³² After a program called Sunrise Beach was investigated by Mexican police in 1995, they “found that girls had been held in isolation

³²⁶ Ibid, 154.

³²⁷ Maia Szalavitz, “Abuse History No Bar to For-Profit Teen Biz: Arrest Probably Won’t End It, Either,” *Huffingtonpost.com*, January 11, 2007, Accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/abuse-history-no-bar-to-f_b_38435.

³²⁸ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 149.

³²⁹ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 137-139. The same year the Cross Creek opened, Paradise Cove became the first WWASP facility outside the US, where around 350 boys slept on concrete floors in straw roofed huts on a beach in Samoa, while surrounded by guards, barbed wire, and security lights.

³³⁰ Ibid, 149.

³³¹ Ibid, 190-191.

³³² Ibid, 141. Being caught masturbating in that program “resulted in an automatic 3 days in the box.”

rooms in stressful physical positions for days.”³³³ In addition to witnessing the facility’s own version of the “box,” a former captive of Tranquility Bay “saw a few kids kicked and thrown,” and others “hog tied” or “handcuffed” with duct tape over their mouths.³³⁴ Another, described a punishment for minor offenses that was common in many WWASP programs called “observational placement” (OP), where children were forced to lay on their backs with their hands at their sides in a “tiled isolation room” for up to 18 months.³³⁵ At High Impact, near Tecate, Mexico, one boy recalled being locked in a “dog cage” for “a solid week.”³³⁶

The late-1990’s and early-2000’s was both the golden age of WWASP and its peak of public criticism and investigations by state agencies both domestically and abroad. Morava Academy and Paradise Cove had both closed in 1999 after local authorities discovered the children were neglected and abused in unsafe conditions by unqualified staff. As problems surfaced around other WWASP programs, the US State Department’s Bill Warren issued a communiqué to government officials in countries where WWASP was still in operation describing his concerns.³³⁷ Foreign programs like High Impact, Tranquility Bay, Paradise Cove, and Dundee Ranch, were subsequently closed after local authorities determined that the children in these programs were being denied basic needs and subjected to harmful techniques.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid, 154.

³³⁶ Ibid, 192.

³³⁷ Ibid, 163; Citing “Communiqué from Bill Warren to Secretary of State and American Embassies in Kingston, Jamaica; Tijuana, Mexico. and Prague, Czech Republic,” June 11, 1999, Released through FOIA November 10, 2001, authorized by Margaret P. Garfeld.

In an effort to protect their business, which in 2003 had a revenue of roughly \$80 million dollars per year,³³⁸ WWASP administrators followed the path of Mel Sembler and Frank Zappala: donating over \$1 million dollars to the Republican party in Utah and Governor George Pataki of New York, whose policies served the organization's interests.³³⁹ Amidst widespread criticism that year, Lichfield took steps to frame his enterprise as a moral mission rather than a profit-making venture. He described his programs as powerful weapons in the fight between good and evil to a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, during which he refused to be photographed for fear of being identified and attacked by the "deranged" former residents of his programs:

We're here getting kids off drugs and other evils ... We're here connecting kids with their families. We're here getting kids in touch with their higher source ... Do I believe, being a God-believing person, that the adversary to all good is going to sit back and let that happen without a major unleashing of dark forces? No, I don't ... God can't help everybody. I don't know how we're going to ... But it does provide an opportunity for thousands of kids to improve their lives. Those who choose not to, choose not to.³⁴⁰

Despite his efforts to expand his empire, however, the organization continued collapsing due to numerous lawsuits from survivors and growing pressure from the state for crimes relating to "child abuse, fraud, breach of contract, conspiracy, gross negligence, RICO violations, false imprisonment, assault, battery, and more."³⁴¹

³³⁸ Ibid, 203.

³³⁹ Ibid, 290.

³⁴⁰ John-Thor Dahlburg, "Key to His Schools' Success? It's God, Founder Says," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2003, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jul-13-na-tou ghbar13-story.html>.

³⁴¹ Kenneth Rosen, *Troubled: The Failed Promise of America's Behavioral Treatment Programs* (New York, NY: Little A, 2021), 143, *Kindle*.

In 2004, there were about 2,500 children residing in WWASP-affiliated programs,³⁴² which made up only a portion of the more than 50 other youth residential programs that Synanon had spawned since the 1970's. Most of the programs around the country were closed in the mid-2000's, including BBA and its antecedent forms. The WWASP name had faded away by 2010, but some programs stayed in operation under different names and others have since been opened by former WWASP owners³⁴³ and practitioners, which continue(d) to utilize the same "tough love" approach.³⁴⁴ One such example was called Youth Foundation Success Academy, which was located on the same site as a Cross Creek program called Horizon Academy, operated by staff and owners of former WWASP programs, and structured in the same way. Today, the program continues to operate under the name 3 Points Center. Other programs also continue to operate as their original names or were rebranded, which WWASP Survivors list on their website.³⁴⁵ Additionally, hundreds of other for-profit and non-profit programs that were never affiliated with WWASP also exist throughout the country and abroad; where children are subjected to behavior modification and faith-based treatments.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This chapter has delineated the history and politics of the fundamentalist movement, behavior modification, faith-based substance abuse rehabilitation, and the TTI, in the US at the turn of the millennium. By working through these entangled stories

³⁴² Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 290.

³⁴³ "Youth Foundation Success Academy," WWASP Survivors, Accessed June 8, 2022, <http://www.aspsurvivors.com/youth-foundation-success-academy-youth-foundation-inc/>.

³⁴⁴ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 290.

³⁴⁵ "WWASP Programs."

and discourses to draw connections between them, it has revealed how evangelical fundamentalists and other settler-colonists have pursued power and profit through the ownership of carceral facilities where, in many instances, children can be court ordered to attend. They are often operated by unqualified and often sadistic practitioners, who coerce the captive children to police one another's behavior to maximize profits by minimizing the number of employees, with minimal oversight or regulation by state entities. Through the language of morality, punishment, and medical treatment, they vindicate subjecting children to torture techniques they claim will save their souls, improve their lives, and protect society from their troubling nature.

During the interwar period, fundamentalist evangelicals formally organized to solidify and extend their power amidst fears of the forthcoming apocalypse, prompted by the British occupation of Israel and growing influence of evolutionary theory, Nietzschean philosophy, and liberal theology. Following the formation of the WCFA, fundamentalists set out to influence state policy and establishing their own institutions, including churches, colleges, and radio shows. The movement's apocalyptic fears were exacerbated by the passage of the New Deal during the Great Depression, which alongside other WASP theologians like Frank Buchman was framed as a Jewish, Satanic, and communist conspiracy to destroy Christianity. As the scientific field of behaviorism was developing in Euro-American nations, the influence of Buchman's ministry, which departed from mainstream fundamentalism but drew inspiration from its core writings, was growing rapidly in the same context. Guided by the Four Absolutes, Buchman sought to establish a global Christian utopia by submitting the entire human population to God Control, including fascist leaders who could impose his moral framework on the

world. Buchman's teachings were at the center of Bill Wilson and Bob Smith's inspiration to found AA in 1935, which integrated a medical interpretation of alcoholism into its faith-based predecessor.

While AA does not explicitly aim to coerce participants to conform to a global political order, the organization became conducive to the reproduction of racial capitalism after becoming deeply integrated into the US criminal justice system. As AA has traditionally emphasized the ethical and practical importance of participation being voluntary, court officials appealed to the logic of social contract theory, which dictates that people who violate the law or have become irrational agree to be punished and reformed by state institutions for their own good and that of society. Since the moral code of AA presumes its accordance with God's will and is both legitimated and often imposed by state institutions; it is implied that the medico-juridical architecture of the US and its social consequences are consistent with God's sense of morality, to the effect of reinforcing patriotic attitudes in segments the populace who identify as Christian. As will be evidenced in later chapters, this syncretic disciplinary strategy was incorporated in faith-based residential programs for troubled youth, like those owned and operated by Reverend Lester Roloff and Reverend Herman Fountain.

The formation of Israel and fears of a growing threat to their faith posed by atheistic communism further entrenched fundamentalist beliefs in US culture following the second World War and Korean War. Within this geopolitical context, these events also catalyzed intense research by the US government into the brainwashing technologies that had been developed and implemented by the Nazis and communist regimes across the Asian continent. Around the same time that fundamentalists were fighting against

desegregation and other forms of cosmopolitan culture, state agencies were ramping up their capabilities to repress non-white communities and Muslims, for the collective purpose of reproducing a WASP-dominated secular ethno-state reflecting the moral values of Western Christendom.

Pursuant to centuries of Christian evangelism in North America and the racist medico-juridical discourses it spawned, this white supremacist trajectory of settler colonialism and chattel slavery was carried forth with the bolstering of policing and prison regimes in the neoliberal age. It was within this context that Chuck Dederich integrated behaviorist and faith-based subject formation technologies to create Synanon's therapeutic approach, which aimed to coerce participants to submit to the will of the group. Alongside the growing carceral capacities of policing and prison regimes, -spurred by discourses pointing to communists, non-white youths, Satanic forces, and other forms of cosmopolitan culture, as the root of crime- Synanonian therapy was integrated into the US carceral system for adults and children in the 1970's to suppress radical social movements amidst burgeoning resistance to the restructuring of the global economy. Thus, laying the foundation for the rise of the TTI in the following decades.

An explosion of privately owned and operated residential programs for troubled youth occurred amidst the War on Crime, War on Drugs, and Cold War, when white conservative parents grew increasingly concerned by how their children were being affected by outside influences, their unprecedented susceptibility to criminalization, and there was a lack of effective treatment options due to deinstitutionalization. The TTI drew on public and private sources of funding to forcibly conform the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, of children to an ideal moral subjectivity; one that is law-abiding, sober,

obedient, patriotic, heteropatriarchal and cisgender, and otherwise consistent with biblical mandates for their appropriate conduct.

Using similar techniques as the controversial CEDU, The Seed, and Straight Inc. programs, WWASP emerged as the premier global network of residential facilities and services for troubled teens in the early-90's. Although it was meant to improve their lives, save their souls, and protect society from dangerous children, subjecting them to the "tough love" approach of WWASP produced extensive trauma and multiple deaths in participants.

The moral, political, and onto-epistemological, discourses of privately owned operated residential programs for trouble teens are framed by fundamentalist cosmologies. They both frame human thought, behavior, and emotion, as though it reflects the moral character of a person with free will, who is living in a political vacuum, who has knowledge of good and evil, and is judged for their conduct the same way as others. Consequently, while many fundamentalists oppose the modern sciences, their faith-based programs have adopted and otherwise reflected the principles of behavior modification to convert willing and unwilling participants to Christianity. At the same time, state-sanctioned carceral regimes have harnessed the widespread influence of Christian theology on the psyche of the US population as a technology of governance.

Since many adults and children are court ordered to complete faith-based programs after having been convicted of a crime, it can be said that the US government deems gendered Christian training as an appropriate means to achieve medico-juridical normality in participants and uphold the dominant social order. This is because the correctional system presumes the moral character of a pious Christian reflects the image

of the healthy and law-abiding person as demarcated by dominant medico-judicial discourses. This not only suggests that people whose ways of knowing and being depart from Christianity are targeted by policing and prison regimes, but also that the strategies and objectives of treatments substance abuse and addiction treatment are inconsistent with their needs or desires. Thus, insinuating that despite the separation of church and state, that the foreign and domestic military forces of the US government are waging a crusade articulated as modern progress; in a context where evangelical fundamentalists simultaneously characterize the state as oppositional to their movement.

The next chapter provides a history of Reverend Lester Roloff's ministry across the Southern US, which included residential facilities for youth and adults. Although the Roloff Homes were integrated into the criminal justice system, the former were, since the 1970's, targeted by the latter for abusing children, which Roloff defended through the language of religious freedom. As an Independent Fundamentalist Baptist minister funded by donations from supporters, Roloff was explicitly opposed to evidence-based scientific treatment and instead favored a faith-based disciplinary approach based on his interpretation of the bible. Despite his lifelong battles with the evils modern world, his techniques almost directly mirrored those instituted in other US carceral facilities that were based on the principles of behavior modification. Further, the moral character he aimed to instill in his residents was congruent with dominant medico-judicial discourses. When Reverend Herman Fountain, a protégé of Roloff, established the compound upon which BBA would later operate in 1978, this allowed the program to smoothly integrate with WWASP.

CHAPTER 3:

THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF REVEREND LESTER ROLOFF'S MINISTRY

I. INTRODUCTION

Comprehending the political history and technologies of Bethel Boys Academy (BBA), as well as the experiences of survivors, requires an interrogation of the life and ministry of independent fundamentalist Baptist (IFB) minister Lester Roloff, who inspired Reverend Herman Fountain's treatment approach and legal strategies as the founder of BBA. While the next chapter focuses on Fountain's ministry in Mississippi, which was deeply influenced by his experiences working at one of Roloff's residential facilities for troubled youth in the late-1970's, this one contextualizes its history and controversies as part of the network of faith-based residential programs operated by Roloff Evangelical Enterprises. It draws on publications of journalists, reports issued by government agencies, court documents, a medical whistleblower¹ report about institutional child abuse in the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI), websites for ongoing ministerial projects that were started by Lester Roloff, and a biography written by his wife Bradie Marie Roloff.²

By constructing this political history, from a range of perspectives, this chapter describes how Roloff vindicated his mission, pathologized children through gendered fundamentalist discourse, and structured his disciplinary program. It also speaks to his ministry's relationship with the state; both in the sense that children could be court ordered to attend his residential facilities and efforts by state agencies to submit these

¹ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 51.

² Marie Bradie Roloff, *Lester Roloff: Living by Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1978).

programs to licensing requirements. The story begins with the early life and ministry of Lester Roloff, whose strict Christian upbringing and education in Texas shaped his convictions as a fundamentalist preacher and drove him to establish residential homes for children and adults throughout the Southern US. Then it discusses Roloff's controversial and widely popular radio show called *The Family Altar*, his print publication *Faith Enterprises*, and the several churches he opened in Texas. The story turns to the founding of some of the most well-known Roloff Homes across the state beginning in the 1950's, including the Anchor Home for Boys, Rebekah Home for Girls, City of Refuge, and the Lighthouse for Boys. Registered as non-profit religious organizations, these were unlicensed residential facilities for children who were either convicted of crimes or enrolled by their parental guardians, for the purpose of improving their lives and saving their souls through faith-based treatment.

The chapter goes on to explain how state welfare and law enforcement agencies began intervening in the affairs of these facilities after allegations of abuse at the Rebekah Home started surfacing publicly in the early-1970's. These events set in motion decades of controversy and legal battles about licensing requirements for youth residential facilities in Texas, as Roloff defended the abusive practices at his facilities under his constitutionally protected right to practice his religion. The section that follows is focused on the event known as the Christian Alamo, Lester Roloff's death, and the brief exile of the Roloff Homes from Texas after the heirs to his empire continued to refuse licensure.

The chapter then delves into how the policies of George W. Bush's administration as governor of Texas attempted to garner support from evangelical voters for the

presidency paved the way for the return of the Roloff Homes. Then it describes the return of the Roloff Homes to Texas and the allegations of abuse that ensued in the first few weeks of their reopening, which resulted in their discreditation and once again be banished in the early-2000's. The proceeding section delineates the trajectory of the Roloff Homes that continued to operate in Mississippi, Missouri, and Florida, at the turn of the second millennium, where allegations of abuse continued to surface long after Roloff's death.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the political mission and social consequences of the residential homes for troubled youth owned by Roloff Evangelical Enterprises and their off shoots. Specifically, how these programs were social technologies intended to reproduce and expand fundamentalist conceptions of Western Christendom through their violent and pedagogical effects on the residents and spectators alike. After summarizing the previous sections, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the ongoing operations of Roloff Evangelical Enterprises, before moving on to discuss the off-shoot ministry of this organization that established and operated BBA.

II. EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY OF REVEREND LESTER ROLOFF

A month before the start of World War I, Lester Roloff was born on June 28, 1914. He grew up on a Scottish-German farm near Dawson, Texas. Since his mother was a Methodist and his father a devout Baptist, young Lester split his Sunday worship between two local churches. As someone who subscribed to biblical inerrancy, including

Corinthians 15:33 which states “Bad company corrupts good character,”³ his father was strict disciplinarian who used corporal punishment to raise his children.⁴ According to Lester Roloff’s wife, Marie Bradie Roloff, her father in law’s “watchword” for his children was “I believe in clean speech, hard work, and clean living. Watch out if you don’t comply!”⁵ The fact that Lester would come to devote his life to instituting this philosophy of child-rearing in his faith-based residential programs for boys and girls, suggests that he was deeply satisfied with his sense of self-identity and critical of anyone whose values departed from his own.

While growing up during the Great Depression, Lester was described as an obedient child with a pleasant conservative upbringing. However, he was frail and frequently sick throughout. When he was particularly ill one night at the age of 17, he prayed and promised God that he would become a preacher if he survived. After living through the night, which Lester interpreted as divine intervention, he decided to attend Baylor University to study to become a minister so he could fulfill this pact with God and spent the next several months hauling hay and picking cotton on Texas farms to pay for entrance fees.⁶

Unable to afford room and board near the university, Lester managed to make an agreement with his landlord to transport a cow from his family farm to the prospective rental property and give them the milk he extracted each day. He had a productive first

³ Corinthians 15:33 (Common English Bible).

⁴ Wolfgang Saxon, “Lester Roloff, Radio Preacher, 68, Dies as His Plane Crashes in Texas,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/04/obituaries/lester-roloff-radio-preacher-68-dies-as-his-plane-crashes-in-texas.html>.

⁵ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 14-21.

⁶ *Ibid*, 26-27.

year of studying and preaching in 1933. However, he experienced serious health issues requiring appendectomy as a sophomore. While the doctor advised him to give up on his education and becoming a minister, Lester refused to break his promise to God, and his health improved that year as he continued to preach in retirement homes, jails, and in the streets.⁷ His junior year, Roloff roomed with other ministerial students who would become lifelong friends and colleagues in his ministry, and introduced him to his future wife at the State Training Union Convention in Dallas Texas. His reputation grew during his senior year, when he and his wife traveled to small towns throughout the state to lead revival meetings, which supposedly resulting in the closure of local liquor stores and gambling halls in Purdon, Texas.⁸

After attending the Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth for several years, in 1941 he moved to Houston and became the pastor Magnolia Baptist Church. It thrived under his leadership in great part due his support for military service members and their struggling families during the second world war.⁹ In the proceeding years he became the pastor of Park Avenue Church in Corpus Christi, which quickly exploded in popularity.¹⁰ On May 8, 1944,¹¹ he established a radio program called *The Family Altar* on a 250-Watt station in town, which served as a platform to proselytize his fundamentalist beliefs, sing hymns, and describe his ministry's activities. Because the station relied on advertising dollars from the liquor industry and Lester refused to stop preaching in favor of

⁷ Ibid, 27-30.

⁸ Ibid, 33-36.

⁹ Ibid, 37-42.

¹⁰ Ibid, 44.

¹¹ "Our Heritage," Roloff Homes, Accessed January 2, 2022, <http://www.roloffhomes.com/about-us-1/our-heritage/>.

temperance, he was forced to move his show to a 50,000-watt station called KWBU at Baylor university in 1945.¹²

A more serious dispute arose the following year when he stood before the Baylor Civil Rights Platform Committee to protest the university's plan to present President Harry S. Truman with an honorary degree, because Lester Roloff believed, as his wife put it, "it was inappropriate for a Baptist college to honor a man who failed to uphold Bible standards and convictions in his daily life."¹³ When the university refused his request, Roloff was publicly ostracized and started receiving hate mail and threatening phone calls.¹⁴ Despite these challenges, he also gained followers and the following year bought land outside Corpus Christi, upon which he built the Second Baptist Church and Park Avenue Christian Day School for children.¹⁵

When one of his mentors, the "cowboy preacher" Evangelist B.B. Crimm, passed away in an accident in the fall of 1950, Roloff bought his tent the following April and started traveling throughout South giving sermons that were recorded and broadcast across the country.¹⁶ In conjunction with these changes, he resigned as pastor of Second Baptist Church¹⁷ and established a faith-based non-profit called Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises in 1951,¹⁸ which encompassed all his ministerial projects and would continue to grow in the following decades. Three years later, on October 24, 1954, Roloff bought 10 acres in Corpus Christi, where he began Alameda Baptist Church on South Alameda

¹² Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 44-50.

¹³ Ibid, 53.

¹⁴ Ibid, 59.

¹⁵ Ibid, 50.

¹⁶ Ibid, 61-62.

¹⁷ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 101.

¹⁸ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 7.

Street.¹⁹ Although the church quickly grew in popularity, when locals called the police to report that the loudspeakers used at his revivals were “causing a public disturbance,” he fell under criticism for calling them communists and characterizing the intervention as a “threat to religious liberty.”²⁰

In May of 1955 Roloff began a print publication called *Faith Enterprises*, which contained sermons and updates on the activities of Roloff Evangelical Enterprises, the schedule for *the Family Altar*, and church services, was mailed to supporters across the country.²¹ Roloff claimed he had largely overcome his health issues at this point in his life through an approach he called “the three F’s,” which was discussed in *Faith Enterprises* and his book *Faith, Fasting, Food*.²² That year Roloff was forced out of the KWBU station “for broadcasting disparaging remarks about his Baptist brethren and for claiming that he was one of the few ministers to preach the true Gospel.”²³ However, Roloff was able to purchase the station through donations and loans from supporters after it went broke the following year, and he proceeded to rename it KCTA (Know Christ the Answer).²⁴ On the one hand, he used this platform to spread the word of Christ and preach against the evils of homosexuality, rock n’ roll, communism, television,²⁵ alcohol,

¹⁹ Ibid, 63.

²⁰ Pamela Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo,” *Texas Monthly*, December 2001, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/remember-the-christian-alamo/>.

²¹ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 64.

²² Ibid, 71-74.

²³ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

²⁴ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 55-57.

²⁵ Liza Tsaliki, “Popular Culture and Moral Panics About ‘Children at Risk:’ Revisiting the Sexualisation-of-Young-Girls Debate,” *Sex Education* 15, no.5 (2015): 500-514, DOI:10.1080/14681811.2015.1022893. Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st there have been moral panics around the influence of media on how children think about sex and morality. It is likely that Roloff denied children in his facilities access to television on the basis that it was a source of sin that would corrupt the moral character.

tobacco, pork, and psychology.²⁶ And, on the other, the station became a medium to ask supporters for donations or “love gifts” of cash, land, and jewelry, which spread to 160 radio stations across the US, Virgin Islands, and West Indies, in the subsequent decades.²⁷

On March 15, 1956, Roloff reaffirmed his identity as a “premillennialist Baptist preacher” while criticizing interdenominational conflicts amongst protestant Christians throughout the nation.²⁸ In this sermon that came to be known the swan song to Baylor, he described how the leaders of various churches “have regimented and enslaved the people with the ultimatum you either bow or burn. Since most folks’ faith is not fireproof, they acquiesce to the program.”²⁹ After denouncing his loyalty to the Baptist General Convention, Roloff set out to build other institutions that reflected his convictions as an IFB minister within a year.

In 1957, three years after founding the Alameda Baptist Church, the members of which had been working with the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission to provide “food, clothing, and housing” to homeless and alcoholic men, Roloff purchased 80 acres outside Lexington, Texas to extend these services to women and children. In this location he established a community called City of Refuge, which was intended to be the seventh iteration of the six cities governed by the Levites described in the Old Testament, who were responsible for teaching and enforcing God’s laws in Israel after their conquest of

²⁶ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 100.

²⁷ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 65-78.

²⁹ Terri Jo. Ryan, “Brazos Past: Sermons by Radio Preacher Lester Roloff Live On in Cyberspace,” *Tribune-Herald*, February 26, 2021, Accessed June 1, 2022, https://wacotrib.com/news/local/brazos-past-sermons-by-radio-preacher-lester-roloff-live-on-in-cyberspace/article_32283544-9fb2-5270-820d-a69eb8f13b2a.html.

Canaan.³⁰ Additionally, he founded the Jubilee Ladies Home in Corpus Christ to provide similar services specifically to pregnant girls and unmarried mothers.

By this point Roloff had purchased a private plane and gained his pilot's license, which he used to travel throughout the nation preaching and tending his programs, including the Lighthouse for Boys that was established in 1958. Located forty miles up the intercoastal waterway on Padre Island, the original houseboat dormitory held up to 25 residents of ages nine and older. Run by Roloff's former roommate at Baylor E.A. Goodman, it served as "a place for delinquent boys to be isolated from drugs and liquor until they were to be delivered."³¹ Because it was only accessible by plane or boat, it's "inaccessibility ... made it impossible for those who are sent there to walk or swim out." Most residents of the Lighthouse were labeled as "society's incorrigibles;"³² those who had either run away from home or been convicted of crimes and received probationary sentences from judges rather than being sent to publicly funded carceral facilities.

The therapeutic approach consisted of bible study, working in gardens and catching fish to subsist on, the products of which were sent to other Roloff homes and sold commercially.³³ Many who completed the program went on to "prepare for a life of service" as Christian ministers, and some even married female residents from other facilities operated by Roloff Evangelical Enterprises.³⁴ To expand this effort, in 1961 he used money collected from donations to purchase 327 acres outside Corpus Christi to build the Boy's Ranch, which was located near an airport and just a 25-minute flight from

³⁰ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 80-84.

³¹ *Ibid*, 90-92.

³² *Ibid*, 9.

³³ *Ibid*, 92.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 142.

the Lighthouse.³⁵ The therapeutic approach at these facilities was designed by Roloff, who as an IFB believed with faith in the inerrancy of the King James Bible, including Proverbs 23:13: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die."³⁶ Throughout his life, Roloff would fight for the legal right to institutionalize this passage in his residential facilities for children, despite moments of intense state pressure for violating laws against child abuse and neglect.

According to his wife, as Roloff grew increasingly concerned about the number of people in the US who were addicted to alcohol and drugs across the country, in a 1960 publication of *Faith Enterprises* he criticized psychology, sociology, and theology, and called for "kneeology."³⁷ Convinced of the inability of the modern world to address substance abuse issues, he argued that "hospitals, reform schools and penitentiaries are not the answer;" and instead promoted his ministry at the City of Refuge, where he provided a "faithful Christ for failing men."³⁸ Eight years after Roloff had established the first iteration of the City of Refuge was established, in 1965 he moved the operation to the 273-acre P.D.T Ranch (formerly the Rutherford Plantation) in Culloden, Georgia, which was four miles to closest neighbors and had no nearby roads.³⁹ This was a community for adults and children who struggled with substance abuse issues, which he advertised the conditions and terms of residency of in *Faith Enterprises*. These rules required that participants submit to Christ, quit consuming all psychoactive substances

³⁵ Ibid, 107.

³⁶ John Gibeaut, "'Welcome to HELL:’ How Allegations of Child Abuse at a Texas Church Home for Problem Kids Could Threaten a Major Part of President Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative" *American Bar Association* 87, no.8 (August 2001): 48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27841870>; Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo;" Quoting Proverbs 23:13 (King James Bible).

³⁷ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 88.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 110-113.

upon entry, commit to at least 90 days, have their incoming and outgoing mail censored, and donate all income to the ministry.⁴⁰

Two years later, in 1967, he established the Anchor Home for Boys in Zapata, Texas; a residential facility with a capacity of up to 300 “delinquent boys.”⁴¹ Located roughly 90 miles south of Corpus Christi, it was built on an old Air Force base that had been donated to Roloff Evangelical Enterprises by a supporter. The compound had three two-story barracks, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, and an administration building.⁴² Roloff also purchased a 79-acre property outside of Corpus Christi that year, which was turned into a residential facility called Rebekah Home. The facility housed children assigned female at birth up to the age of 18 who had been convicted of a crime, disobeyed their parents, been involved in prostitution, drank alcohol or used drugs, ran away, or had sex or become pregnant out of wedlock.⁴³

The children held captive in the Rebekah home were sent there to be “saved” from Satan’s clutches. In this context, the term was used to describe a moral, political, and onto-epistemological, condition of living in accordance with God’s will according to Roloff’s fundamentalist theology. They were plucked from society and transported to a fenced compound, where Roloff and his practitioners subjected them to a range of torture techniques fetishized with biblical discourses; techniques aimed at shedding each girl’s sinful nature and becoming saved through the grace of God. In addition to running the program through the labor of his paid employees, more senior residents who had already

⁴⁰ Ibid, 118.

⁴¹ Ibid, 133-134.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 123-126.

been saved, called “helpers,” would serve the regime because of their devotion to their religion and improve their position in the program.⁴⁴

While the Rebekah Home continued to grow over next two years, Roloff opened the Peaceful Valley Home for Retired Christians in the Rio Grande Valley, which was located approximately 150 miles south of Corpus Christi, in Mission, Texas.⁴⁵ In addition to collecting funds through the Roloff Evangelical Enterprises Interest Saving Fund, which allowed supporters to lend money to the organization for their ministry,⁴⁶ Roloff also amassed significant donations that were used to expand the Rebekah home. In 1967, he requested \$1000 from 1000 listeners on a Family Altar broadcast, so that he could respond morally to a spiritual vision of his mission that reflected a biblical story describing righteousness behavior.⁴⁷ He compared the Rebekah girls’ struggle to remain in the home to the plight of the biblical figure Mephibosheth and his listeners who made donations to the servant of King David, who had rescued the boy from destitution in Lodebar: “I saw a million little Mephibosheth girls living in the land of Lodebar, in juvenile shelters, in jail houses, broken homes, hippie dives, and dope dives. I saw these girls sleeping parks and walking through the wilderness of sin.”⁴⁸ By framing contributions from listeners as pious by comparing their behavior to righteous figures in the bible, Roloff vindicated his crusade to forcibly save the souls of children in his care by teaching them his fundamentalist beliefs and torturing them if they refused to comply.

⁴⁴ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

⁴⁵ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 131.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 127-128.

⁴⁷ Samuel 4:4 (King James Version).

⁴⁸ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 128-130.

It was around this time that Roloff began transporting groups of girls, known as the “Honeybee Quartet,” via plane and bus to various settings around the nation to sing and share their testimonies of redemption at Rebekah Home.⁴⁹ Within several years, the Rebekah Home held 300 girls in three dormitories on a 465-acre property, which also held Rebekah Christian School and was nearby the Peoples Church.⁵⁰ Also on the grounds were a bakery, a vehicle maintenance shop, tractor and implement building, a hospitality house, Roloff’s family home, an aircraft hangar and runway, as well as shops, an agricultural and livestock farm, and house trailers for 100 farm workers.⁵¹ In 1971, a similar project called Bethesda Home was established in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on a 210-acre property that was donated by the local pastor of the Central Baptist Church, where Roloff moved his family the following year.⁵² The direct connection is murky given the available information, but this facility was located less than an hour’s drive from Lucedale, where Reverend Herman Fountain would establish the Bethel Baptist Home for Children after briefly working at the Rebekah Home in 1977.

III. THE STATE INTERVENES IN ROLOFF’S MINISTRY

In 1971, at the peak of his ministry, the local media reported that a girl at the Rebekah Home had been forced to work in the fields two days after giving birth and that

⁴⁹ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 132.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9, 128, 132, 138.

⁵¹ Megan Rosenfeld, “Brother Roloff’s Troubled Mission,” *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1978, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1978/10/13/brother-roloff-s-troubled-mission/54260920-82ff-453d-955c-97f0f489fa03/>.

⁵² Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 8, 138.

staff were “selling babies.”⁵³ After these allegations surfaced, the Texas Welfare Department sent a cease-and-desist order to Lester Roloff that required he close his facilities until they met a list of 30 requirements and were licensed by the state. All of the children under the age of sixteen were required to be removed from his residential facilities.⁵⁴ Although he signed a judgment or injunction statement written by his lawyer, the welfare department, and the attorney general’s office, that signified his agreement to become licensed, Roloff was outspoken about his dissent in *Faith Enterprises* and *The Family Altar*.⁵⁵

We had saved the state many millions of dollars during twenty years in our rescue ministries. Never had we received a penny of tax money from the government -it was god’s people who had faithfully supported the work, and yet the state felt they must set the rules and regulations for our work- a work for which they paid nothing.

Licensing these homes is as unnecessary as licensing a church... At issue is the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. This plainly is government interference in religion.

On October 16, 1972, others joined in support of Roloff’s cause in a “great freedom rally” in Austin, Texas. At this event, former residents of the Roloff Homes testified that their experience had positively affected their lives and their parents “told how their children, who had once been hooked on drugs, illicit sex, witchcraft, and were into all sorts of crime and sordid living, had been saved and reclaimed to physical, spiritual, and mental health.”⁵⁶ Despite demonstrating that he had support in some circles,

⁵³ Ibid, 149. Speaking to the ineffectiveness of this gendered therapeutic approach at addressing social problems and the need for effective alternatives, one of these residents also stated publicly believed sex education in schools would have prevented her from having to attend the program in the first place.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 146.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 146-147.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 157.

however, new allegations of abuse came to light the following year that exacerbated Roloff's legal problems.

The trouble arose in 1973, when parents visiting their daughter in Rebekah Home witnessed a girl being whipped and reported the incident to the authorities. When state agencies subsequently requested to inspect the home, however, Roloff refused to allow access, arguing that it violated his first amendment right to the separation of church and state.⁵⁷ This dispute resulted in a judgement issued on August 3, 1973, by the District Court of Neuces County, Texas, requiring all residential programs for children falling under Roloff Evangelical Enterprises cease operations until they are licensed.⁵⁸ During a court hearing, 16 residents testified to having been "whipped with leather straps, beaten with paddles, handcuffed to drainpipes, and locked in isolation cells-sometimes for such minor infractions as failing to memorize a Bible passage or forgetting to make a bed."⁵⁹

When girls who "had not yet been saved tried to run away," they were "confined to the lockup, a dorm room devoid of furniture or natural light where girls spent days, or weeks, alone."⁶⁰ In defense of his disciplinary approach, Roloff argued that his techniques were brutal but ultimately effective at transforming "parent-hating, Satan-worshipping, dope-taking immoral boys and girls" into "faithful servants of the Lord."⁶¹ Further, he described his "methods as good old-fashioned discipline, solidly supported by Scripture, and denied that any treatment at Rebekah constituted abuse."⁶² Thus, drawing

⁵⁷ Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

⁵⁸ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 151.

⁵⁹ Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

⁶⁰ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers: A Systemic Problem," 101.

⁶¹ Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

⁶² *Ibid.*

on biblical discourse to justify institutional child abuse in his facilities, while simultaneously labeling his residents as troubled, and characterizing his faith-based therapeutic approach as these children's best chance of redemption.

Roloff famously defended his abuse of children by stating that was "better a pink bottom than a black soul," to which the attorney general replied that this did not excuse those bottoms "that were blue, black, and bloody."⁶³ Aside from fighting in the courtroom, Roloff also expressed his dissent on the radio, contending that the closure of his programs was more immoral than the murders and sexual assaults perpetrated by Dean Corll.⁶⁴

This is the most unbelievable, un-Christian, un-American, and unfair crime that's ever been committed. The killing of twenty-seven people by the homosexual in Houston recently is nothing compared to this. My girls and boys have been scattered and shattered and some are dead already. Others are back on drugs.

After refusing to comply, Roloff was found guilty of contempt of court on January 31, 1974, for which he was fined \$1500 and sentenced to five days in jail. However, he only had to serve one night after giving a three-hour presentation at a committee meeting on February 4th that was attended by over a hundred supporters.⁶⁵ About two months later, the Texas Supreme Court overturned the conviction on the basis that that the document he had signed in 1971 was unclear about which residents in his home were considered minors.

⁶³ Kathryn Joyce and Michael Mechanic, "Survivor Snapshots from Teen-Home Hell," *Mother Jones*, July/Aug 2011, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/08/teen-home-hell-abusive-religious-reform-school/>.

⁶⁴ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 158.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 161.

Subsequently, Roloff's lawyers proceeded to file libel suits against the media groups that had supposedly slandered him.⁶⁶

A month before the Texas state legislature passed the Childcare Licensing Act in May of 1975, which mandated that all youth residential programs to submit to licensing, Roloff was again charged with contempt of court for refusing to comply.⁶⁷ Amidst these legal controversies, when a dormitory on the Lighthouse for Boys property was accidentally burnt down by a resident on July 25, 1975; the Austin Land Commission denied Roloff's request to rebuild the dormitory in the same location, even though other people in the area were given permits.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the school continued to operate and a new dormitory was constructed on the grounds of Rebekah Home.⁶⁹ Faced with ongoing challenges from the state, he once again turned to the radio to garner support from listener. In the post-Vietnam moment, he contended that his ministry was turning troubled children into patriotic Christians and was worthy of continuing to operate as it had been, stating: "Our boys and girls are making good Christians and Americans. There are no flag-burners in our homes. We are for God and country!"⁷⁰

Because he was still refusing to comply with the Childcare Licensing Act when the state law went into effect in January of 1976, District Judge James Meyers issued a temporary restraining order against Roloff mandating that he allow the Rebekah Home for Girls, Lighthouse for Boys, and Anchor Home for Boys, to be licensed and inspected

⁶⁶ Ibid, 166-169.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 173.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 143-144.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 9.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 134.

by state officials.⁷¹ When Roloff refused to allow them access, he was once again charged with contempt of court. As punishment, he was sentenced to five days in jail and \$50-1000 fine each day he continued to operate without a license.⁷² On June 3rd, 1977, a rally was held in Austin, Texas, where around 400 people advocated for Roloff. Roughly three weeks later he went to jail for four days while accompanied by a crowd of children who had resided in his facilities.⁷³ Unwilling to submit to state requirements, he stated “If I take a license, I throw this old Bible that I've loved so well into the nearest garbage can ... Compromise is impossible. This is my way of life.”⁷⁴ Thus, reaffirming his commitment to fundamentalist convictions and unwillingness to end institutional child abuse in his facilities on the basis that doing so would threaten the eternal destination of his soul and those of his residents.

Roloff continued operating his facilities without licensing even when Attorney General John Hill inspected the Rebekah Home later that year, who afterwards spoke highly of the operation and encouraged Roloff to continue his battle in the US Supreme Court.⁷⁵ In the following year, a film describing Roloff’s legal battle, titled *Freedom’s Last Call*,⁷⁶ was screened at churches throughout the nation, culminating in a “Save the Nation Rally” in Dallas, Texas, on November 1, 1977, where more than 1500 preachers displayed support for Roloff’s battle to protect the separation of church and state.⁷⁷ Despite this support, however, in the winter of 1977 Chief Juvenile Court Judge John P.

⁷¹ Ibid, 174.

⁷² Ibid, 174.

⁷³ Ibid, 182.

⁷⁴ Rosenfeld “Brother Roloff’s Troubled Mission.”

⁷⁵ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 182.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 187.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 174.

Collins of Tucson, Arizona called the Rebekah home a "private prison" and held hearings to "air charges of brutality, brainwashing, and unfair imprisonment by former Rebekah residents."⁷⁸

The wide gap between these analyses suggests that, on the one hand, some outside observers viewed Roloff as a freedom fighting fundamentalist and his facility as a sanctuary where sinful girls found spiritual redemption through his strict and loving guidance. While at the same time, others saw him as the owner of a network of carceral institutions outside the purview of state regulation; the residents of which were being abused and neglected at the hands of sadistic religious fanatics. The distinction between these positions lies in whether outsiders favored the narratives of Roloff and his practitioners or the residents of his facilities who frequently reported being abused and neglected.

In the following years, more girls would come forward with information about their experiences living in the Rebekah Home in interviews with reporters, which Dr. Janet Parker summarized in her whistleblower report⁷⁹ on residential programs for troubled teens. Residents described being totally isolated from their families for the first 30 days and no contact was allowed with anyone else outside the home. To maintain this level of control over the children's communication, all phone calls were monitored, incoming and outgoing mail was censored, and letters from the guardians of residents "were often withheld so that staff could convince girls that their families did not care about them."⁸⁰ They also were cut off from all sources of information except for the King

⁷⁸ Rosenfeld "Brother Roloff's Troubled Mission."

⁷⁹ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 101.

James Bible. They lived in a facility with locked windows and an alarm system for periods of anywhere from two days to a year. Those who refused to conform claimed they would be subjected to range of twisted punishment techniques including “corporal punishment, lock-up, being forced to hold stress positions for hours, being required to quote from the Bible one hour per day, sermons played during sleep, ... mind control techniques, verbal and emotional abuse.”⁸¹

During this ongoing controversy, it was clear that the abusive, sexist, and racist beliefs of the fundamentalist movement were at the core of the Rebekah Home through the testimony of Roloff himself and other girls. The residents of this program appear to have been exclusively white children and young adults assigned female at birth, whose ways of knowing and being were pathologized through the white supremacist lens of an IFB minister and his underlings.⁸² For example, during an evening sermon Roloff became vocal about his practices including to how he greets new arrivals at the Rebekah Home, when he stated: “When a girl comes to the Rebekah Home I ask her: How much dope? Plenty. Cigarettes? Yes. Alcohol? Yes. Immoral? Yes. Do you know for sure you're not pregnant? No. If you are pregnant do you know who the father is or if he's white or

⁸¹ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 101.

⁸² Abiola Farinde-Wu, Bettie Ray Butler, Ayana Allen-Handy, “Policing Black Femininity: The Hypercriminalization of Black Girls in an Urban Schools,” *Gender and Education* (February 2022): 262, DOI:10.1080/09540253.2022.2072477; Citing A Farinde, Ayana Allen, “Cultural Dissonance: Exploring the Relationship Between White Female Teachers’ Perceptions and Urban Black Female Students’ Disciplinary Infractions,” *National Journal of Urban Education and Practice* 7, no.2 (2013): 142–155; Dorinda C. Andrews, Tashal Brown, Eliana Castro, et al., “The Impossibility of Being ‘Perfect and White’: Black Girls’ Racialized and Gendered Schooling Experiences,” *American Educational Research Journal* 56, no.6 (2019): 2531–2572, DOI:10.3102/0002831219849392. Whereas Black girls in school “are often negatively stereotyped as deviants because of their unwillingness to conform to white, middleclass ideals of femininity,” the mostly white girls at the Rebekah Home were pathologized for their behaviors departing from racialized and gendered expectations within white supremacist culture.

colored? No.”⁸³ Therefore, demonstrating how Roloff appealed to a racist and patriarchal audience to garner support for the Rebekah Home’s mission, which allowed him to amass great wealth and admiration.

A girl who had arrived at Rebekah Home in March of 1977 shared her experiences there with a reporter from the *Corpus-Christi Times* later that year, which corroborated and extended previous descriptions of the program by Roloff and allegations of abuse by former residents.⁸⁴ She explained that at Rebekah Home there was a painstaking schedule, which began with Roloff’s sermons being played in their rooms over an intercom. As soon as they woke, they were required to put on their requisite red, white, and blue dresses, suggesting that Roloff tried to garner support from state officials by presenting his program as if it were concerned with transforming residents into patriotic women living in accordance with God’s will. Further, that the clothing provided and mandated was gendered on the basis of Roloff’s fundamentalist beliefs. Aside from the clothing, residents were required to maintain a specific appearance, which included wearing no eye makeup.⁸⁵

Once dressed, the children went to complete their Accelerated Christian Education program, religious worship, and chores around the guarded compound. They were not permitted to speak to males without permission. The girls were denied access to print publications outside of Christian magazines and the bible, nor were they permitted to listen to rock and roll music⁸⁶ or watch television. They could not consume any type of

⁸³ Rosenfeld “Brother Roloff’s Troubled Mission.”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Rosenfeld’s article reported how Roloff and his supporters articulated rock n’ roll music as the work of Satan in a sermon: “I notice where one of the big rock and roll fellas was found dead . . . Oh, he

psychoactive substances, including caffeine, nor eat junk food while on the premises. Not only were newer residents surveilled for their complicity with these rules by staff members, but also the “narc squad,” a group of senior residents who attempted to infiltrate and report back to the administration.⁸⁷

Residents of the Rebekah Home who could not or would not follow the rules would be subjected to a range of punishments,⁸⁸ some of the most common being assigned extra chores or receiving spankings with paddles from staff members.⁸⁹ A girl who was held captive there described the full range of Rebekah Home’s punishments to a reporter from *Texas Monthly*.⁹⁰ One of these punishments entailed being confined alone in an empty windowless dorm room for days or weeks on end, without permission to

was a popular, he was an outstanding mogul. He was somebody they said. And it's a pity how many of the rock stars are killin' themselves. You know why? They have nothing to live for. Just a bunch of rock and racket. You boys ought to know, girls too, you know what you been through, it'll ruin anybody's mind. It's the worst dope that's ever been invented. No matter if the Beatles delivered it, we got it pretty bad and kept it.”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Robert Gellately, “The Gestapo and German Society: Political Denunciation in the Gestapo Case Files,” *The Journal of Modern History* 60, no.4 (December 1988): 668. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1881013>; “Verschärfte Vernehmung,” *The Atlantic*, May 29, 2007. <https://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2007/05/-versch-auml-rfte-vernehmung/228158/>; Shane O’Mara and John Schiemann, “Torturing Science, Interrogational Torture, and Public Policy,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 38, no. 2 (2019): 182; George Hunsinger, “Torture Is the Ticking Time-Bomb: Why the Necessity Defense Fails,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 229, 437. It is possible that these techniques were used for similar reasons as the gestapo’s *Verschärfte Vernehmung* (sharpened interrogation) protocols and the *enhanced interrogation* techniques used by US government agencies in the War on Terror. In both cases deployed against militant guerilla formations resisting Western imperialism, this “hands off” approach to interrogation was theoretically designed to inflict the most amount of discomfort as possible without leaving evidence of injury. Isolation in small rooms with loudspeakers, sexual humiliation, and stress positions, appear to have the largest overlaps with the techniques designed to coerce compliance with white supremacist regimes. Whereas the Nazis were more concerned with concealing that their victims were tortured so that other members of the resistance would not be aware if their comrade had given up information, the Central Intelligence Agency sought to bypass international laws criminalizing torture in military operations. These techniques were probably used in the Rebekah Home because they do not require elaborate equipment or training, nor do they leave pronounced visible signs on their bodies, which allows practitioners to avoid conviction for violating laws governing child abuse. Despite being labeled ineffective and too cruel for use in warfare, however, many of these controversial techniques continue to be used in privately owned and operated residential facilities for children.

⁸⁹ Rosenfeld “Brother Roloff’s Troubled Mission.”

⁹⁰ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

speak, while “Roloff’s sermons were piped into the room.”⁹¹ She also described being subjected to torturous stress positions including “sitting with her back against a wall and without the support of a chair, even as her legs buckled beneath her,” as well as kneeling “while holding a Bible on each outstretched palm or with pencils wedged beneath her knees” for as long as five hours.⁹²

The same month the girl whose testimony was reported by *Texas Monthly* had arrived Rebekah Home, Roloff’s problems were exacerbated when several residents attempted to stab another to death.⁹³ In October of 1978, one of the attackers told a reporter of the *Corpus-Christi Times* it was an attempt to be removed from the program: “We thought if maybe a girl would die, we’d all get to go home.”⁹⁴ Referring to these residents as his “little murderers,” the minister failed to report the incident to the police, later making a statement defending his actions through the language of fundamentalism: “What I did I’d do again ... I’m not defying anybody, I’m obeying the Lord.”⁹⁵ Seeking to protect his schools, Roloff backed gubernatorial candidate Bill Clements in his race against John G. Hill, who had taken the Roloff to court over the issue of licensing while serving as State Attorney General. Clements gained enough votes from previously unregistered white evangelicals in Texas to win the election, making him the first

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ John M. Crewdson, “Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1979, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/22/archives/texas-demands-that-preacher-shut-girls-home-linked-to-abuse-im.html#:~:text=CORPUS%20CHRISTI%2C%20Tex.%2C%20%E2%80%94,that%20the%20home%20be%20closed>.

⁹⁴ Crewdson, John M. Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Republican governor of Texas since reconstruction, which Roloff claimed direct responsibility for on his radio program.⁹⁶

Roloff's appeal to the US Supreme Court was denied on October 2nd, 1978, on the basis that his spiritually mandated duty to criminally abuse children was not protected by the first amendment, feeding his grievance as a fundamentalist that the state was the enemy of his religion.⁹⁷ When the details of the stabbing incident came to light the following year, Attorney General Mark White filed a suit requiring the facility to be shut down immediately.⁹⁸ Government officials and state troopers were sent to the 557-acre property on June of 1979 with the intention of removing 200 girls from the facility, who Roloff referred to as "prisoners of war."⁹⁹ They arrived to find that hundreds of Roloff's supporters had locked arms and formed a barrier around the facility to prevent the court order from being carried out, in a symbolic and militant gesture that came to be known as the Christian Alamo. Most these supporters were fundamentalist evangelicals who had never registered to vote and made their living in a "parallel economy" that "was not recognized for its true potential, especially its political potential."¹⁰⁰ As will be discussed below, George W. Bush's administration would later attempt to harness this same political force in his presidential campaign.

After a three-day standoff, Governor Clements ordered the state officials to leave so that violence could be avoided. On June 22nd, 1979, many of the girls were temporarily moved to the City of Refuge, but they were returned a few months later and the number

⁹⁶ Ibid; Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

⁹⁷ Ryan, "Brazos Past."

⁹⁸ Rosenfeld, "Brother Roloff's Troubled Mission."

⁹⁹ Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid; Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 103.

of residents continued to grow throughout the year.¹⁰¹ In the wake of the Christian Alamo, Clements “introduced three bills in the Texas legislature that would exempt the Rebekah Home and more than 2,000 other church-operated homes from state licensing standards,” but none were passed.¹⁰² Though Roloff was still required to shut down his schools, by transferring ownership of his youth residential programs from Roloff Evangelical Enterprises to the People’s Baptist Church, he was able to buy some time while the state filed charges against the new owner Reverend Wiley Cameron.¹⁰³ Notwithstanding widespread public criticism and legal trouble troubles, the schools reopened on September 15, 1979.¹⁰⁴ It was around this time that the home became subject to investigation by the civil rights division of the US Justice Department, which was “chiefly concerned with allegations of involuntary servitude and reports that out-of-state police officers had forcibly transported unwilling girls to the home across state lines, with parental consent.”¹⁰⁵

After General Mark White filed a suit seeking \$46,000 in civil penalties from the People’s Baptist Church for refusing to submit to state licensing requirements and inspections in 1980,¹⁰⁶ which Roloff described as “communistic” and in violation of his religious freedom,¹⁰⁷ the latter continued to operate his facilities. Despite the intensifying

¹⁰¹ Saxon, “Lester Roloff, Radio Preacher, 68, Dies as His Plane Crashes in Texas.”

¹⁰² Crewdson, Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse.”

¹⁰³ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 104.

¹⁰⁴ Mack Sisk, “The Rev. Roloff Still Fighting his Battles,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. September 27, 1989, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/23669473/lester-roloff-and-the-rebekah-home-for/>.

¹⁰⁵ Crewdson, Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse.”

¹⁰⁶ “Judge Asks Whether Texas Controls Violate Religious Beliefs; Roloff Homes May Stall Off Licensing,” *The North Texas Daily*, November 20, 1980, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph33254.1/m1/5/zoom/?q=%22rebekah%20home%20for%20girls%22&resolution=4&lat=4456.233896563754&lon=2950.9281696385906>.

¹⁰⁷ Saxon, “Lester Roloff, Radio Preacher, 68, Dies as His Plane Crashes in Texas.”

pressures from state and federal agencies, however, Roloff resumed running the Rebekah home and other residential programs with support from *The Family Altar* listeners and his church congregation, who he requested \$10 million dollars from in 1981.¹⁰⁸ He also received support from state officials like Governor Clements, District Judge Charles Mathews, the head of Pima County Public Defender's program Lawrence Levine, and Texas Ranger Rudy Rodríguez, who after investigating the Anchor Home that spring, stated: "I have to admit that, to a degree, there's a bit of brainwashing that goes on in the whole process ... but they're clearing out what was there and filling it with something more acceptable socially."¹⁰⁹

Similar comments were made the following spring by the operator of the Bethesda Home for Girls, Bobby Ray Wills, who after being accused of abuse, neglect, and brainwashing, defended Roloff's thought reform methods, by stating: "It's a washing, but it's called bloodwashing and heartwashing."¹¹⁰ Former residents at Bethesda testified in court that pregnant girls, who were "repeatedly told they are worse than murderers for having sex out of wedlock," were beaten with boards and submerged in hot water to conceal injuries.¹¹¹ The facility was closed by state authorities soon after, but Wills reopened the facility as Mountain Park Boarding Academy in Mountain Park, Missouri, where regulations were non-existent. Therefore, suggesting that the Wills was trying to avoid accountability from law enforcement, maintain his abusive practices, and at the same time maximizing his profits.

¹⁰⁸ Sisk, "The Rev. Roloff Still Fighting his Battles."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Reginald Stuart, "Home's Ex-Inmates Tell of Beatings," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1982, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/03/05/us/home-s-ex-inmates-tell-of-beatings.html>.

¹¹¹ Stuart, "Home's Ex-Inmates Tell of Beatings."

In February of 1982, Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises purchased 70 acres of property near Fort Thomas in Arizona, which he named the Regeneration Reservation. The project began in 1980 after Roloff accepted an invitation by missionary Ann Murphy to visit the Apache reservation. He subsequently set out to extend his ministry there, stating:¹¹²

Upon seeing these people, many of whom were in jail or broken by addiction, I made the statement to her, “May God forgive me. I never knew this existed. We can and we must reach American Indians for Christ!” I returned to Corpus Christi with a definite burden for these desperate people who are precious in God’s sight.

This ministry became known to missionaries as the “burned over harvest” by missionaries, based on John 4:35, where Jesus stated: “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”¹¹³ The purpose of their operation was to “transform alcoholics and drug addicts into responsible citizens as they became Christians and submitted their lives to the Lord’s leading.”¹¹⁴ In doing so, he attributed the struggles of indigenous peoples to their own moral depravity while obscuring the role that his own religion had played in creating them.

Roloff would never get to see these ministries, however, as his lifelong crusade came an abrupt end on the morning of November 2, 1982, when he died in a plane crash.¹¹⁵ A funeral was orchestrated by Reverend Mike Rios, the assistant pastor of the

¹¹² Lester Roloff, “My Last Big Step of Faith,” Regeneration Reservation, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://regenerationreservation.org/history/>.

¹¹³ “Welcome to Regeneration Reservation!” Regeneration Reservation, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://regenerationreservation.org/>; John 4:35 (King James Version).

¹¹⁴ Roloff, “My Last Big Step of Faith.”

¹¹⁵ Roloff, *Lester Roloff*, 98-103. Throughout his nearly three decades of flying small planes across the country, Roloff had dozens of close calls and emergency landings, largely because he had faith that God would protect him from harm so he could carry on with his ministry. However, his luck ran out when his private plane was ripped apart in a storm over Texas, resulting in the death of the minister and

People’s Church, in Corpus Christi on Friday, November 4, 1982, which was attended by more than 10,000 people including fundamentalist Baptist preachers from around the nation.¹¹⁶ Something of a shrine was constructed in a room in his old house in Rebekah Home with photos, personal articles, as well as a purple heart and a “bullet-torn” American flag draped over his coffin that had been donated by a supporter who had served in Vietnam. There was also a lacquered sign commemorating Roloff’s lifelong commitment to his fundamentalist ideals despite the unyielding pressures of modernism, “Men must be governed by God or they will be ruled by tyrants.”¹¹⁷

After his death, the fate of Roloff Evangelical Enterprises fell into the hands of Wiley Cameron, who had worked for Lester Roloff for 35 years before his passing and carried on his mission. The youth residential programs continued to operate in defiance of state agencies until 1984, when Texas supreme court ruled that “the licensing of church-run, child-care facilities violated no First Amendment religious freedoms.”¹¹⁸ After the stipulations went into effect on January 1, 1985, Cameron transported the roughly 100 children to Missouri where there was no state requirement to be licensed.¹¹⁹ He “ran facilities there for 14 years in exile rather than accept state oversight in Texas.”¹²⁰ At first the girls were held at a property near Calvary Baptist College, but in 1987 were

four of his female employees. Also see “Evangelist Lester Roloff will be buried in an elaborate...,” UPI, November 3, 1982.

¹¹⁶ “Evangelist Lester Roloff will be buried in an elaborate...,” UPI, November 3, 1982, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/03/Evangelist-Lester-Roloff-will-be-buried-in-an-elaborate/2726405147600/>.

¹¹⁷ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo;” Crewdson, “Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse.”

¹¹⁸ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 106; Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 48.

¹¹⁹ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo;” Crewdson, “Texas Demands That Preacher Shut Girls Home Linked to Abuse.”

¹²⁰ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 106.

transferred to an off-shoot of the Roloff Homes in Arcadia, Louisiana, called the New Bethany Home for Girls so they could not be taken into state custody. This exemplifies how owners of residential homes for troubled teens take advantage of the lack of oversight and regulation by the US government in order to continue their abusive enterprises.

IV. GEORGE W. BUSH PAVES THE WAY FOR THE RETURN OF ROLOFF HOMES

Although the Roloff homes were exiled from Texas, Cameron's legal battle continued in Texas and collided with the presidential ambitions of then Governor George W. Bush Jr., whose campaign team sought to market his faith-based style of governance to garner support from white evangelical voters.¹²¹ Bush Jr. had always been involved in the church,¹²² but his excessive drinking, business failures, and stressed marriage led him to become more religious in 1985. Inspired by the teachings of evangelist and Southern Baptist minister Billy Graham, Bush began "a new walk of faith" that he claimed had made his "life better and easier to understand, and clearer."¹²³ Bush and his brother Jeb had overcome substance abuse issues through a faith-based approach in 1986, in part with

¹²¹ Joseph Carrol and Frank Newport, "Reasons why people are voting for Bush or Kerry," *Gallup Poll News Service*, September 21, 2004, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/13096/reason-s-why-people-voting-bush-kerry.aspx>. The election of George W. Bush was in great part due to the support of conservative white evangelicals, who after reelecting him in 2004 "cited Bush's personal character and moral values as paramount to their decision."

¹²² Jason D. Berggren and Nicol C. Rae, "Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no.4 (December 2006): 614, DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-5705.2006.02570.x. Bush was raised Episcopal, but joined Methodist church after marrying Laura Welch in 1977 and baptized his kids Methodist after born in 1981.

¹²³ George W. Bush, "We Are All Sinners," Interview by Steve Waldman, *Beliefnet*, Fall 2000, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.beliefnet.com/news/politics/2000/10/we-are-all-sinners.aspx>.

the help of the founder of Straight Incorporated Mel Sembler, who had played a key role in the election and policies of their father¹²⁴ and would later contribute more than \$250,000 to Bush Jr.'s 2000 presidential campaign.¹²⁵ In the eyes of Bush's campaign strategist Ralph Reed, a former member of the Christian Coalition, the Christian Alamo revealed an opportunity to grow his client's Texas voter base for his 2000 presidential election run.¹²⁶

Given Bush's story of recovery and turn to evangelicalism, the legal battle over state licensing of faith-based substance abuse rehabilitation provided a way for Bush's campaign to "tap into the support of the huge fundamentalist evangelical unregistered voters to vote for him."¹²⁷ In line with this strategy, as governor of Texas Bush set out to pass "laws that protected Faith-based groups from state interference with their religious approach."¹²⁸ He also supported policy aimed at "forbidding lawsuits against personnel who worked in those facilities and pushed a voucher program to enhance federal funding of private religious schools."¹²⁹

The first move took place in June of 1995 when the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) threatened to shut down the faith-based rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. When this opportunity arose, Bush followed the advice of his campaign strategist and "stepped into the fray and defended Teen Challenge,

¹²⁴ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 105.

¹²⁵ Maia Szalavitz, "Why Jesus is Not a Regulator," *The American Prospect*, December 19, 2001, <https://prospect.org/features/jesus-regulator/>.

¹²⁶ It is unknown whether Reed was inspired by Roloff's role in the election of Bill Clements, but seems very possible given the similarities and people involved.

¹²⁷ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 105. Parker claims that "the belief in Faith-based redemption to cure addiction was at the heart of Bush's political campaign strategy."

¹²⁸ Parker, "Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers," 106.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

whose philosophy resonated with his own experience.”¹³⁰ Specifically, the ideas that he had experienced “a profound spiritual awakening and knew the role that faith could play in recovery.”¹³¹ After Bush intervened, the “TCADA postponed judgment of the organization, dropped licensure demands, and agreed to wait until the legislature considered bills that could change the rules for Faith-based organizations.”¹³²

On March 25, 1996, while Bush was working to further deregulate youth residential facilities in Texas, a 16-year-old boy named William Andrew Futrelle II was brutally murdered at Mountain Park Boarding School by three other students, which was still being run as an unlicensed entity by the former operators of the notorious Bethesda Home.¹³³ His attackers had lured Futrelle into a secluded area of the woods before striking him in the head with brick, beating¹³⁴ him with a large stick, kicking him, and then slitting his throat with a four-inch knife. They would later confess that they feared Futrelle would “foil their plan to take over the school, control the female students in a Branch Davidian-style cult and get on national television.”¹³⁵ In a recorded interview with Anthony G. Rutherford, who was involved in the incident, stated he was motivated

¹³⁰ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 107.

¹³³ Kim Bell and Tim O’Neil, “Insiders Tell Of Boarding School, Past And Present Slaying In Missouri Follows Some Troubles In Mississippi,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 31, 1996, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.corpun.com/usre9603.htm>.

¹³⁴ When I use the word “beatings,” I am describing instances where someone, either using a part their own body (hands, feet, etc.) or with an object, struck another person at least once.

¹³⁵ Tim O’Neil, “Man Guilty in Boarding School Slaying: Judge Makes Quick Ruling in Nonjury Case,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 13, 1997, Accessed February 6, 2022, <https://culteducation.com/group/1059-mountain-park-baptist-church-and-boarding-academy/14583-man-guilty-in-boarding-school-slaying.html>.

by the urge to reclaim his sense of dignity and control amidst the oppressive conditions at Mountain Park.¹³⁶

I was trying to overpower and take over, just push over Mountain Park in any way possible, so that I could start something, do things the way I wanted to do them ... not be made to do something because it's the rules ... I felt like I was pushed around to a certain point. I was always looked down upon. I wanted to be looked up to.

Rutherford was found guilty of first-degree murder and armed criminal action, for which he received life in prison without the possibility of parole plus fifty years,¹³⁷ but the undignified conditions that had motivated his crimes were ignored by state officials. In the wake of this event, on May 2nd of 1996, Governor Bush assembled an advisory task force composed of ministers and volunteers, whose job was to “identify obstacles to faith-based groups” and “recommend ways that Texas can create an environment in which these groups can thrive, free of regulations that dilute the faith factor.”¹³⁸ Made possible through the federal Welfare Reform act of 1996, which contained a stipulation allowing “states to contract with Faith-based and community-based organizations to provide welfare services,”¹³⁹ Bush’s leadership sought to “rally the armies of compassion”¹⁴⁰ with the passage of House Bill 2482 (75R) and House Bill 2481 (75R) in the Texas state legislature the following year.¹⁴¹ In this way, Bush’s presidential ambitions enabled evangelical Christians to shape state policy in a way that made

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid. The case was resolved after a five-and-a-half-hour non-jury trial that had been agreed to by the defendant under the condition that the death penalty was taken off the table.

¹³⁸ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 107.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Hanna Rosin, “Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 2000, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2000/04/11/two-arrested-in-texas-child-abuse-case/9a376d72-965b-4520-bd69-e552f8e82163/>.

¹⁴¹ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 107.

children vulnerable to being incarcerated in residential facilities, which are known to abusive and uncooperative, outside the regulation of and accountability to state agencies.

Together, these bills “allowed Faith-based residential facilities and child care facilities to be certified by a Faith-based entity rather than licensure and regulation under the state” and “permitted Faith-based chemical dependency treatment programs to be exempted from state licensing and regulation.”¹⁴² This not only gave legitimacy to faith-based treatment and bolstered the power of evangelical fundamentalist regimes across the state, but it also re-opened the door for programs like the Roloff Homes to return to Texas after being expelled for refusing to comply with state licensing requirements. In other words, these laws set “the stage for deregulation of Faith-based facilities in Texas.”¹⁴³ The first of which had been strategically lobbied for by Wiley Cameron, who was still operating the Roloff Homes in Missouri at the time.¹⁴⁴

Cameron accompanied Don Willett, who was in charge of Bush’s task force, as well as several former residents of the Lighthouse and Jubilee home, to testify for the passage of these bills before the House Human Services Committee.¹⁴⁵ However, there were no endorsements from any other religious organizations. The primary witness was David Gibbs, a long-time friend of Willett and lawyer of Lester Roloff for 25 years.¹⁴⁶ Gibbs never revealed this fact at the hearing, even when a committee member asked how this bill would protect society from groups like the “the Branch Davidians and the Lester Roloffs,” so the bill passed easily and the Bush administration moved forward quickly to

¹⁴² Ibid, 108.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

implement these new laws.¹⁴⁷ Given that these conflicts of interest were never recognized, this history suggests that either the lawmakers were unqualified to make this decision or there was blatant corruption involved, but the social cost was, regardless, immense for the children affected by the outcome.

Over the next few years, the Roloff Homes gained influence across the state following these new policies. In 1997, a former resident of the Lighthouse named John Downs¹⁴⁸ founded Lighthouse Ministries Incorporated, which extended the Roloff approach to Harris County Jail in Houston, Texas. A year later, the Texas Association of Christian Child Care Agencies (TACCCA) was established as an alternative accreditation agency, and Wiley Cameron was appointed as a member of the accreditation committee. Almost immediately, the “Roloff Homes as a care provider was invited back to Texas by Governor Bush and permitted to seek licensure under this newly created alternative accreditation agency.”¹⁴⁹ The Lighthouse, which had come to take the form of a Christian boot camp, as well as the Rebekah Home, were reopened in April of 1999. However, allegations of abuse at both schools came to light in the first few weeks that threw their credibility into question.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Chaplain John Downs,” Lighthouse Ministries, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.lighthouseprisonministries.org/what-we-believe/chaplain-john-downs>. In 1978, after being convicted of his eighth felony related to his heroin addiction, a man named John Downs was sentenced to attend The Lighthouse as an alternative to 20 years in a state facility. During the four years Downs spent years at this program, which is described on the current website as a “spiritual bootcamp that trained young men for Special Forces in the Lord’s service,” he “surrendered his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ,” “memorized huge portions of Scripture,” and “was taught the disciplines of personal devotions and serving God.” By 1997, Downs had established Lighthouse Prison Ministries at the Harris County Jail in Houston, Texas. This ministry continues to this day, which he claims is his divine purpose and the reason why he was spared from dying from his heroin addiction.

¹⁴⁹ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 108.

The Bush administration prioritized his re-election over the well-being of children who, as a direct consequence of these deregulatory policies, would be subjected to virulently traumatic and ineffective treatment at this facility and others. Within the first several weeks of Rebekah Home's reopening, a young girl, Deanne Dawsey, experienced multiple forms of abuse for breaking rules; including being slapped for not doing her homework and calling Faye Cameron, Wiley Cameron's wife, "a bitch" for censoring her letters criticizing the facility.¹⁵⁰ According to Deanne, she quickly grew "tired of playing by their rules," for which she was severely punished.¹⁵¹ One day, for example, she refused to follow Faye's command to write "I will not talk in class" one hundred times after being caught talking. In response, Faye grabbed her by her arm and dragged Deanne to a confinement room, where she was told she would remain until completing the aforementioned punishment:

Inside the lockup, Lester Roloff's voice began to play over the intercom, his rich baritone echoing off the walls—sermonizing, singing gospel songs, and exhorting all who listened to come to Jesus. His voice droned on as morning turned into afternoon and afternoon into evening. DeAnne stuck her fingers in her ears, but his voice seemed to have lodged in her brain. She began yelling rap songs at the top of her lungs—anything to drown out the sound—but Roloff's voice was only turned up louder.¹⁵²

After many hours in lockup, Deanne, who later recalled that she felt like she was losing her mind, began screaming and kicking the wall until it was damaged hours later. At which point, Faye, who had warned her to stop, entered the room with three male staff members who bound her arms and feet with duct tape before kicking her in the ribs.

¹⁵⁰ Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo."

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

When they left, Deanne managed to escape her restraints. She succumbed to her captor's demands and finished writing the sentences follow 32 hours in lockup.

After complaining that she was feeling intense pain from her ribs, she was forced by the Cameron's to return home, which Deanne believes was to avoid accountability for the incident. Once she left, Deanne told this story to her mother who contacted law enforcement officials.¹⁵³ Within weeks, Texas authorities led an unannounced inspection of the facility, during which other girls reported having been mistreated and neglected.¹⁵⁴ While Faye Cameron continued to live and attend church on the property, Texas Protective and Regulatory Services banned here from working at any youth homes operated by the People's Baptist Church.¹⁵⁵

While this controversy was going on at the Rebekah Home, just weeks after being reopened, another serious incident took place at The Lighthouse involving Justin Simon, the news of which would eventually reach the Bush administration. The 18-year-old had been sent to the facility by his mother, in her words to "find himself and find God, and learn to be a man," after getting a speeding ticket and getting in a street fight that was broken up by the police.¹⁵⁶ When she dropped him off, his mother recalled thinking that the place looked "a little strange," in that she "saw boys dressed in red shirts-badges of

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Rosin, "Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case;" Emily Pyle, "Faith-Based Homes on Trial," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 15, 2000, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2000-12-15/79818/>; Dan Parker, "State Forever Bans Roloff Home Leader's Wife from Working at Facility," *Caller Times*, March 28, 2000, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://archive.caller.com/news/state-forever-bans-roloff-home-leaders-wife-from-working-at-facility-366064096-310744641.html/>; Gibeaut, "Welcome to HELL: How Allegations of Child Abuse at a Texas Church Home for Problem Kids Could Threaten a Major Part of President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative 49.

¹⁵⁵ Rosin, "Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case;" Pyle, "Faith-Based Homes on Trial;" Parker, "State Forever Bans Roloff Home Leader's Wife from Working at Facility."

¹⁵⁶ Rosin, "Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case."

punishment-standing at the rear of the room, facing the wall and eating with their hands.”¹⁵⁷ Others she claimed had “socks stuffed in their mouths,” and another was wearing a clown suit as punishment for “clowning around.”¹⁵⁸

Soon after he arrived, while being held captive in this place that seemed “a little strange” to his mother, Simon would be subjected to sadistic practices resulting in serious injuries, prompting his removal from the facility and its closure soon after. In the first few weeks at the Lighthouse, Simon was routinely beaten, forced to complete extreme exercise, and be otherwise abused and neglected at the facility. Simon attempted to escape with 17-year-old Aaron Cavallin on the cold evening of March 28, 2000, but was quickly caught by Superintendent Allen Lee Smith, who proceeded to reprimand them immediately.¹⁵⁹ What happened afterwards speaks to the cruel and sadistic character of the staff members and the program they instituted at The Lighthouse Home for Boys and other Roloff homes under Bush’s new policies.

The captured boys were subjected to severe punishment for their offense, presumably, as a means to deter them and others from attempting to run away and potentially tell others about their experiences. First, the would-be fugitives were tied together with rope and had their heads smacked together by Smith. Then, he forced them to run through the forest brush barefoot while striking them with a stick if they slowed down.¹⁶⁰ The residents were subsequently forced down a ladder into a 15-foot deep sewage trench, while still barefoot, and made to dig for almost 12 hours straight; during

¹⁵⁷ Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Rosin, “Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case;” Pyle, “Faith-Based Homes on Trial;” Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 50.

¹⁶⁰ Rosin, “Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case;” Pyle, “Faith-Based Homes on Trial.”

which, staff members struck them with dirt clots and cans, splashed them with cold water, and urinated on them from the edge of the pit.¹⁶¹ After the first several hours of digging, they “were told they would have to jump across the pit if they wanted to rest.”¹⁶² During his attempt, Simon was so exhausted that he fell in the pit, spraining both ankles and breaking three toes.¹⁶³

When the sun came up, Callin was first ordered to dig a “mock grave” for Simon, but the staff members instead made him “scrub a bathroom floor with a piece of steel wool the size of a nickel.”¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Simon was taken to a walk-in clinic by Lighthouse staff members and notified his mother about the injury, which they claimed was caused by “stepping in a hole while cutting the grass.”¹⁶⁵ She traveled to Corpus Christi to check on her son’s condition, before taking him to the emergency room upon realizing the severity of his injuries.¹⁶⁶ After workers at the hospital reported his wounds to Neuces County Sherriff’s office as signs of possible assault, Simon left the facility immediately while he and his mother were degraded by Wiley Cameron for their decision.¹⁶⁷

A few weeks later, two employees at the Lighthouse were arrested for unlawful restraint, including superintendent Smith, whose lawyer defended his actions on the basis that the fugitives posed a threat to society and the “law in Texas gives caretakers the right

¹⁶¹ Rosin, “Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case.”

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid; Pyle, “Faith-Based Homes on Trial.”

¹⁶⁴ Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 50.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 51.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 50.

to use reasonable force to discipline and keep order.”¹⁶⁸ However, amidst other testimonies from Lighthouse residents in court the following month, including a 17-year old boy who was forced to consume hot sauce and jalapeno peppers and roll around the floor reciting “I’m a fat, desperate whale ... I love cupcakes and Ho-Hos,” Smith was convicted of misdemeanor charges false imprisonment. In addition to being sentenced to one year of probation, Smith was made to pay a \$1,000 fine, complete 150 hours of community service, and banned from working at residential homes for children.¹⁶⁹

This conviction was not the only way that The Lighthouse for Boys would be damaged by these residents’ allegations of criminal abuse in the aftermath of the Bush administration’s policy changes. In the following months, Simon and Callin, as well as other survivors, filed civil suits against The Lighthouse for “fraud, false imprisonment, battery and intentional infliction of emotional distress.”¹⁷⁰ Responding to these new charges, the president of the TACCCA Reverend David Blaser, a fundamentalist who had long admired Lester Roloff,¹⁷¹ resurrected his role model’s defense through a distasteful analogy depicting institutional child abuse as a life-saving measure: “We are completely against abuse, of course ... But how to define it is for the courts to decide. If you see a baby going to the stream, drowning, and you get a rope and throw it to the baby and it gets the baby around the neck, do you drag it out of the water by the neck? Of course you do.”¹⁷² In total disagreement with this characterization, Simon’s mother called out the

¹⁶⁸ Dan Parker, “State Forever Bans Roloff Home Leader's Wife from Working at Facility,” *Caller Times*, February 28, 2003. Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://archive.caller.com/news/state-forever-bans-roloff-home-leaders-wife-from-working-at-facility-366064096310744641.html/>.

¹⁶⁹ Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 50.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Parker, “Abuse and Neglect in USA Treatment Centers,” 109.

¹⁷² Pyle, “Faith-Based Homes on Trial.”

recent policy changes surrounding the licensing of faith-based residential programs, stating “I want an acknowledgment from George Bush about this facility ... He had a wonderful idea, but this place has given him a black eye. He owes an explanation to people about how this could have happened.”¹⁷³ Therefore, speaking to the fact that while some parents most likely consented to their children being abused in these programs, that others would not have enrolled their children if they had been aware of what would happen to them in captivity.

After news of the cruel treatment of residents in the recently reopened Roloff Homes reached Bush’s administration, a spokesperson named Mike Jones stated that:

Governor Bush believes the care of children is a sacred trust and any allegations should be taken seriously ... He believes there should be an exhaustive and thorough investigation, and if any of the allegations are confirmed, our protective and regulatory services should take all necessary steps to protect the young people in that facility.¹⁷⁴

Presumably, given that Bush’s political image was entangled with the outcome of his policies, the events catalyzed the final exodus of the Roloff Homes for children from Texas. In the spring of 2001, the Rebekah Home and Lighthouse for Boys were permanently closed to minors after the state legislature decided “not to renew the state’s Alternative Accreditation program for faith-based child-care providers.”¹⁷⁵ They had reached this decision for numerous reasons. Three of the eight programs that the TACCCA had accredited were owned by pastors on the accreditation board,¹⁷⁶ who had

¹⁷³ Gibeaut, “Welcome to HELL,” 51.

¹⁷⁴ Rosin, “Two Arrested in Texas Child Abuse Case.”

¹⁷⁵ “The Texas Faith-Based Initiative at Five Years: Warning Signs as President Bush Expands Texas-style Program at National Level,” Texas Freedom Network, 2002, Accessed June 1, 2022, https://tfn.org/cms/assets/uploads/2016/01/TFN_CC_REPORT-FINAL.pdf.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid; Citing Application for State Approval of the Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies as an Accrediting Agency in the State of Texas, Jun 15, 1998.

failed to inspect their own facilities annually and police them as required by their contract with the state.¹⁷⁷

This conflict of interest was found to be especially problematic because the “rate of *confirmed* abuse and neglect at alternatively-accredited facilities was 25 times higher than that of state-licensed facilities;”¹⁷⁸ their “complaint rate was almost 70% higher than state-licensed facilities;”¹⁷⁹ and the “state could not conduct site visits or address complaints at alternatively-accredited facilities unless TACCCA filed formal allegations of abuse against a facility it accredits.”¹⁸⁰ After great responsibility was put in the hands of the TACCCA and owners of these residential programs by the state of Texas, that they failed to do what was expected of them as professional caregivers to vulnerable children, which resulted in widespread institutional child abuse for which they were never held accountable aside from losing accreditation. This suggests that, despite their self-presentation and stated mission, representatives of the Christian faith should not be given the benefit of the doubt when public institutions are assessing their fitness to care for children.

V. THE AFTERLIFE OF ROLOFF EVANGELICAL ENTERPRISES

¹⁷⁷ Ibid; Citing Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services letter to Rev. David Blaser, Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies, Mar 8, 2001.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid; Citing “List of Alternative Accreditation Organizations Alternatively Accredited Facilities,” Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, September 2000; Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services Statistics on State-Licensed Facilities, 2001. Research indicates there was 75% complain rate at residential programs for youth accredited by TACCCA, while state-licensed facilities had only a 5.4% complaint rate.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid; Citing List of Alternative Accreditation Organizations Alternatively Accredited Facilities, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, September 2000; Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services Statistics on State-Licensed Facilities, 2001.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid;

Despite losing accreditation in 2001, however, it was not the end of Roloff Homes youth residential facilities, as the girls from Rebekah home were transferred to a new facility in Devil’s Elbow, Missouri, where licensing was not required and the owners could continue to cut corners to maximize profits. It was renamed as New Beginnings Girls Academy to avoid the stigma of past controversies, but the program structure remained intact. Soon after, the children were once again moved to a new property in Pace, Florida, where it continued to operate under the same name without a license from the state.¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Mountain Park Baptist Academy, which had replaced the Bethesda Home for Girls and had also housed Rebekah Home girls, also continued to operate as a for-profit business in Mississippi without licensing. While grossing between two to three million dollars annually, mostly “from children trafficked in interstate commerce,”¹⁸² it closed in 2004 after lawsuits and public allegations of an array of criminal abuses including unpaid forced labor.¹⁸³

Before it was shut down, former residents of Mountain Park described being held captive in buildings with locked doors and windows on a compound surrounded by razor wire, where they were neglected, abused, and exploited. The residents were forced to complete manual labor around the property such “as picking up rocks, brushhogging fields with weed hooks, digging ponds with shovels and wheelbarrows, and other jobs.”¹⁸⁴ Participation was not a choice, as residents were brutalized by staff members

¹⁸¹ Susan Donaldson James, “Biblical Reform School Discipline: “Tough Love” or Abuse,” March 6, 2011, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/independent-fundamental-baptist-discipline-call-tough-love-abuse/story?id=13310172>.

¹⁸² Kaufmann vs. Mountain Park Academy, 2003, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://nospank.net/stille.y.htm>.

¹⁸³ Jim Suhr, “Baptist Boarding Schools Close in Missouri, Florida,” *Sun Herald*, April 30, 2004, Accessed June 1, 2022, <http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/baptist-schools.htm>.

¹⁸⁴ Kaufmann vs. Mountain Park Academy.

and other residents who had succumbed to “coercive persuasion” techniques; including sleep deprivation, beatings, force feedings, controlling bathroom breaks, and others.¹⁸⁵ Those who soiled their clothes were first subjected to a punishment called “GI shower,” which meant they were “stripped of their clothing, tormented with wire brushes and other abrasives, and then dressed.”¹⁸⁶ After showering, they were “forced to stand before the rest of the children and apologize” while the “remainder of the children are all required to mock and harass the victim.”¹⁸⁷

Additionally, former residents and their guardians accused staff members of administering to children the behavior modification drug chlorpromazine without the notification or consent of guardians.¹⁸⁸ They described being dispensed drugs in beverages and under the guise of “worm medicine,” which aside from their psychoactive effects, affected their urination, defecation, and menstruation functions, making the denial bathroom breaks particularly traumatic.¹⁸⁹ One parent, who had specifically chosen a faith-based program because they promised not to administer drugs, was shocked at her daughter’s radical transformation right when she left the program. After a private physician informed her that her daughter tested positive for chlorpromazine, she said they believed that the clandestine administration of drugs was, on the one hand, to manage the

¹⁸⁵ *Child Abuse and Deceptive Marketing by Residential Programs for Teens*, Committee on Education and Labor, 110th Congress, 2nd Session (2008), 63, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg41839/html/CHRG-110hhrg41839.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ Kaufmann vs. Mountain Park Academy.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid; *Child Abuse and Deceptive Marketing by Residential Programs for Teens*, 63.

¹⁸⁹ Kaufmann vs. Mountain Park Academy.

behavior of children in captivity.¹⁹⁰ And, on the other, to pass off the therapeutic approach as being effective.¹⁹¹

Looking back this would explain the complete change in Erika's headstrong attitude. When we picked her up from Mountain Park Academy she was overly submissive. It was not God, it was not Mountain Park's Miracle "Religious" Message and Discipline practices. It is the simple fact that they were chemically restraining children that refused to conform.

While confined in this disciplinary environment, residents were pressured to relieve their situation by gaining the perks of serving as "orientation guides" and security guards up to 18 hours per day.¹⁹² This institutional dynamic not only allowed the owners to raise their profit margins, but it also allowed them to maintain "plausible deniability" of their own culpability in these violent abuses when confronted by civil authorities."¹⁹³ In other words, it was a mechanism for the owners to manage the captive population without hiring additional staff members, which places the violence required to maintain order in the facility on the children themselves. Further, it serves as a means to gain the allegiance of children who might otherwise have been ungovernable through coercion alone, if positioned within the political structure as a normal resident without the perks that come with the responsibility.

In addition to preventing escapes by "beating, terrorizing, mocking, or restraining" fugitives, residents in these positions were also required to police other children's behavior and implement the treatment approach, which often meant being made "to stare at and physically and emotionally harass children on the toilet, jerk students off toilets while they

¹⁹⁰ *Child Abuse and Deceptive Marketing by Residential Programs for Teens*, 63.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

try to relieve themselves, and limit the use of toilet paper.”¹⁹⁴ According to a lawsuit filed by former residents in 2003, the owners “routinely pressure[d] children in their care to remain with the facility as employees” for less than minimum wage.¹⁹⁵ According to the plaintiffs, this was made possible through “brainwashing and routine deprivation of substantial age and intelligence appropriate education which might thereby render the child competent and confident to find employment in the "outside world.”¹⁹⁶

Mountain Park Academy shut down in 2004, but other Roloff Homes offshoots continued to operate around the nation and similar allegations of abuse continued. The girls from New Beginnings Girls Academy in Pace, Florida, were relocated to LaRussel, Missouri, in 2007 where allegations of abuse continued.¹⁹⁷ In November of 2010, a 17-year-old girl named Anne Marie was sent to New Beginnings Girls Academy by her mother after her Tabernacle Baptist minister, Don Martin, recommended the program to her.¹⁹⁸ She was desperate to help her daughter because she had begun to drink and otherwise act out, after being dragged into a vehicle while jogging in her Maryland neighborhood and sexually assaulted by a group of men.¹⁹⁹ Instead of receiving help to overcome her trauma, Anne “was told the rape was her fault and subjected to harsh discipline,” including being ridiculed by staff members, violently restrained, as well as deprived of food, clothing, and toiletries.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Susan Donaldson James, “Biblical Reform School Discipline: “Tough Love” or Abuse?,” *ABC News*, April 6, 2011, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/independent-fundamental-baptist-discipline-call-tough-love-abuse/story?id=13310172>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

While held captive at New Beginnings Girls Academy, Anne was constantly surveilled by staff members and other girls, which meant her behavior was “micromanaged down to the number of squares of toilet paper” she had access to.²⁰¹ Anne had suffered serious injuries from the sexual assault that had left her partially incontinent, but she was denied adequate sanitary pads, for which she was mocked by other students for bleeding in public.²⁰² Further, she was not allowed access to proper medical treatment for a urinary tract infection.²⁰³ The dormitories were frigid during the harsh Missouri winter, but girls were only provided a skirt and light jacket.²⁰⁴ The food often consisted mostly of “bologna on white bread, watered-down milk and canned eggs.”²⁰⁵

Similar to allegations from survivors of Mountain Park, Anne described residents who collaborated with the staff members as those who had been “broken” from “having been told that their families have abandoned them, and that the world outside is a sinful, dangerous place where girls who leave are murdered or raped.”²⁰⁶ Thus, insinuating to the children that submission to the program was the only option to save their lives and souls from the evils of the modern world. Under their surveillance, residents were banned from making eye contact or conversing with one another at any time except for Fridays from 6:00-9:00pm.²⁰⁷ In addition to all communications being monitored and censored,

²⁰¹ Kathryn Joyce, “Horror Stories from Tough-Love Teen Homes,” *Mother Jones*, July/August 2011, Accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/08/new-bethany-ifb-teen-homes-abuse/>.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ James, “Biblical Reform School Discipline.”

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Joyce, “Horror Stories from Tough-Love Teen Homes.”

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

residents were not allowed to contact their parents for the first month and no one else for six months.²⁰⁸ However, Anne and others manage to sneak out letters by hiding them between hymnal pages and passing them to members of the church congregation.²⁰⁹

For misbehaving, Anne was made to wear a red shirt and stand facing a wall up to 10 hours a day in makeshift isolation cell, which she was only allowed to leave for worship and two daily bathroom breaks.²¹⁰ She was also forced to take cold showers and subjected to five minute “force feeding” sessions while monitored by other girls.²¹¹ If she failed to eat all of her food, she would be punished further, and was often made to perform “endless sets of calisthenics after meals.”²¹² Unable to escape these torturous conditions, girls attempted to take their own lives, according to Anne, “if only for the chance to get taken to a hospital and beg for outside help.”²¹³ Within the first three months, which she recalled felt like six because she had no sense of time, Anne attempted suicide while in an effort to escape the abusive conditions imposed by staff members, later stating that “they take away any feeling that you are capable of doing anything outside the home ... You have this sense of total isolation: There’s no way out of it, you’re there for the rest of your life.”²¹⁴

Months after Anne was removed from the program in April of 2011, her mother said she was deeply traumatized by the experience, telling reporters: “She is doing terrible ... She has no self-worth. They had her say a hundred times that she was the

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ James, “Biblical Reform School Discipline.”

²¹¹ Joyce, “Horror Stories from Tough-Love Teen Homes.”

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

daughter of the devil with the tongue of the devil -- crazy destructive talk at New Beginnings. Now, I think she actually believes it."²¹⁵ Rather than criticizing Anne's treatment at the facility, Don Martin blamed the girl and her mother, stating "My sense is people send children there and they want them to come back as model citizens, and if something goes wrong, they want to blame the school. I think they tried to help, but that doesn't mean a thing if there is not good support."²¹⁶

When Anne's testimony surfaced and further investigation ensued, New Beginnings Girls Academy was closed in 2011. In response, Roloff Homes spokesman August Rosado denied that the People's Baptist Church as affiliated with New Beginnings Girls Academy, decried the abuse that took place there and claimed that no child abuse is tolerated at their own facilities which supposedly only served adults.²¹⁷ To avoid the stigma attached to the previous facility, it was rebranded as the Marvelous Grace Girls Academy and moved back to Pace, Florida, operating under the former Executive Director of New Beginnings Girls Academy, Steven Blankenship.²¹⁸

VI. CONCLUSION:

This chapter has delineated the history and legacy of Reverend Lester Roloff's ministry, whose IFB convictions led him to establish and operate dozens of churches and faith-based residential programs for children and adults. Even before the secular behavior modification programs largely associated with the TTI today, Roloff was implementing a

²¹⁵ James, "Biblical Reform School Discipline."

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

similar therapeutic approach based on his faith; amidst a thriving resurgence of the fundamentalist movement in response to the permeation of cosmopolitan culture into the Southern US. By establishing his own institutions, Roloff sought to reproduce and expand the influence of evangelical fundamentalism by forcibly conforming the minds, bodies, and spirits, of children to ideal gendered subjectivities. Specifically, the embodiment of moral, political, and onto-epistemological identities in most ways congruent with both fundamentalist morality and medico-juridical constructions of normality.

While held in captivity, children in the Roloff Homes were forced to participate in religious rituals intended to manifest a fundamentalist utopia stifled by modern culture. Although an opponent of scientific treatments, his therapeutic approach included many techniques that have also been deployed in US carceral facilities for purposes defined by the discourses of behavioral science as discussed in the previous chapter. The disciplinary approach at the Roloff Homes rested on the fundamentalist belief that children are inherently sinful and must be redeemed through pain and deprivation, as had been the case in his childhood home and as he interpreted from the bible as an adult.

In addition to Roloff's own comments on interracial relationships and queer identity, the differences between the gendered-segregated programs, as well as the gendered pathologies the children were labeled with to rationalize their incarceration; reflect the fundamentalist vision of a white supremacist utopian world and the pathway to salvation. Roloff was on a crusade to reproduce and expand Western Christendom; to create a world where interventions intended to prevent institutional child abuse in radical religious schools are part of a communist conspiracy orchestrated by the antichrist, where

people who identify as LGBTQ+ are immoral and bound for hell, where non-whites are destined for subjugation, and women must be controlled because they are conduits of evil.²¹⁹ It is unknown whether there were any non-white residents of the Roloff Homes, but no evidence to the contrary was uncovered during this research, which suggests that this network might have served as a means of diverting white children out of the criminal justice system as it intensified in the second half the of the twentieth century. In cases where children were enrolled in one of Roloff's facilities against their will by their guardians, who feared how their sinful offspring would be judged by God, the Roloff Homes represented a state-sanctioned carceral facility to impose fundamentalist morality on the youth population through isolation, torture techniques, and systematic radicalization.

Roloff pathologized girls as sinful so and in need of being "saved" to vindicate their incarceration and subjection to torture in his facilities, through which he garnered millions of dollars from supporters and free labor. Nonetheless, his ministry remains respected in many Christian circles to this day. His success in this regard was achieved by decrying gendered immoralities -such as having sex or becoming pregnant outside of wedlock, being disobedient to guardians after a divorce, interracial relationships, prostitution, and acting out after being traumatized by sexual violence- were destroying society and damning the souls of countless children. By structuring Roloff's institutions for women and girls in accordance with his patriarchal interpretation of scripture,

²¹⁹ Susan Campbell, *Dating Jesus: A Story of Fundamentalism, Feminism, and the American Girl* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2009), 99, *ProQuest*. The gender roles in this political structure are oriented by the fundamentalist conviction that women are inherently evil since Eve ate from the tree of knowledge in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

including the belief that “suffering is supposed to bring one closer to God,” he joined other fundamentalist men who have attempted create “Good Christian girls” trained to abuse themselves and police others in order to conform to the will of God.²²⁰

The residents of the facilities for children assigned male at birth, on the other hand, less often were incarcerated for their sexual or reproductive history as the use of psychoactive substances and having been convicted of a crime. While in captivity, they were taught to measure the morality of women according to their capacity to serve as subservient wives and mothers in accordance with their interpretation of the bible. Aside from being prepared to train as fundamentalist ministers, they were more often than girls placed in manual labor roles, characterized by Roloff and other practitioners as exercises for building discipline, learning job skills, and giving something back to the ministry.

The discursive directorate of the Roloff Homes was to prefigure the character of future generations of adults with a Christian character that is compatible with legal and medical conceptions of normality. While at the same time, delivering a spectacle projecting to the public that there is an epidemic of sinful teens, driven away from righteousness by modern culture, whose lives and souls can only be saved through submission to Christ. Together, these forces were directed at compelling the US population to support the fundamentalist movement and “tough love” approach to child-rearing, which as previously discussed, were central contributing factors to the proliferation of the TTI and US criminal justice system after the second World War.

²²⁰ Campbell, *Dating Jesus*, 99.

Despite garnering a wide range of supporters, Roloff's mission was fraught with public controversies surrounding allegations of institutional child abuse and refusal to conform to state licensing requirements. While sometimes denying accusations of criminal abuse and neglect when questioned in court or publicized interviews by journalists, he often defended his right to violate those laws by referencing his constitutionally protected rights to practice his religion. After his passing, Roloff's followers have continued to run his facilities for adults and children for the next four decades while under constant pressure from state authorities. The Roloff Homes were exiled from Texas for refusing to submit to licensing guidelines, but the presidential ambitions of George W. Bush's catalyzed their temporary return by establishing the TACCCA, which offered alternative accreditation for faith-based schools that would otherwise be subject to state licensing requirements. Despite Roloff's antagonistic relationship with the state and problematic reputation, their allure to evangelical fundamentalists and privately sourced funding enabled their ongoing existence.

The ghost of Lester Roloff continues to haunt the people of the US decades after his passing. To avoid regulation by state agencies throughout their existence, the original Roloff Homes for youths have moved to jurisdictions with less scrutiny and changed titles to avoid association with past controversies. Dozens of offshoots were spawned from the original programs, including Reverend Herman Fountain's ministry in Mississippi. The Jubilee Home for Jubilee Ladies Home Drug & Alcohol Addiction Treatment Center and Roloff Men's Home are still up and running today. These are residential facilities for adults without licensing, which remain under the control of the

Peoples Baptist Church Ministries.²²¹ In addition to the Peoples Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, the Regeneration Reservation, Lighthouse Prison Ministries, *The Family Altar*, and Roloffian missionary projects in South America and former soviet bloc countries, remain in operation. Roloff's ministry continues to be as notorious to some people as they are esteemed in evangelical fundamentalist circles. This because while many of the thousands of people who resided in his facilities claimed to have found salvation, other survivors have described being deeply traumatized by their experiences which their advocates are well aware of.

The next chapter describes the political history and techniques of Reverend Herman Fountain's ministry in Lucedale and Petal, Mississippi, where faith-based residential programs for youth were not required to be licensed by the state. After achieving sobriety and taking on the life of a minister, Fountain had briefly worked in the Rebekah Home in 1977, where learned the Roloff's business model and therapeutic approach. Like his mentor, Fountain's treatment of children violated state and federal laws regarding child abuse and neglect, which he either denied or defended by arguing that such legal conditions violate his constitutionally protected right to practice his religion. These facilities were also raided multiple times by police and child welfare agencies resulting in the removal of children following allegations of abuse, often raised by runaways. While Bethel Academy for Girls kept the same name throughout its years

²²¹ Nanci Eischens, "Jubilee Ladies Home Application," Jubilee Ladies Home Drug & Alcohol Addiction Treatment Center, Accessed February 3, 2022, <http://www.roloffhomes.com/jubilee-ladies-home/>; Application, Roloff Men 's Home Addiction Rehabilitation Center, Accessed February 3, 2022, <http://www.roloffhomes.com/roloff-men-s-home/>. According to the applications, the rules and regulations reflect previous practices related to maintaining a strict daily regiment, no psychoactive substances, no possession of money, monitored communications, Christian worship and biblical memorization, mandatory labor, dress and hygiene requirements, and sexual abstinence.

of operation, BBA was a rebranding of an earlier iteration that would be renamed at least three other times to disassociate it with past controversies. It was in this context that the discourses of behavior modification would overlap with Roloff's faith-based therapeutic approach, when BBA became affiliated with WWASP and was eventually purchased by one of the latter's owners.

CHAPTER 4:
THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF REVEREND HERMAN FOUNTAIN'S
MINISTRY

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the political history and techniques of Reverend Herman Fountain's ministry, which included two compounds run by himself and members of his family between 1978 and 2006. The first facility was a compound in Lucedale, Mississippi, which began as a co-ed program called Bethel Baptist Home for Children (BBHC). While under Fountain's control, the program changed in structure and name multiple times to disassociate the program with public controversies, before being sold to the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs (WWASP) and renamed Gulf Coast Academy (GCA). The second, which was founded near in Petal in 1999, was called Bethel Academy for Girls (BAG) as long as it operated. This historical narrative highlights the coercive nature of the therapeutic approach at these programs and their relationship to the state, as well as how residents survived, and outcome of civil suits against the ministry. It also reveals insights on how the religious schools for troubled youth are integrated into the US criminal justice system, alongside other state-sanctioned facilities that rely on secular discourses like behavior modification.

In the original co-ed program in Lucedale, gender training was less pronounced in the structure of the programs, but became more apparent when the boys and girls were split into different facilities in the 90's with the formation of BBA and BAG. Although these compounds and the programs they hosted shared many characteristics, their disciplinary techniques departed along the lines of fundamentalist conceptions of piety

and gender roles at different moments in history. At BBA, as well as in its afterlife as Eagle Point Christian Academy (EPCA) and Pine View Academy (PVA), the program aimed to transform the thoughts and behaviors of captive children to conform to fundamentalist expectations for people assigned male at birth. At BAG, on the other hand, children assigned female at birth were subjected to gendered training aimed to producing pious daughters, mothers, and wives to fundamentalist men.

Herman Fountain became an Independent Fundamentalist Baptist (IFB) minister after achieving sobriety, which put him on the path to working with children. Fountain had briefly worked in the Rebekah Home in 1977 where he adopted the fundamentalist beliefs of Lester Roloff, including his therapeutic approach and divinely appointed mission to forcibly conform children deemed sinful to fit ideal gendered subjectivities. Specifically, the program was discursively directed at producing straight, cisgender, sober, patriotic and law-abiding, pious, and hard-working children; out of those deemed sinful by their guardians or criminal by the court system. And, in doing so, attempted to shape the world according to his fundamentalist ideals, by publicly contending that his Christian disciplinary methods saved the lives and souls of residents.

As discussed with regard to the Roloff Homes in the last chapter, as well as the larger fundamentalist movement in the one before that, the mission of Herman Fountain's ministry was to live, defend, and expand, Western Christendom through an enterprise where children are subjected to abusive techniques. Although the owner and practitioners of the program characterized it as an altruistic venture and garnered public support from many former residents and advocates, hundreds of others have criticized it program for being harmful, exploitative, and ineffective at meeting the needs of vulnerable children.

As had been the case with Roloff, Fountain both denied and defended his techniques, which violated state and federal laws concerning child abuse and neglect, by framing the issue as a matter of religious freedom. These facilities were raided multiple times by police and child welfare agencies resulting in the removal of children following allegations of abuse, which in some cases were raised by runaways or signaled by riots. Until the Lucedale property was sold to one of the primary owners of WWASP in 2006, Fountain had for decades reaped profits from tuition payments and the forced labor of captive children, who were coerced to work on private construction projects and take up roles in the program itself managing other children.

By the time Leroy and the Tipps arrived at the compound when the program was called Bethel Boys Academy (BBA), it was affiliated with WWASP and had had adopted a boot camp structure, but also had stayed true to its fundamentalist roots in the Roloff Homes. In addition to shedding light on Herman Fountain's background and credentials, the following pages in this chapter provide context for the stories in forthcoming chapters through journalistic publications describing the history of Fountain's residential programs for troubled youths between 1978 and 2007. In addition to describing the evolution of the program, it speaks to nearly three decades of institutional child abuse and the efforts of politicians, state welfare agencies, and advocacy organizations, as well as survivors and their families, to render the program safe for residents or close completely.

II. EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY OF REVEREND HERMAN FOUNTAIN

The property where BBA would later rest was purchased by Herman Fountain in 1978. Little is known about his life before that, however, in an interview with Jamie

Spear in 1990, who is a reporter for *USA Today*, the reverend's mother claimed that he "was so lonely as a school boy that he tried to buy friends with his lunch money."¹ Her son told the same reporter that he had grown up in the "working class south side of Oklahoma City," where he started using drugs and was a criminal from a young age. While it was never verified, he told court officials in 1990 about a "previous life of crime and drugs, including a 100-pound marijuana deal in Miami in which he said he "ripped off" his supplier."²

Fountain claimed that by 19 years of age he was addicted to heroin and practicing witchcraft while living in New York City, before he converted to Christianity and decided to dedicate his life to saving the souls of children. As he later explained to a reporter, this was before finding sobriety through faith, which he designated to be the sole reason for abstinence: "I ain't got veins in my arms from where I shot up heroin. I used LSD, speed, marijuana ... Demerol, morphine, Dilaudid. I still have the desire for drugs. The only reason I don't smoke dope is because the Lord doesn't want me to."³ The details of his self-proclaimed spiritual enlightenment are unclear, as he has given at least two vague and unfounded descriptions to reporters,⁴ but whatever the details, his "experiences

¹ Susan Spear, "Troubled Minister Says God Chose Him to Suffer," *USA Today*, October 17, 1990, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36216>.

² Fred Grimm, "Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, June 23, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36221>.

³ Spear, "Troubled Minister Says God Chose Him to Suffer."

⁴ Evan Moore, "Daddy's Place: is it a Home or Hell on Earth?," *Houston Chronicle*, October 23, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36223>; Spear, "Troubled Minister Says God Chose Him to Suffer." Fountain told Moore that "somehow... he woke up in a hospital with hepatitis, found God, went to Bible college in Florida and Started his own church in Oklahoma City." Then, two years later, he told Spear that "he finally turned to the Lord while using drugs on a couch in a New York City apartment."

on the street” and story of achieving sobriety through spiritual redemption became the foundation of his qualification to work with so-called troubled youths.⁵

After his church “failed”⁶ in Oklahoma City in the mid-1970’s, Fountain moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, where he became the protégé of IFB minister Lester Roloff. While working at the notorious Rebekah Home for Girls in Corpus Christi. During his time there, Fountain decided he wanted to spend his life forcing children to surrender to his religious beliefs. Amidst growing pressure from the state for Roloff to submit to state licensing requirements, Fountain set out to open his own religious school in Mississippi, because it was one of only four states that did not require such facilities be licensed, regulated, and supervised.⁷

According to Snyder,⁸ a reporter for *The Times-Picayune*, the reverend established his program as a religious non-profit, so tuition was paid in the legal form of “contributions,” which allowed him to “get around the law[s]” requiring him to pay taxes, maintain transparency, and meet more restrictive standards. In 1978, the reverend took his family and three other children, who had been “handed over to him by Roloff as a start to his ministry,”⁹ to a remote 28-acre property in Lucedale, Mississippi.¹⁰ Then, by

⁵ “Youths Missing in Raid on Shelter,” *Desert Sun*, June 13, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19880613.2.22&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>.

⁶ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.” The reverend never gave the details on why his first church “failed,” but he told Moore that this event was what prompted him to work with Roloff, stating: “That church failed and I’d heard that Brother Roloff might need some help down in Corpus Christi, so I headed down there to work with him.”

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Snyder, “Miss. Moves to Regulate Wayward Children Homes,” *The Times-Picayune*, July 3, 1989, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36210>.

⁹ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.” In an interview with Moore, one of the original three children that were given to Fountain by Roloff, named Rebecca Stringer. The article goes on to describe how she (and other girls at Bethel) called Fountain “Daddy,” even though he beat her, spit in her face, forced her to fight other girls, mocked her speech impediment, called her a “morphodite,” and “told her what a worthless piece of human flotsam she was.”

¹⁰ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

his own account in 1990, the group “parked a 25-foot camper” on the property and “began to build” BBHC.¹¹ His ministry was located down a driveway at 2147 Mill Street; on the former site of a Kampgrounds of America recreation area and nudist colony,¹² which amounts to a clearing surrounded by wooded swamp in the outskirts of town.

Like his mentor, the reverend based the structure of his program on the biblical dictum, “spare the rod, spoil the child,”¹³ which was a philosophical belief that motivated him torture thousands of children over the next several decades. The number of boys and girls in the program grew quickly according to Grimm, who wrote an article describing how 38 children¹⁴ were removed from the premises by George County officials in March of 1980, after “a runaway from the school found suffering from scabies claimed that he was beaten there.”¹⁵ According to another article by Lynn Watkins,¹⁶ a staff member at BBHC was charged with misdemeanor assault based on the allegations of the child who had escaped, but they were never convicted, and the other children were returned to Fountain’s custody on the compound soon after.¹⁷

¹¹ Spear, “Troubled Minister Says God Chose Him to Suffer.”

¹² “Bethel Baptist Church Raid,” prod. Martin Clancy, *ABC News 20/20*, 1988, Youtube video, 2:19, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SQahaAZZJk>.

¹³ “Rev. Herman Fountain Pleads Innocent to Assault Charges,” *Associated Press*, October 28, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/657cfef9b6d00778be7bdfaebba6392c>.

¹⁴ Ronald Smothers, “Church State Fight Over Home for Troubled Children,” *St. Petersburg Times*, June 18, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36219>; Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home;” Lynn Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children,” *USA Today*, June 10, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36192>; “Teen’s Complaint Prompt Probe of Boys Academy,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, October 27, 2002, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/319248437/>. Smothers and Grimm put the number of 38, but Watkins claims that 33 children were removed in the 1980 police raid on Bethel, and another published in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* puts the number at 36.

¹⁵ Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home.”

¹⁶ Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children.”

¹⁷ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

In the wake of this intervention by state authorities, Fountain “nearly tripled the occupancy of the home.”¹⁸ He also created his own construction company, manned by the unpaid teen-age boys in his care,” which was used to build “dormitories, an office building and a new church” over the next eight years.¹⁹ Throughout this period, numerous journalists²⁰ reported that youth county services workers had encountered more than 150 children who had run away from BBHC and described abusive practices; including being beaten, locked in a “prayer room” alone for days, and forced to run laps outside in the middle of the night.²¹

According to an article in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*,²² Fountain had “often” been publicly accused of “abuse, neglect and even child slavery,” but it wasn’t until the summer of 1988 that state authorities investigated and raided the compound again. Roughly two years before this raid, a thirteen-year-old boy from Florida known only as “SDL,”²³ as he would later be referred to in court records to protect his identity, arrived at BBHC.²⁴ On May 8th, 1988, he escaped the compound by hiding in a locker before a

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Adam Nossiter, “‘Abuse’ Matter of Opinion Founder of Miss. Home Says,” *Atlanta Journal & Atlanta Constitution*, June 13, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36196>; Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children;” “Operator of Bethel Children’s Home Not Surprised Assault Conviction Upheld,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, June 12, 1992, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36199>; “Judge Rules Bethel Mistreated 15,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, July 16, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36222>.

²¹ “Bethel Head Hoping for a Second Chance,” *Biloxi Sun Herald/Associated Press*, June 11, 1994, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36198>.

²² “Operator of Bethel Children’s Home Not Surprised Assault Conviction Upheld.”

²³ Moore, “Daddy’s Place;” Adam Nossiter, “Runaway’s Story of Abuse Triggered by Court Action,” *Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, June 19, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36220>. While Moore reported that S.D.L. told Kathy Prine he had arrived at Bethel in 1986 at the age of thirteen and was fifteen years old when he escaped on May 8, 1988, Nossiter reported that he was fourteen years old and was incarcerated at Bethel for 19-months.

²⁴ Moore, “Daddy’s Place;” Nossiter, “Runaway’s Story of Abuse Triggered by Court Action;” Kathy Eyre, “Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths,” *Baton Rouge Advocate*, June 11, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36193>.

church service and then riding a bicycle to a nearby convenience store, where he contacted the George County Sheriff's office to report being abused. SDL was then taken into the care by a child welfare investigator name Kathy Prine, who interviewed him about his experiences at BBHC.²⁵ According to Kathy Eyre of the Baton Rouge Advocate, in a youth court petition submitted on May 10th, 1988, the child said he fled because he was "tired of being locked up, slapped, and getting licks all the time."²⁶

In his interview with Prine, SDL described in detail the structure of this secretive and notorious program, including forced labor and brutal punishment rituals. Upon arriving, his head was shaved and was informed that he was not allowed to speak to other children. He was put "on watch," which meant he was continuously surveilled by another child who reported back to the reverend and other staff members.²⁷ All doors were guarded by captive children to prevent escapes, personal communications with the outside world were tightly controlled, and there were strict conditions surrounding visitation from friends and family.²⁸ In addition to being denied dentistry care and glasses for his failing eyesight," SDL was "caned" and publicly humiliated at BBHC by staff members and other captive children.²⁹

After involuntarily urinating in his bed while sleeping, he was placed on "pee watch," which meant he "was awakened hourly forced to urinate and was punished if he couldn't and beaten if he wet the bed."³⁰ At least once, SDL was locked the "cooler;" a

²⁵ Moore, "Daddy's Place;" Watkins, "Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children;" Eyre, "Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths."

²⁶ Eyre, "Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths."

²⁷ Moore, "Daddy's Place."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Watkins, "Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children." A judge later determined that S.D.L. "failed to get treatment for an eye condition that eventually would render him blind."

³⁰ Moore, "Daddy's Place."

“bare room with an uncovered light bulb in which children were held for weeks at a time and forced to listen to the continuous droning of sermons by Roloff.”³¹ He also described³² being subjected to more than one “nigger pile;” a technique where “a group of boys pile on another boy and pummel him,” as well as, being “pelted with dirt clods in a ditch.”³³

While children who had resided at BBHC had shared stories with law enforcement that were “equally shocking”³⁴ as SDL’s, according to Moore, the reasons why George County Prosecutor Mark Maples pursued his case were that “he had nowhere to go, no one wanted him and he was willing to testify.”³⁵ There were, however, many others who had also left BBHC whose witness testimonies substantiated his allegations. In court on June 1st, 1988, other boys and girls verified SDL’s story and revealed details about their own experiences at BBHC. They described how the meals consisted primarily of simple starchy foods; either day-old bread or cooked grains, and milk when it was donated. Amenities like toilet paper and time in the shower were strictly rationed. The children who worked on the compound were divided into two distinct groups. The first, assigned to the least desirable tasks, was called the “nigger crew.”³⁶ The

³¹ Ibid.

³² Nossiter, “Runaway’s Story of Abuse Triggered by Court Action.” The details of S.D.L.’s account of this incident were included in Judge Oswald’s notes, which occurred while the former was being forced to “dig a ditch or pit of some type.” As he tried to crawl out of the trench after other boys, “a teenage leader directed the other members of a work gang who were already out of the ditch to pick up and throw hardened clods of dirt at S.D.L.” When he attempted to get himself out of the hole in the ground or ditch, that he was prevented from doing so” and was forced by “a leader to place and hold his face in a hole, a small depression in the wall of this ditch or pit.”

³³ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

³⁴ Ibid. At the time Fountain was being pressured by the state, he was also facing lawsuits from former children he held captive, who charge him with involuntary servitude and sexual molestation.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

second group of captive children, known as the "workers," dismantled condemned buildings, cleaned lots and gardens and did roofing jobs.”³⁷

Aside from work, at the center of everyday life was attending Fountain’s church sermons and memorizing biblical scripture, which like his mentor Roloff, he claimed to believe was God’s word and that he could access its true meaning. While these Christian knowledge systems were being impressed upon the captive children, “there were no newspapers, magazines, movies, radios, or televisions” on the compound.³⁸ Residents only had access to the “Accelerated Christian Education program, which requires a child to learn on his own without teachers and [was] not accredited.”³⁹ When asked about the educational program, a former resident said they “did not really” learn anything and that they had been stripped of all non-Christian literature they had brought with them to the compound. In the face of criticism for not providing accredited education, Fountain stated: "They talk about our education program. Well, it's as good as Mississippi public schools, which isn't saying much. But education here is secondary. We're teaching them the Bible ... We're saving their souls."⁴⁰ By controlling the traffic of knowledge and enacting its behavioral mandates through the systematic application of rewards and punishments, BBHC was a world⁴¹ where, as Moore put it: “Every child there was a

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. Rebecca Stringer described how she was deeply impacted by the control of information and was traumatized after being released from Rebekah Home: "Sometimes I dream about it, dream that I'm still there, and I wake up scared... When I got out, I didn't know who won the war in Vietnam. I had to find out who the president was and I couldn't read very well. I guess I really didn't know what TV was either. I'd see the shows and I thought they were real. My father-in-law had to explain to me that they were just actors in stories... Fact is, I had to go back to school to get my high school diploma. Fountain stole four years out of my life, and I'll never forgive him for that."

frightful sinner, condemned to hell with only one, narrow avenue of escape: to follow Fountain's every dictate. Catholics were idolatrous heretics; the Pope, the Antichrist. Jews were despicable. Blacks bore the mark of Cain."⁴²

Children who complied with the program could improve their political position and gain more desirable responsibilities, but those who (to varying degrees) could not or would not conform were subjected to an array of ritualized torture techniques. In court, the children relayed the terms "pops" and "licks,"⁴³ which describe being whipped with a hickory switch, primarily to the legs and buttocks. They described how Fountain and his staff members would force the children to hold stress positions for extended periods of time, either in a chair position or standing on their toes "with their chins against the wall."⁴⁴ Others described the "black room," which was "an unlighted storage closet in which children were locked for disobedience."⁴⁵ In addition to the physical violence, one attested to being subjected to intensive verbal abuse, including regularly being called a "punk" and "faggot" by adults on the compound.⁴⁶

Herman Fountain was called to testify to the allegations of SDL and other survivors in early June of 1988. Following the proceedings on Wednesday, June 8th, the reverend and two of his assistants⁴⁷ were held in contempt after refusing to comply with a court order from Judge Robert Oswald, who demanded he provide a list of the "names

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. According to Moore, "pops" were "floggings administered by Fountain and his staff, leaving welts and open wounds on the legs and buttocks." Girls at Bethel described to court officials in 1888 "how they were forced to bend over and raise their dresses to receive "licks."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Judge Rules Bethel Mistreated 15."

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Grimm, "Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home." The names of his assistants were David Owens and Thomas McDonald.

and addresses of the children and their parents.”⁴⁸ In turn, they were jailed for several days and ordered to pay a fine of “\$1,500 a day until they agree to cooperate” with state officials,⁴⁹ but Fountain was released “without providing the information when he agreed that there would be an orderly transfer of the children to state custody.”⁵⁰

On day he was freed, Friday, June 10th, 1988, Oswald accused the reverend of “physical abuse, medical neglect and detention amounting to imprisonment.”⁵¹ Once again, the reverend refused to answer questions, claiming the investigation was in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state.⁵² To defend his abusive practices, Roloff characterized his mistreatment of children as pious and mandated by God, because his residents are sinful and dangerous. And, therefore in need of radical transformation through his faith-based approach to improve their earthly wellbeing, save their souls, and protect society from their “troubling” behaviors:

About 80 percent of everything that's been said about me is true ... I don't have a bunch of good little kids in here. I've got some terrible kids. I've got transvestites, homosexuals, nymphomaniacs, punks. I had a kid who raped his sister and murdered her. When a girl acts like a slut and a whore, I call her a slut and a whore. If a boy acts like a queer, I call him a queer. If somebody in our group needs churchin', we church him. That's it.⁵³

⁴⁸ “Youths Missing in Raid on Shelter.”

⁴⁹ Snyder, “Miss. Moves to Regulate Wayward Children Homes.”

⁵⁰ “Youths Missing in Raid on Shelter.”

⁵¹ Kathy Eyre, “Police Storm Church, Take Children,” *Associated Press*, June 14, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/f50b6bd5c64a09d08e863efd8d3561d8>.

⁵² “Minister Jailed for Refusing to Answer DA’s Question,” *Baton Rouge Advocate*, June 10, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36191>. In an interview with a reporter from the Baton Rouge Advocate, Fountain stated “I did answer questions pertaining to myself... But the line pertaining to the separation of church and state is drawn right here with me.”

⁵³ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.” Reflecting fundamentalist conceptions of gender and morality, Fountain attacked the character the boys in his care by referring to them as gay or transgender, while the girls were characterized as being promiscuous or sex workers.

Further, drawing on fundamentalist discourses about regarding the pathological consequences of modern culture, he denigrated the character of the children who were accusing him of abuse to discredit their claims that he was abusive:

The parents have lost control. Kids today are such manipulators. Such cons. Especially a child from a divorce. They've learned how to manipulate their parents. ... The children are here mainly for runaways, stealing, homosexuality. We have little girls who were whores ... They need a little discipline, a little bit of hard work.⁵⁴

Fountain's lawyer, Bill Bailey, also criticized the state's involvement in his client's affairs on the basis that Bethel is a religious non-profit and dedicated to the cause of evangelical fundamentalism: "Where does the state get its authority? ... There's no tax money that goes out there. This man's mission is to help children. When these children leave there, they may not be able to operate a computer or fly a plane, but they'll have the word of the Lord in them."⁵⁵

The judge disagreed with the reverend and his lawyer, however, who the former described in his notes as being "utterly mistaken" in believing that the "first Amendment right of freedom of religion" made the latter exempt from state laws prohibiting child abuse and neglect.⁵⁶ In the same vein, attorney general Mark Maples also disagreed with Fountain's position, admitting that while he was "not a bible scholar," but didn't "ever remember finding anywhere in the Bible that God ever approved of Bethel or any place like it. ... It's been said that the children learn the Bible, but it's also been said that they learn to get beat, how to run laps at 4 in the morning, how to censor their mail."⁵⁷ Again,

⁵⁴ "Youths Missing in Raid on Shelter."

⁵⁵ Watkins, "Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children."

⁵⁶ Nossiter, "Runaway's Story of Abuse Triggered by Court Action."

⁵⁷ Watkins, "Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children."

Fountain was found in contempt of court and jailed for 30 minutes before he returned to court and remained uncooperative. Subsequently, at around 11:00 am,⁵⁸ Judge Oswald ordered the State Welfare Commissioner Thomas Brittain Jr. to make “arrangements for them to be housed in an unused portion of a state mental institution.”⁵⁹ The order gave the state “48-hour temporary custody, not including Saturday and Sunday” to return the children to their parents,⁶⁰ with the exception of thirteen children whose parents were “denied custody because of reports of child abuse in their homes” before they had been enrolled.⁶¹

III. A SERIES OF POLICE RAIDS ON BBHC

According to Moore, when the reverend learned of the impending raid on his compound, he immediately traveled there to warn the children, and announced: “You’re going to the nuthouse; I have no more control over you.”⁶² When officials from the Department of Public Welfare and more than a dozen Mississippi State Troopers led by Sheriff Eugene Howell arrived to execute an emergency removal of the children, they were met by dozens of church members, children, ministers from nearby states, and other supporters, who “sang hymns and quoted scripture” in protest.⁶³ According to Eyre, a church member posed the question to state officials when they arrived: “If this isn’t Nazi Germany, what is?”⁶⁴ By this point, BBHC’s legal controversy had captured the attention

⁵⁸ Eyre, “Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths.”

⁵⁹ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

⁶⁰ Eyre, “Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths.”

⁶¹ “Church-Based Boys’ Home Being Investigated,” *Enterprise Journal*, May 28, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/319350471/>.

⁶² Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

⁶³ Eyre, “Police Storm Church, Take Children.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

of news media firms nationwide, including an *ABC News*, which released a television special called “Preacher of Discipline”⁶⁵ featuring footage of the removal, as well as, interviews with children from the program, state officials, and Herman Fountain.

To their surprise, when state officials arrived to the BBHC compound they found that most of the 120 to 160 children who were estimated to reside there had already fled or ran away when they saw law enforcement vehicles on approach.⁶⁶ Many of those who had remained were upset they were being forced to leave, including sixteen-year-old Erik Parker, who screamed at state officials:⁶⁷ “You have no right... I want to be here with my people. I don’t want to be here with the rest of you people who hate the truth. You better check yourself and make sure you are not burning on the way to hell.”⁶⁸ In a similar vein, another child allegedly stated: “We're running because we don't want to be sent to some nut house, we don't want the welfare to take over, we want to be here and we want to be with the word of God, which is the right way. So all these people are going to hell.”⁶⁹

Amidst allegations of child abuse at the program, rather than the rational decisions of free-thinking agents who were loyal to the reverend, or simply were averse to being taken to a mental hospital against their will, the children’s oppositional response

⁶⁵ “Bethel Baptist Church Raid.”

⁶⁶ Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children;” “Youths Flee School in Mississippi in Wake of Allegations of Abuse,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1988/06/12/130388.html?pageNumber=32>; Nossiter, “‘Abuse’ Matter of Opinion Founder of Miss. Home Says;” “Youths Missing in Raid on Shelter;” “Home Founder Says He’s Sheltering Youths,” *St. Petersburg Times/Associated Press*, June 13, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36195>.

⁶⁷ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.” This is not to be generalized that they were rude or non-compliant, as was reflected in one of Britain’s comments after the raid: “Oddly enough, these ‘terrible’ kids appeared to be pretty normal youngsters who’d simply been deprived any sort of education... We didn’t have any trouble with them.”

⁶⁸ “Youths Flee School in Mississippi in Wake of Allegations of Abuse.”

⁶⁹ Maggie Wade-Dixon, “Children’s Homes Under Investigation,” *Lamar Broadcasting Television (WLBT)*, November 9, 2002, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.wlbt.com/story/1005732/childrens-homes-under-investigation/>.

was characterized by state officials⁷⁰ and journalists⁷¹ to be a consequence of abuse and “brainwashing.” Faced with these accusations, Herman Fountain denied any criminal behavior and criticized the state intervention as overreach by government agencies who were looking for a reason to force him to license the program:

They (state and federal officials) have all their different authorities they have to answer to ... Here at Bethel we only have one ... and that's God... As long as I don't take their money, they don't have no business in here. If I've done something criminal to these kids, I oughta' be in jail and they've got laws to cover that ... If I haven't, they oughta' stay out.⁷²

Journalists reported that between 60 and 72 children were forced onto Trailways and Greyhound busses and then transported to the Mississippi State Hospital in Whitfield.⁷³ The police spent the rest of the evening recovering fugitive children from businesses, homes, streets, and treetops of Lucedale, but the Welfare Commissioner Thomas Brittain claimed there were more than 60⁷⁴ still missing.⁷⁵ While Fountain denied telling the children to flee when questioned, he “admitted warning them they were being taken to a mental hospital.”⁷⁶ He stated that the children were so “freaked” by the news that one “went into convulsions,” and that he was powerless to stop the others who just “started going out the doors,” but might have been able to control them if he had a

⁷⁰ Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home.”

⁷¹ Moore, “Daddy’s Place;” Wade-Dixon, “Children’s Homes Under Investigation.”

⁷² Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

⁷³ Moore, “Daddy’s Place;” Wade-Dixon, “Children’s Homes Under Investigation;” Riva Brown, “2 Children’s Homes Under Investigation,” *Clarion Ledger*, November 7, 2002, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/185531470/>; Smothers, “Church State Fight Over Home for Troubled Children.”

⁷⁴ Kathy Eyre, “Officials Stymied by Religious Homes Exemption from Licensing,” *Associated Press*, June 19, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/dc6226c2b2a918e28416e7f6c7ced327>; Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home.” According to Eyre, Fountain put the number at around 50 missing children. Yet, the actual number remains unknown, as Grimm reported that Brittain had stated angrily after the raid: “We don't know how many kids are still out there. I think telling those kids to run away was abuse in itself.”

⁷⁵ Eyre, “Police Storm Church, Take Children.”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

“switch” available.⁷⁷ Contrary to the reverend’s claims of innocence, Brittain contradicted his account in an interview with Eyre the night of the incident, after the commissioner had spoken to some of the children: "We were told they were allowed, if not encouraged, to leave the campus, and some of the children said they were told to run."⁷⁸

Over the weekend, state officials involved in the case worked tirelessly to reunite 15 to 20 children with their parents, and in the process learned that more than fifty of the others had been living at the BBHC compound illegally.⁷⁹ Watkins reported that some parents were upset that their children had been taken to the state hospital by state officials without their consent, such as Marcus Daniels of Georgia, who stated: "If they had called me, I would have come and gotten them and taken them home... But this, this is Nazi, it's communist, it's not even logical."⁸⁰ Even more disturbed by the situation than the parents whose children had been removed without their consent, were those whose children had supposedly run away from the compound and could not be located by state officials.⁸¹

The reverend spoke on the Saturday evening following the escape to a group of “workers,” who were adult residents of the compound who had grown up there and “been promoted to help maintain discipline and give instruction.”⁸² While standing in a circle of supporters, he criticized the state intervention and defended his use of corporal

⁷⁷ Adam Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School,” *Atlanta Journal & Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1988, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36217>.

⁷⁸ Eyre, “Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths.”

⁷⁹ Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children;” Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School;” “Children Removed from Group Home,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, January 15, 1990, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36208>.

⁸⁰ Watkins, “Emergency Custody of Bethel Home Children.”

⁸¹ “Home Founder Says He’s Sheltering Youths.”

⁸² Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School.”

punishment in the name of God, which Nossiter was able to capture: “They say we abused and neglected kids, but we feel we haven't. I spank kids, I make'em run laps. I make'em be men, I make'em be ladies. I show 'em how to be Christians.”⁸³ While Fountain had the support of some community members, guardians, and former children who were in the program,⁸⁴ others continued to approach law enforcement with allegations of abuse and the willingness to testify in court, which inadvertently resulted in legal consequences unrelated to child abuse.

On Monday, June 13th, 1988, when state officials returned to collect the children who had returned to the compound over the weekend, the reverend had locked them inside a church in a four-hour standoff with police.⁸⁵ He was arrested after punching several law enforcement officers while they attempted to remove the children from the building,⁸⁶ which was witnessed by dozens of reporters who photographed him swinging on officers.⁸⁷ He was charged with “assaulting a state policeman and inciting a riot”⁸⁸ and taken into custody alongside with seven of his employees, before being released on bail in hours.⁸⁹

⁸³ Nossiter, “‘Abuse’ Matter of Opinion Founder of Miss. Home Says.”

⁸⁴ Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School.” According to Nossiter, “the ‘workers,’ said they were devoted to the school and to Fountain.” One girl called the state officials “liars” regarding the allegations of abuse. Another explained to the reporter that her parents didn’t want her but Fountain took her in “as his own child.”

⁸⁵ Eyre, “Police Storm Church, Take Children;” Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School;” “Minister Is Indicted in Assault,” *New York Times/Associated Press*, October 26, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1988/10/26/issue.html>.

⁸⁶ “Minister Is Indicted in Assault.”

⁸⁷ “Bethel Baptist Church Raid;” “Minister Sentenced to One Year in Prison for Striking Trooper,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, April 18, 1989, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36211>. The *Baton Rouge Advocate* reported that “members of the news media present June 13 took photographs of Fountain swinging at officers.” It is unknown if the incident was video recorded, but it was covered by *ABC News*.

⁸⁸ Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home.”

⁸⁹ Smothers, “Church State Fight Over Home for Troubled Children.”

According to Nossiter, on Monday afternoon of June 13th, 1988, following the third police raid and Fountain's arrest, four girls in a nearby juvenile courtroom who had been removed from BBHC the previous Friday attested to suffering "beatings with a tree branch, forced running laps at 4:00 am, slapping, hair pulling, and confinement in a windowless room for weeks on end to listen to religious tapes."⁹⁰ As Grimm reported, that they "told the judge they were slapped, beaten, awakened at 4 am to run laps around an outdoor track, strip-searched and forced to stay *in a small windowless room, sometimes for days or weeks, listening constantly to taped sermons.* The children talked of long hours on work crews and said their mail and telephone calls, even to parents, were censored."⁹¹ One girl said she fell into a seizure during a beating.⁹² She also described, after having watched another captive child falling and hitting the head on the floor and becoming injured, witnessing a BBHC "supervisor" offer no medical assistance, but instead, "simply [tell] the girl to sit up."⁹³ Another described how she "was slapped because her supervisor did not like the skirt she was wearing," and stated to the court that while "spiritually [BBHC] can help you to a point, but they're too strict. Their kind of discipline is abuse."⁹⁴

During a break in the court proceedings, Fountain told Ronald Smothers of the *St. Petersburg Times* that he believed the state's intervention in his affairs was a "conspiracy against fundamentalist homes."⁹⁵ Further details about the nature of this so-called

⁹⁰ Nossiter, "Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School."

⁹¹ Grimm, "Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home."

⁹² Nossiter, "Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School."

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Smothers, "Church State Fight Over Home for Troubled Children."

“conspiracy” were revealed by Grimm’s account of these events, when he reported how the reverend had stated outside of court: "This is just the state trying to control our children. The state is just using this to get a licensing law passed.”⁹⁶ He continued to defend what he believed his legal right and spiritual mandate to abuse the children he held in captivity; insisting that he would continue to resist the mandates of state officials, whose modern sensibilities departed from the word of God: “These people are the liberals who want to control us ... But we don't want any of their humanistic learning. We believe in the separation of church and state, and that's why I won't cooperate with them.”⁹⁷ At some point in the proceedings, the reverend attempted to enter a sealed area in the courthouse where the children who had testified were located. He was subsequently arrested by state troopers for charges for obstruction of justice before being released on bail a few hours later.⁹⁸

Following the incidents at Monday’s hearings, Nossiter reported that “on the condition they not be returned to Bethel,” about half of the removed children had been released to their parents, who lived all over the country.⁹⁹ Also, that the future of the other half of the children, who were either homeless, their guardians could not yet be contacted, or their guardians did not want to comply with the order that they not return their children from BBHC,¹⁰⁰ was to be determined in the following week.¹⁰¹ Their fate

⁹⁶ Grimm, “Preacher Defies Orders to Answer Questions about Controversial Home.”

⁹⁷ Smothers, “Church State Fight Over Home for Troubled Children.”

⁹⁸ Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School.”

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Eyre, “Police Storm Church, Take Children.” One parent named Pat Green claimed that she and her husband refused to pick up their son from state custody because the couple did not agree with being forced sign a legal agreement that they could not send him back to Bethel, stating that: “Brother Fountain through Bethel saved our child’s life.... When a child is on drugs, you need the help of religion to get off drugs.”

¹⁰¹ Nossiter, “Girls Testify on Beating, Confinement at School.”

was never made clear through the information I reviewed, but one year later in an interview with a journalist for *The Times-Picayune*, a social worker named Kim Myers told Snyder that the children removed during the second and third police raids on the BBHC compound were “making a slow, painful adjustment to the outside world... It’s like they were frozen in time on the date they went in there, educationally¹⁰² and emotionally.”¹⁰³

About four months later, on October 26th, 1988, Fountain proclaimed his innocence to a George County jury and court officials, when he faced the criminal charges against him for swinging on police officers during the third police raid on June 13th earlier that year. While the evidence against him was overwhelming, he claimed that he had been the victim of “police brutality,” and that the law enforcement officers initiated the confrontation: “I didn’t feloniously hit them... I didn’t double up my fist and hit anyone.”¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the reverend and three of his assistants¹⁰⁵ were each indicted on three counts of felonious assault on a law-enforcement officer,¹⁰⁶ before being released on “property bonds they posted in June.”¹⁰⁷ The next month, following

¹⁰² Snyder, “Miss. Moves to Regulate Wayward Children Homes.” Snyder described how “a 14-year old boy sent there as a second-grader came away testing educationally at the second-grade level” and a “17-year-old boy spent 3 ½ years in the home came away about that far behind in school.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Rev. Herman Fountain Pleads Innocent to Assault Charges;” “Minister, Staff Plead Innocent to Charges,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, October 29, 1988, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://pou.ndpuplegacy.org/node/36215>.

¹⁰⁵ “Minister, Staff Plead Innocent to Charges.” The three men’s names were reported as Mike Baldino, Phillip Reining, and Mike Rawlings.

¹⁰⁶ “Minister Is Indicted in Assault.”

¹⁰⁷ “Rev. Herman Fountain Pleads Innocent to Assault Charges.”

additional court hearing, Oswald determined that 17 of the children who had been removed in June had been abused, but no charges were filed.¹⁰⁸

In January of 1989, BBHC's labor practices came under fire from a "Wisconsin-based church-state separation group" called Freedom of Religion Incorporated.¹⁰⁹ According to John Maines and James Ricketts of *USA Today*, the organization publicly accused the reverend of using children for "slave labor" to demolish a building on the docks in Mobile, Alabama. The spokesperson for the group publicly stated on January 9th, 1989, that "Slavery was outlawed in 1863" and that this case "smacks of the worst sort of 'chain gang' slave labor."¹¹⁰ While Fountain claimed they were unpaid volunteers over the age of 18, the organization "issued a press release saying witnesses observed "teenage boys working in dangerous conditions without safety hats and appropriate equipment."¹¹¹ They also sent letters to the governors of Alabama and Mississippi to inform them of the situation, as well as, requested that US Department of Labor investigate BBHC's labor practices.¹¹² The reverend's situation worsened on Tuesday, May 13th, 1989, when he was found guilty of one count of simple assault on a law officer for the third police raid incident and Judge Clinton Lockard sentenced him to one year in state prison and four years of probation, before releasing him on \$40,000 bail.¹¹³

A few months later, on July 1st, 1989, the Child Residential Home Notification Act was passed in Mississippi, which according to Riva Brown, a journalist for the

¹⁰⁸ John Maines and James Ricketts, "Group Alleging Fundamentalist Minister Using Child 'Slave Labor,'" *USA Today*, January 10, 1989, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36214>.

¹⁰⁹ Maines and Ricketts, "Group Alleging Fundamentalist Minister Using Child "Slave Labor."

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ "Bethel Home Leader Found Guilty of Simple Assault," *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, May 17, 1989, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36212>.

Clarion-Ledger, was “passed in response to the problems at Bethel Children's Home in 1988.”¹¹⁴ This legislature requires that all residential childcare facilities register with the state and submit a list of “juvenile residents' names and ages, and the names and addresses of their parents or legal guardians.”¹¹⁵ It also dictates that children can be removed from programs which fail to comply, and while there are no other legal penalties, this law would later catch up to Fountain nonetheless.

In the first week of the following year, on January 3rd, 1990, “the US District Court in Gulfport held a hearing” to call for a “preliminary injunction against the Rev. Herman Fountain and the home that would bar him from using children on work projects.”¹¹⁶ This motion was catalyzed by the testimony of 13-year-old, who reported to state officials that employees would whip children who refused to work for Fountain’s construction company and that school was often interrupted to do jobs, stating in court: “They told us what to do. If you didn't do the work, then they would pick a switch and you got it then.”¹¹⁷ He explained how teams of children were coerced into “tearing down buildings as well as building houses” and “digging septic tanks” as many as “12 or 13 hours a day and six days a week” without pay and in unsafe conditions.¹¹⁸ When the prosecution “subpoenaed Fountain's records in an attempt to determine whether he has purchased building supplies and sold houses built by the residents of the home,” the reverend was once again held in contempt after he “declined to bring the records to court,

¹¹⁴ Brown, “2 Children’s Homes Under Investigation.”

¹¹⁵ “Children Removed from Group Home.”

¹¹⁶ “Ex-resident of Home Describes Work by Youths,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, June 5, 1990, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36209>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

claiming that the separation of church and state in the First Amendment gives him the right to refuse.”¹¹⁹

On January 10th, 1990, state officials seized 13 children from the compound after Fountain continued to refuse to comply with the Child Residential Home Notification Act that had passed around five months before. When state troopers entered the property, Fountain purportedly said to a reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate*: “I hope there’s not any violence... If there is, it will be provoked by disrespect or grabbing hold somebody’s kids. I’ll try to conduct myself as a man if they’ conduct themselves as professionals.”¹²⁰ After the fact, he vindicated his efforts to torture children as obeying divine mandates communicated to him through the bible and declared that he would continue to refuse to submit to the state: "I do obey the higher powers ... It's the lower powers that are killing me. I am not going to submit to something that I believe is wrong."¹²¹ Nonetheless, BBHC was ordered by the court to be closed following this event, leaving the reverend, his family, and followers, to wallow alone in the compound which quickly began to deteriorate.¹²²

Despite his declarations of unwavering faith and the willingness to martyr himself for his religious beliefs, the local community and other preachers started distancing themselves from the reverend and the earthly world started to close in around him. On August 15th, 1990, the Mississippi Supreme Court told the reverend that he “must obey”

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ “Children Removed from Group Home.”

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Bethel Head Hoping for a Second Chance.”

the Child Residential Home Act, but he quickly appealed that decision.¹²³ Fountain told a reporter for *The Baton Rouge Advocate*¹²⁴ a few days later, that while more than a thousand children had passed through BBHC in its first twelve years, his business was struggling because pastors and parents were “afraid to fight the state.”¹²⁵

He stated that, in the last few years, his family of nine had “went from quite a bit of money to almost nothing” and they were “buying food one meal at a time.”¹²⁶ The city water, gas, and phone service, had ceased for lack of payment, he could barely afford the electricity, and one of the dormitories was being repossessed.¹²⁷ This not only affected his family and several other children in his care, but also the “seven or eight” other households of workers on the property, who were made up of “children who grew up at the home and returned to raise their families.”¹²⁸ Amidst these challenges, the reverend decried the “pantywaist” preachers from around the state who had stopped publicly supporting his cause, as well as, denounced officials who had intervened in his affairs and in Fountain’s words would someday: “stand before God and account for the souls they scattered to the streets.”¹²⁹

On September 18th, 1990, Fountain stood before the Mississippi supreme court to appeal the order issued in 1988 that he comply with the Child Residential Home

¹²³ “Minister to Appeal to Supreme Court to Bar State from Children’s Home,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, October 12, 1990, Accessed June 2, 2002, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36201>.

¹²⁴ “Controversial Minister Vows to Keep Children’s Home Open,” *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, August 26, 1990, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/36202>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Notification Act, but on August 15th they upheld the ruling, which he vowed to take the US supreme court. Afterwards, he reiterated his previous remarks to Spear,¹³⁰ declaring that he would continue to resist the tyranny of the state and operate the school at any cost to himself or his family, because serving God is his first priority: “We have never closed this place down, and they'll have to kill me to do it. I'm willing to die ... Sometimes I get tired. This is a rugged life for me, but I'm compelled to do this. I have no choice.”¹³¹ At this point, one of Fountain Sr.'s children, Josh Fountain, was running BBHC, which no longer had telephone, electricity, gas, sewage, and water services cut off.¹³²

On June 10th, 1992, the Mississippi supreme court found the reverend guilty of assaulting Patrol Captain Richard Smith on June 13th, 1988, when he had tried to enter a room in the courthouse where children who were testifying against him were being held.¹³³ He denied responsibility, as he had when accused of assault in the third police raid, claiming that he didn't know he didn't know he had struck an officer because “there was so much going on” and that he “didn't deserve” to be convicted.¹³⁴ Afterwards, he reiterated his fundamentalist principles to a reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate/Associated Press*, who he told he did not believe the conviction should be upheld, because the criminal act he was accused of took place in relation to criminal charges that violated the legal “separation of church and state.”¹³⁵ Further, that the charges were not based on “whether Herman Fountain is a bad guy or whether Bethel is a

¹³⁰ Spear, “Troubled Minister Says God Chose Him to Suffer.”

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Operator of Bethel Children’s Home Not Surprised Assault Conviction Upheld.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

bad place,” but instead, represented “just another attack by the devil.”¹³⁶ After being sentenced to five years in prison and four months of probation, he was ordered to turn himself into the sheriff’s office the next Wednesday, June 17th, 1992, so that he could be transferred to the state prison. In the wake of this conviction, Fountain told a reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate* that he feared for his family’s welfare and hoped that Christians would continue to support his family and cause.¹³⁷

IV. BBHC IS REBORN AS BETHEL BOYS ACADEMY

After serving a total nine months in a state prison in the early-90’s Fountain, publicly declared his plans to reopen his faith-based residential home for children in Lucedale.¹³⁸ He claimed would continue to use corporal punishment only if nothing else was effective and his employees would be under strict supervision.¹³⁹ In the first week of June, in 1994, he filed motions to the “George County Chancery and Youth Court asking it to release him from contempt of court and to dissolve an injunction keeping him from operating a home for youths.”¹⁴⁰ In an interview with a journalist from the *Baton Rouge Advocate*,¹⁴¹ the reverend said he had “no regrets” about his previous actions, but was ready to comply with the state if it meant being able to continue operating the home: "I know that I want to work with kids. I know that's my calling. It's either I come under the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Eyre, “Miss. Gets Temporary Custody of Bethel Home Youths.” Fountain told a reporter that he planned to start his program on the original compound with about 20 children, but hoped to move to another as soon as possible: "I don't want to leave the jurisdiction here. We've established something that I want to keep, but this place is run down and I'd like a fresh start on facilities and everything."

¹³⁹ “Bethel Head Hoping for a Second Chance.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

state or I don't get to work with kids and I don't plan to buck the system anymore."¹⁴² He also described how the “humbling experience” of being incarcerated had “taught him that what his children’s home lacked was compassion” and now he knew how to better address their needs.¹⁴³

In the last few months of the year, the Lucedale compound was reopened as BBA and started only accepting children who were assigned male at birth. No information is available about its first few years of operation, but it is known that in 1999 BAG was opened in Forrest County, on Victory Ranch Road near the town of Petal.¹⁴⁴ Over the next few years, the Fountains started associating with Narvin Lichfield and recruiting children through a corporate entity called Teen Help LLC,¹⁴⁵ the marketing arm of the burgeoning WWASP, which gradually gained influence over BBA in the following years. The military boot camp style of the program became increasingly pronounced when they hired a former marine drill instructor named William “DI” Knott, who aside from Herman Fountain, became the most notorious staff members in the organization’s history.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Brown, “2 Children’s Homes Under Investigation;” “Bethel Runaways in Custody of State,” *The Associated Press*, June 12, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/185530178/?terms=Bethel%20runaways%20in%20custody%20of%20state&match=1>; Lora Hines, “Parents sue Bethel Boys Academy; Cadets Beaten, Forced to Work at Military Style School, Lawyer Says,” *Clarion-Ledger*, November 3, 2004, <http://nospank.net/n49r.htm#:~:text=Parents%20of%20eight%20Former%20Bethel,%2C%20attorney%2C%20Oscar%20Stilley>.

¹⁴⁵ “Bethel Boys Academy,” Teen Help, Archived on January 31, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050131190948/http://th.bethelacademy.org/>.

¹⁴⁶ Allen Knoll, *Surviving Bethel: Overcoming the Odds* (2018), *Kindle*. Knott, who BBA survivor Allen Knoll refers to as “The Maniac” is mentioned throughout this dissertation.

In July of 2001, Joseph G. Paolillo and his father¹⁴⁷ filed a \$5 million federal lawsuit against staff members at BBA, including DI Knott, after the former was tortured during his time there in 1998. In addition to describing how Paolillo “was denied medical treatment for two weeks¹⁴⁸ for a broken bone that was protruding through his flesh,” the lawsuit describes explains how he was viciously beaten, “rolled through the dirt and interrogated until he could not remember who he was,” and that staff members encouraged other children to mock him for “his Italian heritage and sexuality.”¹⁴⁹ Ironically, given the discourses of the program, it states that he was berated for having faith in God, and that the reverend expressed "his respect for the money and power of the Mafia, Mafia gunfights, and the manner in which the Mafia dressed" in his sermons.¹⁵⁰ The lawsuit also explains how the staff members at BBA had trained a pit bull, which was “allowed to urinate and defecate in the student barracks,” was trained to bite the genitals of children who could not outrun it, and that staff members would brag when it bit their ears and they “could see sunlight through the open wound.”¹⁵¹ It also states that

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Benton, “Boot Camp Ordered to Pay Seymour Men \$900G,” *New Haven Register*, December 16, 2006, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://www.heal-online.org/seymour.pdf>. In an interview with Benton after the lawsuit was settled, Paolillo Sr. said that before he was sent to BBA, he had been placed in the foster care system after making false allegations that he had been abused at home, which resulted in him being “sexually abused by a therapist at a children’s home in Washington.” He said he had hoped that sending his son BBA would help him work through the trauma, but came to deeply regret the decision: “Being a Christian, I thought a Christian academy would be most appropriate, because of all the bizarre and dirty circumstances ... To start a child in a good Christian academy with the good book on one side and good academics on the other ... I was never prepared for anything like this. Who in God’s name wishes something like this on a child?”

¹⁴⁸ Robert McClendon, “Manager of Prichard's Restoration Youth Academy Linked to Past Controversy,” *Alabama*, January 14, 2019, Accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.al.com/live/2012/05/manager_of_prichards_restorati.html. In an interview with McClendon, William Knott claimed that he was not present when Paolillo “fell” and broke his arm, but that that he took him to the hospital when he returned the day after it happened.

¹⁴⁹ Benton, “Boot Camp Ordered to Pay Seymour Men \$900G.”

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Paolillo was told by staff members that if he reported the abuse, “they would find him and seek retribution no matter where he went in the country.”¹⁵²

As discussed later, this lawsuit would catch up to the reverend and other staff members, but before that would take place, more allegations of abuse by at BBA would arise. After a sixteen-year-old boy reported to law enforcement officials that he had been abused in October of 2002, state welfare investigators questioned six staff members and children at BBA about their experiences.¹⁵³ In an interview with a reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate* a month later, Herman Fountain’s son, John “Brother Fountain” Fountain, attacked the boy’s character and credibility, claiming he had spouted similar allegations at other facilities he has been incarcerated in and had tried to burn one down.¹⁵⁴ It is unknown how long this practice had been taking place, but he also stated that while many of the children had been sent by their guardians, others who were sentenced to attend BBA by court order for having been convicted of crimes.¹⁵⁵ After verbally disparaging the children in his care to the media, he vindicated his family’s mission in secular terms: “we want to help the boys. We work to improve their self-esteem and raise their grades.”¹⁵⁶

The next month, in November of 2002, the state attorney general’s office announced that state health officials were investigating BBA and BAG, as well as, taking steps to close them or force them to become licensed” under the Child Residential Home

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “Allegation of Abuse Probed,” *Clarion-Ledger*, October 7, 2002, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/184593464/>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ It is unknown how long this has been the case or how this arrangement was made with court officials.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Notification Act.¹⁵⁷ In response to these ambitions and allegations, the Fountains' new lawyer Robert Shepard argued that BBA was already in compliance with the act and that the charges of abuse were manufactured by dishonest and dangerous children: "These are not the cream of the crop, they are the bottom of the barrel in most cases ... Somebody has got to take them or else they get turned loose on society."¹⁵⁸ Therefore, appealing to the moral panics around the dangers that children pose to the dominant social order when they do not conform to culturally-prescribed expectations of adults.

John Fountain became the director of the BBA program in the early months of 2003, likely prompted by reasons related to his legal standing and a business decision to bury the stigma attached to his reputation. However, the reverend remained active and present on the compound as well as the girls' campus, where he would be accused of abuse multiple times before BAG multiple times, as will be discussed further in this chapter. Despite the formal change in leadership titles, claims of abuse continued to emerge publicly that prompted state intervention.

On Friday, May 23rd, of 2003, 13 children were removed from the BBA compound, which at the time was estimated to be housing between 70 and 116 boys.¹⁵⁹ According to Riva Brown, a reporter for the *Clarion-Ledger*, the Mississippi attorney general's office was still trying to close BBA and BAG because they were not

¹⁵⁷ Brown, "2 Children's Homes Under Investigation."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ "Bethel Runaways in Custody of the State;" Riva Brown, "Academy Abuse Charges Probed," *Clarion Ledger*, April 28, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/185518225/?terms=Academy%20abuse%20charges%20probed&match=1>; "Church-Based Boys' Home Being Investigated," *Enterprise Journal*, May 28, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/319350471/>. Whereas Brown reported the number at 70, the *Enterprise Journal* stated there were 116 residents before the 13 were removed.

licensed.¹⁶⁰ In addition to the children being struck by staff members, state officials contended that the children had “been forced to or permitted to beat and strike other children; denied proper medical treatment for illnesses or injuries; shocked with a cattle prod or stun gun; forced to exercise in the sun without water; locked in a footlocker for hours; and subjected to racial, ethnic and other slurs.”¹⁶¹ The fact that the owner and practitioners were not held accountable for the criminal abuse and neglect of children after decades of allegations, nor were all of the children removed from the facility, suggests that law enforcement and court officials and police took seriously Fountain’s attacks on the credibility of his residents and valued his mission. Furthermore, that many of the children who reported being abused at BBA and BAG might not have been taken seriously by law enforcement.

About two weeks after the children were removed from BBA on June 7th, 2003, eight boys escaped from the compound sometime in the middle of the night.¹⁶² John Fountain told a reporter for the *Associated Press* that they were discovered to be missing by the night watchman at around 2:00 am, before being taken into custody by state welfare officials or their parents hours later.¹⁶³ Accused of abusing former residents, John Fountain maintained his innocence and brushed off the situation, stating: “I know there are allegations, but there’s no proof ... It’s just a bump in the road we’ve got to overcome ... I want to help these kids, and I want to help the community. There are good people in

¹⁶⁰ Brown, “Academy Abuse Charges Probed.”

¹⁶¹ Riva Brown, “Bethel Boys Academy: Tough or Abusive?,” *Clarion-Ledger*, July 20, 2003, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/185733081/?terms=bethel%20boys%20academy%20tough%20or%20abusive&match=1>.

¹⁶² Brown, “Academy Abuse Charges Probed.”

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

this community, and there are good kids in this home.”¹⁶⁴ Despite these statements of good intent and the firing of several abusive staff members that year,¹⁶⁵ however, a local news station *WLOX*¹⁶⁶ reported that the attorney general Mike Moore had filed a complaint against BBA to state court system requesting the children be removed from the home. The compound permanently shut down, and the staff members barred from running other programs,¹⁶⁷ but the Moore’s ambitions never came to fruition.

When reporters for the *Clarion-Ledger* visited the compound in mid-July after the complaint had been filed and interviewed the parents of the children held captive at BBA, they found that some children had not reported being abused because staff members had threatened them with retaliation, while others denied being abused.¹⁶⁸ These reporters painted a picture of what the compound looked like, which was described as having clean

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ “Attorney General Moves To Close Bethel Boys Academy,” *TV-13, Biloxi, Mississippi (WLOX)*, July 2, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.wlox.com/story/1345843/attorney-general-moves-to-close-bethel-boys-academy/>.

¹⁶⁷ Brown, “Bethel Boys Academy,” Brown, “Academy Abuse Charges Probed.” Attorney general Mike Moore told Riva Brown that he wanted to shut down BBA and prevent the staff members from operating other facilities. According to Brown’s article, Moore stated that “The children have suffered physical and mental anguish and humiliation as a result of the defendants’ negligent failure to protect the health, safety and welfare of children.” In a separated interview with Brown, the Mississippi Department of Health Services (MDHS) Media Director Cory Wofford asserted that while the agency was involved, they “did not initiate the investigation, nor does the agency make a determination in whether the facility is allowed to remain open.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. On the one hand, a 13-year-old held captive at BBA named Robert who had a scar on his head from being jabbed in the head with a key, told “Bethel administrator and counselor,” Reverend Dick Brown, that that he had not reported being abused because the staff members threatened him with retaliation. And, in phone interview with the mother of Jacob Napier, the former to Brown that her son had been “choked, kicked and made to do pushups on fire ant hills,” and that he had a scar on his head from being punched. And, on the other, in a separate interview with Brown, Kurt Lewis, the father of a fifteen-year-old boy who had been at BBA five months and would continue living on the compound, explained that his son would remained on the compound because he had told his father that “he had never been hit or abused or touched or anything” during their phone conversations. Another parent named James Tasso told Brown on the phone that BBA had held his son find Christ and that it had such a positive effect on his life that he had recommended the program to at least 20 people. Brown also reported that multiple children also denied being abused while *Clarion-Ledger* reporters were investigating the compound.

and newly renovated buildings, a boxing ring, and was occupied by disciplined children exercising in camouflage military fatigues and combat boots.¹⁶⁹ The reporters were led around the compound by DI Knott, who intermittently stopped to ask if the children had memorized certain bible passages and if they had experienced abuse; all of whom denied they had in his presence.¹⁷⁰ During this tour, DI Knott claimed that he was in charge of training new instructors over a one and a half week class how to subdue children without hurting them. In response to reporter's questions of whether or not staff members were allowed to abuse children at BBA, he denied tolerating their mistreatment by staff members and claimed to hold the latter accountable if any evidence surfaced. However, he also argued that his practices were both divinely mandated and effective at improving the lives of residents:

If you hit one of these kids out of anger, out of frustration, out of anything like that, I'm going to bring you down to the office, I'm going to tell you what you've been charged with, I'm going to call the police ... If I'm doing what I know is right, I can't worry about what everybody else is saying and what everyone else is doing. All I know is what I'm doing ... I'm following the Lord, and I'm changing lives.¹⁷¹

Rather than force the program to close as Attorney General Moore had requested, during a hearing on August 21st, 2003, Chancery Court Judge Pat Watts of Jackson County declared effective a consent decree containing a number of stipulations¹⁷² for

¹⁶⁹ Brown, "Bethel Boys Academy."

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Brittany Brown, "Bethel Academy to Remain Open Under Watchful Eye," *George County Times*, August 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://strugglingteens.com/news/bethelopen.html>. Specifically, the decree required that Fountain Sr. "relinquish any and all interest and control with Bethel... within 120 days" though he was allowed to continue as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church. All "employees, prospective employees, volunteers, and prospective volunteers," pass a background check and undergo training and certification process. The program was mandated to comply with state educational standards and provide appropriate medical services to the captive children. The program would be subject to monitoring by a "court appointed" guardian and community advisory board. Cameras were to be installed

BBA to remain open, which would expire after three years if the Fountains complied.¹⁷³

This decree was ordered on the basis that boys were “struck, forced to beat or strike other children, denied proper medical treatment for illnesses or injuries, shocked with a cattle prod or stun gun, forced to exercise in the sun without water and punished for requesting water.”¹⁷⁴ No criminal charges were filed.

About two months later, in September of 2003, Claire Nelson¹⁷⁵ of *WLOX* interviewed residents in the local community who expressed their support for BBA.¹⁷⁶ She also reported that Lucedale Mayor Dayton Whites had voiced his endorsement of the program to the Chancery court, where he stated: "I know that the city of Lucedale and our Board of Alderman support the home. We support it because we are familiar with the kids that come there, and I think we've seen kids turn around and make good citizens."¹⁷⁷ Nelson indicated there were 60 children at the BBA compound at this point, which was supposedly in the process of undergoing the changes prescribed by the state, such as installing cameras, hiring a barber and nurse, as well as, coming under the supervisory control of a board of directors. When the article was published, on September 22nd, 2003,

on the compound and all electric fences needed to be removed. To continue operating, there was a need for an updated policy forbidding abuse and neglect, an improved reporting system, and revised communication procedures between children and their guardians. As part of the new policy forbidding the abuse and neglect, employees were banned from using electrical devices to discipline children, including the electric fence that had been installed to prevent escapes.

¹⁷³ Claire Nelson, “Lucedale Residents Back Bethel Boys Home,” *TV-13, Biloxi, Mississippi (WLOX)*, August 22, 2003, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.wlox.com/story/1413948/lucedale-residents-back-bethel-boys-home/>.

¹⁷⁴ Brown, “Bethel Boys Academy.”

¹⁷⁵ Nelson, “Lucedale Residents Back Bethel Boys Home.”

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* A business owner named Randy Moorman, who had hired a former resident, praised the program for its effectiveness, stating: “I employed one of the guys who was a graduate from the Bethel home. [He was] my best employee, great work ethic and manners . . . There will be a lot of lives as far as the kids go, that will reap the benefits.” Another Lucedale resident named Kathy Howell also said that she thought Bethel was effective, but likewise supported the new state guidelines: “Make sure the parents know what's going on. Because it's suppose to be bettering the children and not making things worse for them.”

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the reverend had 119 days comply with the court order to step down from managing the program.¹⁷⁸

While they were enacted at BBA, these changes were never implemented at BAG, which continued to receive complaints of abuse from captive children and their parents. When Jayme Bahrenberg¹⁷⁹ arrived to BAG in January of 2004, she was explained the rules and regiment of the program by John Fountain. She learned that everyone woke up at 5:00 am and it was “lights out” at 8:30 pm. She would be granted a four minute shower per day and would have no phone privileges for the first month. In addition to attending “Christian-based”¹⁸⁰ classes from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and again from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, she would also participate in daily “devotions and bible memorizations,” as well as, attend church three times a week. John Fountain took away her possessions, provided her with a used skirt, shirt, and shorts for exercise. Then, because he viewed her black hair as menacing, he forced to dye her hair blonde, causing it to fall out “in clumps.”¹⁸¹

Jayme learned that she would start out in “orientation” and then progress through three levels of the program, each of which was named after women in the bible.¹⁸² While

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Sara Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?,” *Daily Herald*, July 11, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://wwaspsurvivors.com/bethel-shut-down/>. According to Burnett, Jayme’s father (who had divorced her mother) had encouraged her mother to send their daughter to BAG because she had been arrested twice for using drugs, skipping school, and was suffering from depression. He learned about BAG from a friend, whose son had been sent to BBA. Jayme’s mother had never been to the BAG compound before she sent her daughter, nor seen pictures, but was able to gain access to a “glossy brochures.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Jayme said the curriculum was based on the bible. In “bible reading class” she was required to “fill in blank words missing from Bible verses.” In “earth science,” she was taught that “God made it rain for 40 days and 40 nights,” because as Jayme put it, “he was mad.” In “history class,” she was given a lesson about Christopher Columbus, which according to Burnett, “Jayme said she studied sometime around fourth grade.” She was also allowed to use the compounds single computer for “15 minutes per week to practice typing.”

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid. The article delineates the program’s structure based on the handbook, including the pathway towards progressing in the program, but she only describes her experience in the “orientation”

in orientation, she “wrote letters begging her mom to come home” that never reached their destination. When her mother, Laura Bahrenberg, called the compound, staff members refused to let her talk to her daughter. Suspicious of the situation, Laura drove to the compound to visit her in March, which she struggled to locate even with help from local residents, GPS coordinates, and law enforcement officials. When she finally arrived, however, staff members refused to let her enter the compound or visit with her daughter because she was in the orientation stage, so Laura left and returned to Chicago.¹⁸³

Soon after, on March 28th, 2004, Jayme witnessed a “leader,” who had permission to slap new arrivals in the face if they swore, brutally beat a new arrival outside the dorm while staff members stood by and watched.¹⁸⁴ The following day, when staff members overheard the girls conspiring to go on strike because of the conditions, the reverend arrived at the compound and “allegedly threw a table and chairs” at a group of 15 girls who were involved.¹⁸⁵ About a month later, in April of 2004, Laura received a call from an unnamed woman who was associated with the program, who “told her of specific abuses and urged her to go get her daughter.”¹⁸⁶ She left immediately and removed her daughter from the program on April 30th, who proceeded to tell her mother about her traumatic experience at BAG. When interviewed by Burnett over a month later, Jayme condemned the program as harmful and ineffective, and stated that she hoped it would

stage. Probably, because she was there for less than 100 days. The first level was called “Hannah;” the second was called “Ruth;” the third was called “Esther.”

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ “DHS Releases Information Involving Claims of Abuse at Girls Home,” *Sun Herald/Associated Press*, June 11, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/bethel-girls-academy.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

close so that other children would not have to endure its rigors: “I would hate to see more girls go back there ... When you’re there, they make you feel so low about everything, that you’re nothing. And you believe it. That’s not a place ... to get better.”¹⁸⁷

Before that interview took place, on May 16th, 2004, someone reported that there was abuse taking place at BAG to the MDHS, who John Fountain believed was a former staff member, and was, perhaps, the same person who had tipped off Laura.¹⁸⁸ Three days later, 38 children were transported by bus and police cruiser to a barrack at a National Guard post called Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. There, they were questioned extensively by state officials, who had found signs of physical and psychological trauma.¹⁸⁹ A girl from Florida named Brittany told her father the allegations of abuse were true, though outside of being forced to “roll in raw sewage,” their nature was undetermined at the time of the removal, and even contested by other girls who described having a positive experience at BAG.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, in an article published in the *Hattiesburg American*, Antoinette Konz¹⁹¹ reported that several parents of the girls were deeply upset by MDHS removing their children without their permission and then refusing to disclose the nature of the accusations.¹⁹²

A few weeks later, however, another article in the *Sun Herald* described reports released by the MDHS, which were based on interviews with the girls who had been

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Antoinette Konz, “Parents Upset Over Abuse Allegations – Some Girls Deny Abuse at Academy,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 21, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://nospank.net/n-m07r.htm> (accessed 1-20-2021); Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid; Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

removed from the program a month previously.¹⁹³ They reiterated the claims that students were made to exercise (sometimes in a “sewage pond”) for up to five hours or until they could not breathe or vomited, and then walk around the rest of the day in filth.¹⁹⁴

Mirroring Jayme’s story, it described how staff members encouraged “leaders” to abuse new arrivals,¹⁹⁵ including one instance where a girl who was experiencing so much pain from being kicked in the head that “she couldn’t put her head on the pillow at night.”¹⁹⁶

The reports also accused Fountain Sr. of beating them with broom handles, sitting on their heads, calling them “derogatory names when he got angry,”¹⁹⁷ including “freak show,” “stupid,” “devil worshipper,” and “whore.”¹⁹⁸ When a girl refused to eat her food, an unidentified staff member allegedly told her that “if she hated herself so much, she should “just hang herself from the ceiling and that he was willing to give her his belt.”¹⁹⁹ As had been the case at the Roloff Homes,²⁰⁰ a different girl described being “forced to sit alone in a room from 5 am to 8:30 pm for eight straight days” listening to recordings of Herman Fountain preaching.²⁰¹ Another claimed that she was denied medical care for over a week after she seriously injured her ankle. Further, one who had scoliosis, “said she and her dad had asked school officials on two occasions to take her to a doctor and they did not.”²⁰²

¹⁹³ “DHS Releases Information Involving Claims of Abuse at Girls Home.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid; Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

¹⁹⁵ “DHS Releases Information Involving Claims of Abuse at Girls Home.”

¹⁹⁶ Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

¹⁹⁷ “DHS Releases Information Involving Claims of Abuse at Girls Home.”

¹⁹⁸ Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Coloff, “Remember the Christian Alamo.”

²⁰¹ Burnett, “Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?”

²⁰² Ibid.

At least one parent named Carolyn Stewart, who claimed that the accusations were exaggerated by state officials to fabricate evidence that would negatively reflect BAG, explained to Burnett in an interview: "My daughter has told me that while she was being interviewed by DHS, the social worker would twist her words around ... These people came into her home and twisted her words around. Now they are trying to use this twisted information to build a case."²⁰³ Fountain Sr. continued to deny these claims alongside his son, who told Lora Hines of the *Clarion-Ledger*, "that's all they are, allegations ... They haven't proved anything ... We don't use corporal punishment. They (State officials) wanted us not to use exercise. I didn't agree with that."²⁰⁴ It is unknown whether the girls were returned to the school, but no criminal charges were filed.²⁰⁵ A month later, the reverend told Burnett that he had enrolled two new students, hoped to fill the school to capacity once more, and was willing to work with the state attorney's general's office to resolve their concerns.²⁰⁶

In 2004, near the end of October, the MDHS interviewed around 100 children at BBA, after receiving complaints of physical abuse by the George County Sheriff's office and a parent of a boy in the program. No charges were filed and none of the children were removed from the compound,²⁰⁷ but a month later, the parents of eight boys who had been abused at BBA filed a federal lawsuit against the program's owners, operators,

²⁰³ "DHS Releases Information Involving Claims of Abuse at Girls Home."

²⁰⁴ Lora Hines, "State Seeking Accord with Girls School," *Clarion-Ledger*, July 9, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/184602646/>.

²⁰⁵ Burnett, "Rehabilitation or Child Abuse?"

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ "Bethel Cleared of Abuse Charges," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 31, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/183626378/>.

and employees, on November 2nd, 2004.²⁰⁸ According to their attorney, Oscar Stilley, the parents were seeking \$75,000 each on the basis that they had been misled about the program, and that their sons had been exploited, abused, and denied access to effective education. In an interview with Hines, Stilley said that the boys “basically were turned into slaves. They were even told to beat up other kids.”²⁰⁹

One parent, Cheryl Struble,²¹⁰ told Hines that she had found information about BBA on the internet, while seeking a “Christian-based educational alternative” for son, Morgan, after the 17-year-old’s grades started slipping and he was caught consuming cannabis. She had then removed him from the program three days later, because she discovered that that he had a black eye and bruises all over his body during a visit. When the state refused to intervene, Cheryl took action to see justice for her child and those still in the program, as Hines described following an interview: “she and the other parents decided to file the lawsuit... after reports to the state Attorney General's Office, the state Department of Human Services and the state Health Department did not result in criminal charges.”²¹¹

The lawsuit describes dozens of horrifying acts of torture²¹² committed by drill instructors and captive children who were coerced “into beating, terrorizing, mocking, or

²⁰⁸ Lora Hines, “Parents Sue Bethel Boys Academy: Cadets Beaten, Forced to Work at Military Style School, Lawyer Says,” *Clarion-Ledger*, November 3, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://nospank.net/n-n49r.htm#:~:text=Parents%20of%20eight%20former%20Bethel,%2C%20attorney%2C%20Oscar%20Stilley>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Cheryl Struble et al. Plaintiff(s) v. Herman Fountain, Et Al. Defendant(s), November 2, 2004, Accessed June 2, 2022, <http://nospank.net/complaint2tc.pdf>. The articles discussing this case spell the name “Streuble,” but the lawsuit reads “Struble.”

²¹¹ Hines, “Parents Sue Bethel Boys Academy: Cadets Beaten, Forced to Work at Military Style School, Lawyer Says.”

²¹² Cheryl Struble et al. Plaintiff(s) v. Herman Fountain, Et Al. Defendant(s). There are too many examples of abuse in the suit to name them all, but the former residents alleged to have been choked, poked

restraining other cadets, while maintaining “plausible deniability” of [staff members’] culpability in these violent abuses when confronted by civil authorities.”²¹³ In addition to the Fountains, it names other employees, including Thomas Fortenberry and DI Knott. On the one hand, Struble was explicit that the parents sought to be reimbursed, stating: “We don't pay for torture. We are parents who can cough up \$25,000. But we expect more than torture.”²¹⁴ And, on the other, she it made clear that the plaintiffs were more concerned with having BBA shut down for the sake of their sons and “all of those kids we don’t already know about.”²¹⁵ In response to the allegations, John Fountain, who then was the “academy director,” reportedly laughed and denounced the parents, stating “These are low-income families who want something for nothing.”²¹⁶ Nonetheless, the state Health Department opened a third investigation into BBA and BAG, which did not result in any criminal charges.

in their eyes, and beaten with fists and various objects. They were starved, and disallowed drinking water in hot weather. They had their faces and heads intentionally cut during haircuts and shavings by staff members when they arrived and every few days afterwards. Within minutes of entering the compound, one child was forced to undress and be photographed before being humiliated by staff members, beaten, and spat on. They were forced grab an electric fence and subjected to tasers, stun guns, and cattle prods. They were held underwater in the swamp and then resuscitated, as well as, subjected to simulated drowning using water bottles (commonly referred to as waterboarding). They were locked in footlockers for hours, and one had sand poured into his mouth while he lay on his back. They were denied access to education and communications with their families. They were denied access to showers and medical care even after serious injuries, which staff members took actions to conceal from state officials during inspections. One former resident was denied access to anti-depressant medications that their parents mailed to the compound, because the staff members didn’t believe in such treatments. They were denied bathroom breaks and forced to urinate and defecate in their clothes, which were sparsely available and often not cleaned for days at a time. They were forced to exercise until sever exhaustion or illness, sometimes for 14 to 16 hours per day, and permitted only 4 to 6 hours of sleep per night. They were forced to work sometimes up to 18 hours per day without pay, both on and off the property. They were pressured to remain on the compound after turning 18 and pushed into arranged marriages with staff members. They were transported there against their will by “escorts.” They were called “faggots” and other abusive names by staff members and other children. They were forced to box other children and staff members in full contact fights. They were threatened that there would be consequences for reporting the abuse.

²¹³ Cheryl Struble et al. Plaintiff(s) v. Herman Fountain, Et Al. Defendant(s).

²¹⁴ Hines, “Parents Sue Bethel Boys Academy.”

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

V. THE AFTERLIFE OF BBA UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE FOUNTAINS

A few months after Struble's lawsuit was filed, an article published in the *Sun Herald* on February 10th, 2005, reported that John Fountain had changed BBA's name to "Eagle Point Christian Academy, (EPCA) a reform school for troubled youth."²¹⁷

According to the author, the name change was prompted after the public got wind of the lawsuit against at this "boot-camp program," which was based on the testimonies of children who claimed to have "been beaten, denied proper medical treatment and shocked with a cattle prod."²¹⁸ It also stated that while there were "no pending legal issues with the state," that "parents continued to complain of visible signs of injuries to their children," that the testimonies of former residents would soon be heard in federal court, and that were "at least two similar lawsuits to come."²¹⁹

While John Fountain denied these allegations, which he described as "hogwash" and "so far fetched, it's almost funny," he claimed that the name change would be accompanied by major changes to the program, which was housing around 100 children at the time. Specifically, according to the author of the article, he intended "steer away from the rigid "boot-camp" approach" and instead "offer opportunities for vocational and technical training, and enter in sports competitions with other schools."²²⁰ Rather than being directed at stopping abuse in the program, Fountain stated that these changes were

²¹⁷ "Bethel Boys Academy Changes Name," *Sun Herald/Associated Press*, February 10, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/Bethel_Boys_Academy_changes_name.htm.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

intended to heal the program’s reputation in the eyes of the community and state officials, which was tarnished by false accusations and his father’s past “mistakes:”

I’m just trying to put a new face on our school ... We're just trying to do something positive. Along the way we might fail, we might not do everything exactly by the book, but we'll sure try ... Life's a learning experience, I've learned a lot from the mistakes my father has made and still learning everyday and wanting to make a change.²²¹

While his son claimed to have been trying to avoid his father’s “mistakes” at the boys’ compound, according to an article released by a local news station *WDAM*, Herman Fountain was accused of making another “mistake” at BAG just two days after the previous article was published.²²² The more recent article stated that on February 12th, 2005, Angela Roberts, the mother of a girl who was residing at BAG, learned from staff members that her daughter was taken to the emergency room because she had “injured herself after she slammed her fingers in a door and punched a wall.”²²³ Angela would later learn that her daughter, Angenika McNeil, had suffered a broken wrist.

By Fountain’s recollection of the story,²²⁴ the injury had occurred while he was trying to restrain her, because she bit his arm and kicked him in the chest and legs, but Angenika stated that she had become injured because Fountain had assaulted her: "He just jacked me up and he flung me into the door and that's how I got this cut on my eye and when I got into his office he put his knee into my stomach and started bending my

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² “New Abuse Claim Against Bethel,” *TV-7, Laurel, Mississippi (WDAM)*, February 15, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.wdam.com/story/2952277/new-abuse-claim-against-bethel/>.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid. The article also reported what Angela recounted her daughter had told her had happened, stating in an interview: "My daughter says Mr. Fountain grabbed her and took his knees and put it in my daughter's pelvis area and grabbed her wrist and pushed it all the way back until it popped ... That is ridiculous."

hand back and then I jerked it away from him."²²⁵ Because her mother believed her daughter's story over the reverend's, she expressed a desire for Fountain to be held accountable by law enforcement officials, stating: "Mr. Fountain needs to pay for his actions ... He needs to be put in jail for his actions. It makes no sense for a man to do those types of things to these children. I don't care what type of children they are."²²⁶

A few days after Angenika was injured, *WDAM* reported that 11 girls ran away from BAG on Wednesday February 16th, 2005, who claimed to have abused the day before the escape.²²⁷ In an article by Jenny Hunsperger,²²⁸ a journalist for the *Hattiesburg American*, she reported that the girls had escaped at around 9:00 am following a riot, prompted by their collective intolerance for the abuse and neglect they endured at the hands of staff members. When interviewed about the incident by Hunsperger,²²⁹ however, the reverend, did not mention the grievances that catalyzed it: "Some of the girls had an uprising and sort of took over the place ... They just ran away."²³⁰ On the same day they escaped, the other 50 girls who were in the program were taken into custody of MDHS officials. While no charges were filed, the reverend announced that BAG would be temporarily closed.²³¹ Referring to John Fountain, a drill instructor at the

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ "Bethel Shuts Down After Girls Flee," *TV-7, Laurel, Mississippi (WDAM)*, February 17, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.wdam.com/story/2965137/bethel-shuts-down-after-girls-flee/>.

²²⁸ Jenny Hunsperger, "Complaints of Abuse Prompt Bethel Probe," *Hattiesburg American /Clarion-Ledger*, February 17, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipati on/stories/complaints_of_abuse_prompt_bethel_probe.htm.

²²⁹ Ibid. The words of Angela Roberts were also featured in this article, who drove to Lucedale from Miami to pick up Angenika, after she "got a call from inside the school that they were beating the girls." This article suggests that Angenika was injured on February 10, 2005, which suggests that she did not receive medical treatment for her injury for two days after it happened.

²³⁰ Hunsperger, "Complaints of Abuse Prompt Bethel Probe."

²³¹ Ibid.

academy named Nikki Rich told the same reporter that she was quitting after the incident, stating that she “had never seen him put his hands on the girls, but something is definitely going on here.”²³² Although Rich did not admit to witnessing any physical abuse, she signaled that the girls “were tired of staff members calling them ‘losers’ and ‘freak shows,” which John Fountain brushed off to the same reporter as the staff members’ “way of joking.”²³³

Another article by Hunsperger, which was published on February 18th, 2005, featured additional quotes from an interview with John Fountain, who reiterated earlier remarks about the character of the children wielding accusations against himself, his father, and other employees.²³⁴ Specifically, he claimed that he had never abused any children in his care and that the allegations were rooted in the nefarious desires of children looking for a way out of the program:

A lot of people don't know what type of kids we're dealing with here. We're talking about drug addicts, alcoholics, runaways and some violent girls. They'll say anything and do anything to get out ... I mean, I've got four girls of my own and I treat the girls at the home as if they were my own ... I wouldn't abuse my kids and I wouldn't abuse anyone else's kids.²³⁵

Despite these assertions of innocence, however, the events in the previous week catalyzed an investigation by MDHS, the state attorney general’s office, and local law enforcement officials.²³⁶ In addition to this investigation, Angela Wilson also announced that she

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Jenny Hunsperger, “Bethel Girls Academy Temporarily Closed,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/Bethel_GirlsAcademy_temporarily_closed.htm; “Girls’ School in Petal has been Closed Temporarily,” Greenwood Commonwealth, February 18, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/244777073/?terms=Bethel%20Girls%20Academy%20temporarily%20closed&match=1>.

²³⁵ Hunsperger, “Bethel Girls Academy Temporarily Closed.”

²³⁶ Ibid.

would be seeking criminal charges against the reverend for assaulting a minor, which she expressed in a second interview with Hunsperger, where she said: “The contract was broken when he broke my daughter's wrist ... I want him prosecuted for what he did to my child. He hides behind the word 'restrain,' but that word means 'abuse' to him.”²³⁷ It is unknown what the outcome of her case was, but the publicity of these events certainly did not paint the Fountains and their businesses in a positive light. BAG closed in the following months and never reopened.

In an article published in the *Clarion-Ledger* on March 6th, 2005, Julie Goodman described the effects of the consent decree ordered against BBA in August of 2003 and shared further details about the federal lawsuit filed by Struble and roughly two dozen other plaintiffs.²³⁸ Specifically,²³⁹ as reported by Goodman,²⁴⁰ 38 cameras had been installed throughout the BBA compound and John Fountain had fired and pressed charges against several abusive employees.²⁴¹ He had also implemented “a reward and sanction system,” which he claimed would “no longer use exercise to punish all students for the bad behavior of one child.”²⁴² John Fountain said he was “trying to arrange with the Boys and Girls Club so students can serve as companions for younger children, or be paired with mentors” and that he intended “to build a gym and a larger schoolhouse, while gravitating away from a military approach and toward a boarding school environment.”²⁴³

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Julie Goodman, “Reforms don’t Stem Allegations,” *Clarion-Ledger*, March 8, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.fornits.com/phpbb/index.php?topic=8602.0>.

²³⁹ Ibid. For example, John Fountain changed the “drill instructor” title for employees to “team leaders” or “dorm leaders,” and changed the uniforms from “military fatigues” to “khaki pants.”

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid. In an interview with Goodman, John Fountain claimed to have “fired three employees on the spot for what appeared to be abusive behavior” and filed charges against one of them.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

Further, he had allowed a former prosecutor named Bill East to inspect the home four times a year, who told Goodman that Fountain Jr. had “zero tolerance for abuse” and that the accusations of abuse by former residents were fabricated by manipulative children.²⁴⁴

Despite these reforms, the testimonies of former residents continued to pile up. Including those by Ruben Villa, whose mother, Alice Stroud, was involved in the federal lawsuit against the program. This occurred after Ruben had escaped with a group of friends in November of 2004 and returned home “underfed” and “overworked.”²⁴⁵ When released following a year in captivity, Villa described the conditions to Goodman in an interview, who wrote that “students [slept] on mattresses with urine stains and broken springs, and [were] forced endure long hours of physical labor helping to build cabins on Herman Fountain’s property, with little focus on schoolwork.”²⁴⁶ Villa also said that he had his head slammed into a wall, which John Fountain told Goodman was impossible because it would have been caught on camera. However, several parents told Goodman they believed the cameras had been “tampered with” and that the Fountains tried to manipulate them into thinking their children were “bad.”²⁴⁷ After interviewing John Fountain, Goodman reported that the former had attacked the credibility of the children and portrayed their guardians as grifters. For example, he claimed that Villa had stolen a car from the compound, and pointed out that others had been in the juvenile detention

²⁴⁴ Ibid. While being interviewed by Goodman, East said: “A lot of those kids have problems, and they’ll make allegations just so they can get out of there.”

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. Specifically, John Fountain reportedly stated: “I’ve had parents come in there, drop their kids off, find out that there has been allegations against Bethel Academy, come pick up their kid and say, ‘Oh my kid’s been abused’ ... And then want their money.”

system previously. He also stated that while he didn't "want to invalidate the concerns of families ... by and large, he has been the victims of parents trying to make a buck."²⁴⁸

On Friday, April 9th, 2005, roughly three months after the riot at BAG, the children held captive at EPCA orchestrated an open rebellion that resulted in significant damage to the program. This was prompted after a rumor spread among residents of the compound that "state investigators might arrive at the school over the weekend," so they took the opportunity to draw attention to the abuses taking place there.²⁴⁹ It is unknown whether the residents of EPCA were inspired by the riot at BAG, but it is certainly possible given that they followed the same strategy in such a similar time frame. According to an article by Mollie Reeves that was published in the *Mississippi Press*, during the incident "windows were broken, bunks overturned and a barrack was trashed." In the wake of this riot, "seven²⁵⁰ students were transported to a hospital for treatment, and six others were taken into custody for disorderly conduct."²⁵¹

Two boys escaped from the compound, and after being recaptured, were picked up by picked up by their mother, Christy Depasquale.²⁵² She said that her children ran away because they were scared and when she found them they had "plenty of bruises and cuts and scrapes" from the program's "hazing-like discipline tactics;" including "scrapes

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Robert Malone, "Six in Custody after Academy Riot," *Hattiesburg American*, May 11, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/Six_in_custody_after_academy_riot.htm.

²⁵⁰ Julie Goodman, "Juvenile Facility Faces Uncertain Future," *Clarion-Ledger*, May 26, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/juvenile_facility_faces_uncertain_future.htm. Goodman put the number of children who were hospitalized at nine.

²⁵¹ Mollie Reeves, "Mom Pulls Twins from Eagle Point after Riot," *Mississippi Press*, April 16, 2005, Accessed June 2, 2022, http://www.unmarriedamerica.org/emancipation/stories/Mom_pulls_twins_from_Eagle_Point_after_riot.htm.

²⁵² Ibid.

on their knees from being made to kneel on a hardwood floor for long periods of time when they got in trouble,” as Reeves put it.²⁵³ Once returned to their mother’s custody after a month at EPCA, the Depasquale twins recounted the dangerous and abusive conditions they had survived, such as being sprayed with mace and denied protection from predatory children by staff members, who either left the room or “stood by and watched” them fight each other.²⁵⁴ They said the “kitchen was infested with rats and roaches” and that they “either couldn’t finish eating or were given 30 seconds to finish their meal” if they broke any rules during mealtime.²⁵⁵

While there were already extensive reforms in place due to the court ordered consent decree; on April 14th, 2005, the George County Youth Court designated an “improvement plan” for EGCA following the riot, which included hiring the services of a private security firm called Mississippi Security Police Inc. for the “security of the kids and for the community,” as Sheriff Garry Welford put it.²⁵⁶ Within month after the riot, the head of the security firm, a man named Tony Best had fired a “drill instructor for ‘aggressive behavior,’ which he described as pushing cadets.”²⁵⁷ In the same period, the George County Chief Deputy Sheriff J.D. Mitchell claimed to have received no reports of escapes or abuse.²⁵⁸ However, these changes did little to repair the public image of the program, which had lost at least 22 students and had not admitted any new ones.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Goodman, “Juvenile Facility Faces Uncertain Future.”

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

In addition to losing business from the incident itself, which John Fountain said was “just a bump in the road,” at least one parent named Ed Trawinski removed his child from the program.²⁶⁰ This was because he was underfed and spent most of his time there repairing the damage from the riot rather than pursuing meaningful education, as he stated in an interview with Goodman: “I’m not paying three grand a month for them to use my son as a carpenter ... Yes, you should keep them busy, but it ain’t his fault that this place got all torn up.”²⁶¹ As he had done in the past, John Fountain denied these allegations in an interview with Goodman, where he admitted that completing chores was mandatory for the children he held captive, but also insisted that more difficult work was voluntary, and that his mother provided plenty of high quality food for the boys.²⁶²

It is unknown whether the Fountains were able to increase the number of students to rebuild the compound in the following months, but it was seriously damaged by hurricane Katrina in the last week of August that year, which put further strain on the struggling business. At some point in 2006, the name of the program was changed to PVA, presumably to “put a new face on the program” as John Fountain had put it the last time this occurred.²⁶³ However, it was unable to escape its past offenses in the eyes of the law, as a serious lawsuit filed in 2001 came to a head in June of 2005, which required the Fountains and staff members²⁶⁴ to pay \$900,000 for the abuse of Joseph G. Paolillo.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Benton, “Boot Camp Ordered to Pay Seymour Men \$900G.”

²⁶⁴ McClendon, “Manager of Prichard’s Restoration Youth Academy Linked to Past Controversy.” D.I. Knott was found liable for damages in this case, but claimed to be innocent in a later interview.

²⁶⁵ “State Man Wins in Torture Case: Victim Beaten in Military School Later Tried to Kill His Parents,” *Hartford Courant/Associated Press*, December 15, 2006, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/243796282/?terms=State%20Man%20Wins%20Torture%20Case&match=1>; Benton, “Boot Camp Ordered to Pay Seymour Men \$900G.”

Although he won, the victory was bittersweet, as the lawsuit was settled a few months after Paolillo was sentenced to be incarcerated in a maximum-security psychiatric hospital for 20 years. He had been convicted for attempting to kill himself and his parents by setting their house on fire for “revenge” for sending him to BBA in 1999.²⁶⁶

VI. THE COMPOUND IS PURCHASED BY WWASP

After nearly three decades of abusing children and forced removals, as well as the recent closure of BAG, the Lucedale-based program collapsed under the weight of its abusive reputation. Sometime in the later months of 2006, amidst the mounting pressures of the state and lawsuits from former residents, EPCA was sold to Narvin Lichfield and was renamed GCA. While John Fountain remained the academy director, the program became an official WWASP institution and the structure shifted away from its religious roots toward the scientific field of behavior modification. It once again became coed, the children were no longer made to work on construction projects, and they started attending Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) seminars in the church instead of the reverend’s sermons. Though there were no documented instances of abuse by staff members, many of the old problems remained.

In an interview with American correspondent Royce Armstrong of the Hattiesburg American, a former resident of GCA named Ashley Smith described daily life in the program, as well as, the story of her escape and return home.²⁶⁷ She began the

²⁶⁶ “State Man Wins in Torture Case;” Benton, “Boot camp ordered to pay Seymour men \$900G;” Brown, “Academy Abuse Charges Probed.”

²⁶⁷ Royce Armstrong, “Parents Want Academy Closed.” Hattiesburg American, October 7, 2007, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/279325415/?terms=royce%20armstrong%20mississippi&match=1>.

five months she spent there in April of 2007, where she quickly learned that not only would she not receive the psychological treatment from trained professionals that her parents paid for, but did not have the ability to communicate with them. She told Armstrong that did she not receive letters sent by her parents, that her emails to them were edited, and her phone calls were monitored: “A staff member was right there when you made a phone call ... If you said anything negative about the school, they just cut the phone off. Staff members read all of the e-mails before they were sent. If there was anything negative in an email, they didn’t send it.”²⁶⁸

Ashley was clear that most children did not stick to the daily regiment,²⁶⁹ but each day began at 6:00 am, before the children attended physical education 30 minutes, and then ate breakfast. During school, which lasted between 8:00 am and 12:00 pm, the staff members would help the children cheat on the tests to demonstrate academic progress. In the afternoon, the children would attend LGAT seminars and watch educational videos in the church building. They ate dinner at 5:30 pm and went to sleep at 9:00 pm. She recalled being in a constant state of “boredom” and the meals consisted of low quality food, often consisting of Kool-Aid and rice and beans.²⁷⁰

Another parent named Janine Jannicelli made similar these allegations after traveling to GCA on Labor Day of 2007 to visit her son. She was so disturbed by what she found that she removed her son from the compound the same day. Janine told

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. Ashley told Armstrong that “most people didn’t pay any attention to the schedule ... Most kids got up when they wanted to. Only a few went to P.E. Classes normally started late and the computers didn’t work a lot of the time. There was a month when the computers were down. Staff people helped the students cheat and gave them the answers.”

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Armstrong that not only was the food of low quality, but the dorms, showers, and weight rooms were filthy and infested with cockroaches. After witnessing a larger and older boy being dragged by staff members from one building to her son's dorm building after being involved in a fight, she grew concerned for his safety. When she asked the school administrator, Harold Dabel, who had never returned her phone calls or emails,²⁷¹ if he could guarantee her son's safety; he told her that he was unable to make that promise, so she pulled her son out of the program.²⁷²

Five days later, on September 8th, 2007, eight children were arrested and taken to the Forrest County Juvenile Detention Center in Hattiesburg after a serious fight broke out. The following week, Ashley Smith was no longer willing to bear the conditions at GCA, so she conspired with another girl and two boys to organize an escape. About a week after the brawl and removal, on September 16th, the group of children gathered food and water bottles and then simply walked out when the staff members at the front gate were distracted by another fight. She spent the next week wandering the local community, sleeping outside and drinking water from garden hoses. Her parents were already concerned about the fact that they hadn't been able to communicate with their daughter, but when they learned of the escape, they immediately drove to the area to help search for her and observe what was happening at the compound.²⁷³ In an interview with Armstrong, Ashley's mother, Alicia Dobiac said of her decision to remove her daughter:

We knew that she was not getting the letters we sent ... We didn't know about the rest of this. They had told us that they would monitor messages home but that they would not restrict them in any way ... We had already

²⁷¹ Ibid. Corroborated by Ashley's testimony, Janicelli told Armstrong that she believed the emails she received from her daughter were edited by staff members.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

made the decision to pull her out of here ... We were concerned because communication was so poor. She was not getting our letters or e-mails. We were not hearing from her. We couldn't get GCA staff people to call us back after leaving messages.²⁷⁴

After spending seven days outside in the rain, without food and exposed to biting insects, she called her parents to pick her up, while the other three fugitives remained at large. Yet, when another parent named Barbara Ramirez visited the compound the following week, the staff members told her that all but one of the children had been recaptured.²⁷⁵

Barbara had traveled from Chicago to attend a seminar and visit her daughter Tianna, who had been sent to the program in July of 2007 after her mother learned about GCA from a Teen Help counselor.²⁷⁶ When she arrived, Barbara was shocked to hear from staff members that her daughter, who was failing her junior year of high school, had completed the requirements to graduate in less than two months. She grew more concerned upon surveying the buildings on the compound, which she described to Armstrong as being dirty, infested with cockroaches, and in a state of disrepair. In the wake of the EPCA riot and hurricane Katrina, she recalled seeing “broken glass in the school yard,” “broken windows patched with plastic garbage bags,” and weeds growing in the swimming pool.”²⁷⁷ When Barbara removed Tianna from the program, the latter told her mother about the “poor food, abusive discipline, student fights and escapes,” and that the staff members had never provided access to a psychologist or counseling sessions as she had been promised.²⁷⁸ A month later, Ramirez told Armstrong that she feared for

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. Another parent named Collen Fleming corroborated Ramirez's claims that she had not these services had not been provided, though she paid roughly \$50,000 annually for 12 months of tuition,

the children who remained: “My daughter is out of there and safe ... I am worried about the other girls who are still there. I want that place closed for good.”²⁷⁹

Despite the allegations of other parents, at least one named Collen Edwards supported the program, which she explained to Armstrong: “I don’t want to sound like a cheerleader - the school definitely has kinks to work out ... but I feel strongly there is no intentional harm or danger happening and that the staff are trying to run a legitimate program that helps kids. It’s a very tough population of kids.”²⁸⁰ Soon after a series of escapes, on September 21st, 2007, the 33 boys in GCA were transferred to a different facility in South Carolina,²⁸¹ while 13 girls remained on the compound, before 4 more left in the following weeks. GCA closed permanently soon after.

After decades of accusations of child abuse and neglect by former residents, Fountain has continued to operate faith-based residential facilities. While he no longer works with the youth population, he has since 2008 operated a recovery facility called Bethel Church Ministries City of Refuge for Men in Lucedale. The facility houses up to 120 men²⁸² who either enrolled by choice or were “assigned by drug courts, probation and parole officers, as well as other legal entities located throughout the United

medical and dental treatment, clothing and uniforms, haircuts, postage, phone calls, supervision and transportation costs, and psychiatric treatment and counseling. Like Janicelli, Fleming had decided to pull her daughter from the program when her calls to the school were not returned, when she realized that phone conversations were monitored and emails were edited, when she did not receive reports of her son’s condition as she had been promised, and when she learned that her son had not been receiving psychiatric treatment.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ It is uncertain based on the available information, but I believe this facility was called Seneca Ranch which Narvin Lichfield also owned.

²⁸² Jo Anne Embleton, “Offering Rescue, Renewal at City of Refuge,” *The Cherokeean Herald*, June 25, 2021, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.thecherokeean.com/articles/48368/view>.

States.”²⁸³ The program aims to “develop their character through anger management, improving work-ethic activities, community service, individual and group counseling, and extreme character building activities.”²⁸⁴ While residents are required to attend for at least one year, their stay can be “extended depending on the progress and needs of the resident.”²⁸⁵ It is unknown whether the program receives state funding as an alternative sentence, but it operates on donations and the sale of plaques produced by residents,²⁸⁶ who have been directly involved in constructing the facility.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter tells the story of Reverend Herman Fountain’s ministry from the perspectives of the owners, practitioners, journalists, politicians, court and law enforcement officials, welfare agents, community members, survivors, and their guardians. On the one hand, they describe a conspiracy to prevent owners and practitioners from fulfilling their sacred and civic duty to save the lives and souls of immoral children and protect society from their dangerous behaviors. On the other, their stories describe decades of survivors’ resistance to commodified institutional child abuse at BBA and BAG, manifesting most cogently in open rebellions and escapes as reported by journalists. This contestation has been a common thread across residential programs

²⁸³ “Life at “The City,”” City of Refuge for Men, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.corformen.org/>.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ “Online Store.” City of Refuge for Men. Accessed March 30, 2022. <https://www.corformen.org/onlinestore>.

for troubled teens for decades, which continues to this day in contemporary iterations when enough children are no longer willing to accept their political condition.

The story of Herman Fountain's life and legacy began with Herman Fountain's journey from being a criminal witchcraft practitioner addicted to heroin, to becoming an IFB minister and running abusive residential facilities for children. After overcoming substance abuse issues and running a failed church, Fountain briefly worked at the Rebekah Home in 1977 in the months leading up to the Christian Alamo. Within two years of opening in a jurisdiction where he would not be subject to the type of state licensing requirements that plagued his mentor, BBHC came under fire from state authorities after a runaway reported being beaten at the facility. Subsequently, a staff member, who was charged but never convicted of any crimes, which allowed Fountain and his employees to continue abusing children without recourse.

Over the next eight years, more than 150 other residents followed suit with no action taken by law enforcement, until SDL and others testified in court to the torture, neglect, and exploitation, to which they had been subjected; including how fundamentalist racism and homophobia were directly integrated into the programs structure. When Fountain refused to disclose a list of residents' names to the judge, the latter ordered a series of police raids on the facility that resulted in the removal of the children, which was garnered national media attention. The state intervention was protested by supporters and some of the residents who wanted to remain on the grounds, most of whom had followed Fountain's orders to run away. Since they had been isolated and deprived of education outside of fundamentalist teachings, many of these children

had trouble adjusting to the outside world, which suggests that this program produced dysfunction rather than prepare them for adulthood.

Fountain was charged for assaulting a police officer during one of the raids but was not convicted of any charges related to the mistreatment of children in his care. Soon after, he was cited by the court for forcing children to work for him in dangerous conditions and without pay and held in contempt of court for refusing to turn over documents. Following in his mentor's footsteps, 13 children were removed from the program after Fountain refused to comply with the Child Residential Home Notification Act, which had been passed the year before in response to the issues in his program. By this point, the public image of BBHC had been damaged to the degree that he had trouble finding residents, leading to financial struggle and the deterioration of the facility. Two years after the Mississippi Supreme Court rejected his argument that religious schools should be exempt from the Child Residential Home Notification Act in 1990, Fountain was sentenced to prison for over five years and only served nine months.

Soon after the reverend was released from prison, he was permitted to reopen his facility as BBA, which took on the character of a military bootcamp and became a program exclusively for children assigned mail at birth. BAG was established nearby in 1999, around the time both programs became affiliated with WWASP. Soon after Herman Fountain's son was made director of BBA in 2003, ongoing allegations of abuse and refusal to submit to licensing requirements led to another police raid. A year later, attorney general Mike Moore failed to shut down BBA following more allegations from BBA runaways and failed, but managed to convince court to apply a consent decree that required Fountain to comply or step down within three years. Although these regulations

were aimed at ending institutional child abuse at BBA, they failed and were never implemented at BAG, where the state once again intervened after girls accused the Fountains of mistreating them.

Near the end of 2004 a number of former residents and their guardians filed lawsuits against BBA for the abuse they had endured, prompting the name change to EPCA which transitioned away from the bootcamp model. After more allegations of abuse and escapes during a full-scale riot at BAG the next year, the facility was permanently closed. Then, just three months later, a riot at EPCA seriously damaged the compound. Coupled with more allegations of abuse, this event catalyzed a series of court-mandated reforms to the program, triggering another name change to PVA. Faced with mounting pressure from the state and a sullied reputation, however, the Fountain's sold the facility to Narvin Lichfield of WWASP. At which point, it was renamed GCA and radically transformed from a fundamentalist religious school to behavior modification facility offering LGAT seminars. In 2007, a conjuncture of fights, escapes, growing criticism of WWASP, and the destruction of the campus by Hurricane Katrina, led to GCA's permanent closure. At which point, the remaining children were transferred to another facility in North Carolina owned by Lichfield; presumably, a WWASP program called Seneca Ranch.

Although the explicit examples are sparse in this data, it is clear from this political history that non-white, queer, and disabled, children were treated particularly badly while living in Fountain's facilities. It is unknown if the reverend was racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic, before he became an IFB minister, but afterwards the man was on a crusade to impose white supremacy on the world through institutionalized child

abuse; a political stance that should be expected given protégé of a man who shared these same qualities, as was discussed in detail in the previous chapter. His evidentiary support for this statement is unclear, but as previously noted, *Houston Chronicle* reporter Evan Moore claimed that as an IFB minister, that the reverend viewed Catholics as “idolatrous heretics” who worshipped the Pope as Antichrist, viewed Jewish people as “despicable,” and believed that “Blacks bore the mark of Cain.”²⁸⁷ Although he employed at least one Black man (William “DI” Knott), survivors described how anti-Black language was directly integrated into the program and at least one resident complained of being subjected to racial and ethnic slurs.²⁸⁸ Further, the reverend explicitly voiced his disdain for people who identify as LGBTQ+ on the basis that departing from heteropatriarchal identity is immoral and sinful. Like the Rebekah Home, BAG aimed to transform girls he called “whores” into obedient mothers and wives to men, who abuse themselves and police others, to uphold the patriarchal structure of the fundamentalist movement.

Rather than pursuing God’s favor by systematically torturing thousands of children, perhaps, Fountain might have devoted his life to a different cause if he wanted to improve their lives and protect society. This analysis is, of course, presuming that his true motivations aligned with those presented publicly; rather than more earthly incentives like profit, prestige, furthering the mission of the US criminal justice system, and/or having the opportunity to be torture children without legal repercussions. Although Fountain’s residential programs for children were closed; since they had served as training grounds for staff members, these disciplinary techniques were carried forth

²⁸⁷ Moore, “Daddy’s Place.”

²⁸⁸ Brown, “Bethel Boys Academy.”

into other contexts. For example, DI Knott went on to work at a program called Youth Restoration Academy in Prichard, Alabama. This Christian boot camp program was shut down in March of 2015 after being raided by police in response to allegations of criminal abuse; including solitary confinement, extreme exercise, beatings, shackles, at least one mock suicide, where a depressed child was asked to shoot himself in the head with a gun he didn't know was unloaded.²⁸⁹

The investigation began after a former policeman named Captain Charles Kennedy was asked by parents of residents to investigate the facility. Rather than have him interview children in his office, Knott made Kennedy ask questions to naked boys in the shower and then forced the children to write letters suggesting that he was a pedophile to discredit his account.²⁹⁰ Despite this effort to avoid accountability, however, Knott and two others were convicted on three counts of aggravated child abuse in 2017 and sentenced to 60 years in prison in 2017.²⁹¹ After the conviction, Robert McClendon interviewed Paolillo Sr. about his lawsuit against Knott for abusing his son at BBA, who was deeply traumatized by the attacks: "He had nightmares, he would push the blanket away like he was trying to get away from a wild animal."²⁹² When McClendon asked Knott about the lawsuit filed against him, the latter denied having abused Joseph and claimed that he "didn't know that a judge had found him liable for damages in the Paolillo case, but said that he'd "look into it."²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Art Levine, "The Harrowing Story of Life Inside Alabama's Most Sadistic Christian Bootcamp," *Newsweek*, February 2, 2017, Accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/2017/03/10/saving-youth-foundation-alabama-christian-school-beatings-nudity-562257.html>.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ McClendon, "Manager of Prichard's Restoration Youth Academy Linked to Past Controversy."

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

Whereas the previous chapters have focused on the broader history of these programs and the experiences of survivors in various iterations of Fountain's ministry, the next two follow the stories of Leroy and the Tipps brothers before, during, and after, being held captive at BBA in the early-2000's. They describe in detail how their perceptions guided their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, within and beyond the facility; upsetting the construct of the "troubled teen" by collapsing the idea that they are free agents of immoral character in need of correction. Further, how their social identities shaped their experiences living in a white supremacist society and being held captive at BBA. Alongside other residents of the program and other "tough love" programs, they struggled to not only survive, but maintain their dignity in the face of torture, exploitation, and neglect. Without this intervention, the narrative of practitioners, who actively seek to discredit the claims of their victims, will dominate public discourse and proliferate the TTI.

CHAPTER 5:

LEROY'S STORY OF SURVIVING BETHEL BOYS ACADEMY

I. INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters have provided a broad political history and discourses of evangelical fundamentalism, faith-based rehabilitation, behavior modification, Synanonian attack therapy, and the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI), as well as the ministries of Reverends Lester Roloff and Herman Fountain. Now that a rich representation of the context and explanation of the disciplinary technologies has been established, this chapter proceeds by focusing on the story of a Bethel Boys Academy (BBA) survivor named Leroy. It explores how he makes sense of his experiences before, during, and after, being held captive on the compound between June of 2001 and July of 2002. In detail, it delineates Leroy's understanding of why he was ripped from his home in South Florida and incarcerated in Lucedale, what he learned at BBA and what it was like to be there, how he survived, and the way he was affected by the experience after being released.

Through a narrative inquiry approach, this story is constructed using data collected from two interviews and three follow up discussions over a period of five years, that were organized as chronologically as possible and revised based on Leroy's feedback. By focusing on giving Leroy's account, rather shaping it with my own frame of analysis, this method aims to upset the epistemological framing of the TTI and US criminal justice system, which is that Leroy was court ordered to attend BBA because of his history of domestic violence and breaking into his neighbor's house. Upsetting this narrative, however, is Leroy's version of the events, which speaks to his experience as a

Black heterocisgender boy, who has fought to survive and navigate white supremacist political structures¹ within and beyond the walls of state-sanctioned prison regimes in the United States (US).

Leroy's story begins with his early life growing up in South Florida, as a second-generation Haitian immigrant living an abusive household in the early-90's. This was a time when the carceral capacities of policing and prison regimes were growing rapidly² during the War on Crime and War on Drugs, amidst rapid demographic change referred to today as the "white flight."³ Living at a conjuncture of a moral panic around non-white urban teens⁴ and an influx of refugees and immigrants into his community made him, as a

¹ Connie Wun, "Angered: Black and Non-Black Girls of Color at the Intersections of Violence and School Discipline in the United States," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21, no.4 (2018): 424, DOI:10.1080/13613324.2016.1248829; Citing Joy James and Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *The Black Feminist Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). As Wun puts it, "Black and non-Black feminists of color scholarship situate interpersonal violence within the context of white supremacist/anti-Black, settler colonial, anti-poor, and xenophobic heteropatriarchy." This analytic framework is important to understanding how Leroy's behaviors, violent and otherwise, were shaped by his political condition as the son of a Haitian immigrant who was found himself embedded in hostile environments within and beyond BBA.

² "State Incarceration Trends in Florida," *Vera Institute of Justice* (2019), 1,2, Accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-florida.pdf>; "Research Report: Unequal Treatment: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Miami-Dade Criminal Justice," *ACLU Florida: Greater Miami*, (July 2018), 13, Accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.aclufi.org/sites/default/files/6440miamidadedisparities20180715spreads.pdf>. Between 1983 and 2018 the number of people incarcerated in Florida increased 275%. These policies have disproportionately affected Black people and women, who despite making up only 17% of the population in 2018, made up 39% of those incarcerated in jails and 47% in prison. In this context, people who identify as non-Hispanic Blacks were more than twice as likely than whites to be arrested and Hispanic Blacks were more than four times more likely. Just as alarming, the number of women in Florida jails and prisons has increased more than 700% between 1980 and 2018.

³ William Booth, "A White Migration North from Miami," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 1998, Accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/11/09/a-white-migration-north-from-miami/9d983850-dfb8-4c46-bdce-aa61b0579b63/>. Booth reported that, in response to the increasingly diverse population due to rapid immigration from the Caribbean, Central American, and South America, to South Florida, "some 95,000 white non-Hispanics left Miami-Dade County, decreasing that group's presence by 16 percent, to around 492,000, or about one-fifth of the county population" in the 1990's.

⁴ Michael Welch, Eric A. Price, and Nana Yankey, "Moral Panic Over Youth Influence: Wilding and the Manufacture of Menace in the Media," *Youth & Society* 34, no.1 (September 2002): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X02034001001>. According to Welch, Price, and Yankey, the media was in the 1990's proliferating sensationalistic representations of non-white urban youth as a "dangerous class" of criminals.

Black boy and son of a Haitian immigrant, particularly vulnerable to the criminal justice system⁵ and white vigilante terrorism. Within this context, following numerous criminal convictions related to defending himself from abusive family members at home,⁶ Leroy was court ordered to attend BBA after being framed for a crime he did not commit by white neighbors seeking to avoid prosecution.

The story continues with Leroy's first-hand account of his experiences at BBA, including how he strategically rebelled against and complied with his captors to survive. At this point in Herman Fountain's ministry, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the reverend was still evading compliance with requirements of the Child Residential Home Notification Act, Bethel Academy for Girls (BAG) had only recently been established, and there were widespread allegations of brutality, neglect, and frequent escapes, reported by local media about both homes. Whereas the program had historically been structured as a religious school, and BAG continued to do so, BBA had taken on the structure of a youth military bootcamp; a behavior modification concept credited to Synanon, which Fountain harnessed in an effort to forcibly conform the boys to his fundamentalist understanding of pious men. While isolated from his community, Leroy

Reinforcing racial stereotypes, these images served as "a lightning rod for public fear, anger, and anxiety over impending social disorder, all of which contribute to additional law and order campaigns."

⁵ Wun, "Angered;" Citing Ann Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Victor Rios, *Punished Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011). Reflecting Leroy's account of his childhood as a Black boy living in South Florida, Wun contends that Black and Latino boys are "subject to perpetual surveillance based upon racialized suspicions of their potential or inherent criminality," which speaks to "the underlying problems related to the disproportionate rates by which boys of color are disciplined."

⁶ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016. The first instance is discussed in detail further in this chapter. Leroy describes other charges as being related to fighting with his brother.

was in this state-sanctioned prison regime subjected to, witness to, and purveyor of, various forms of institutional child abuse.

Although Leroy's violent behavior at BBA was in part due to being coerced by corporal punishment techniques, to understand his motivations it is necessary take seriously Sadiya Hartman's insights on subject formation in her analysis of chattel slavery, which is that the "most invasive forms of slavery's violence lie not in... exhibitions of "extreme" suffering or in what we see but in what we don't see."⁷ This consideration is especially important with regard to understanding the construction of his violent behavior towards other children in this context, because telling his own story positions Leroy as a political agent suffering the betrayals of his family, religion, community, and government; as a Black boy being held captive in an isolated white supremacist compound guarded by people with belief systems particularly conducive to his torment and death, expressly if he does not behave as if he has been "saved" by the program. However, he was affected by the violent and pedagogical effects of the program and the symptoms brought on by the trauma he incurred at BBA did not become manageable until the time he reached adulthood. Leroy's narrative concludes after describing life after being released from the program and his struggle to overcome the trauma he incurred there as a Black boy living in South Florida who was labeled as "troubled."

⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror; Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York, NY: University Oxford Press, 1997, 4. Not only because focusing on corporeal violence positions the victim in a fungible body, but also since it obscures mental anguish that people experience. Therefore, "rather than glance at the most striking spectacle of revulsion or through tear-filled eyes, we do better to cast our glance at the more mundane displays of power at the border."

II. LEROY'S PATH TO BBA

At the time these interviews began in 2016, Leroy was a young man in his late-twenties of who had grown up in South Florida during the early-90's.⁸ His family moved to Florida within a month of him being born in a New York City hospital, soon after his mother had arrived from Haiti with his father.⁹ She struggled to adjust to the drastic change of climate and wanted to move, but felt she was too far along in her pregnancy to leave the city before giving birth. After Leroy was born, however, she managed to “escape New York before the winter” by moving to Ft. Lauderdale.¹⁰ Many of the Haitian people in his area did not speak English or interact with other people outside of that community or their relatives in Haiti.¹¹

His mother was raising three sons while working as a nurse at the local hospital. He didn't grow up in extreme poverty, but was far from wealthy in South Florida. His father, who was unemployed throughout Leroy's childhood, was addicted to alcohol and cigarettes.¹² The man sometimes physically abused the family until his parents divorced, before he moved away when Leroy was six years old. After their father left, Leroy's brother Mike came to see himself as the “man of the house” and became violent towards Leroy and his mother, which only exacerbated the family's issues: “Me and my brother

⁸ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, April 2016. The reasons for his family immigrating to the US are not totally clear to Leroy, but he believes that his mother moved to be near her family members who had fled Haiti years ago in response to a regime change, because they feared their relationship with the previous government could make them targets of the new one.

¹⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

didn't quite get along and then after my dad left... my brother decided he was gonna be the head of the house... to this day we do not speak."¹³

In addition to living in an unstable environment at home, Leroy faced a racist and xenophobic community that was hostile to his identity as a person of Haitian descent. The house Leroy lived was located in a neighborhood that had been abandoned by the middle-class whites during the great "white flight," which occurred in response an influx of refugees, primarily from Haiti and Cuba, arrived to the coast of Florida in the early-90's.¹⁴ He recalled that there was a Ku Klux Klan demonstration in front of his elementary school, which was covered by the local news, where members congregated to show their opposition to refugees entering the public school system.¹⁵ In this environment, Leroy had to defend himself from racially motivated attacks by whites in the neighborhood throughout his childhood, including false accusations, physical attacks, as well as verbal assaults and threats. The hostility in his community would later put him on the path to BBA, as he and his family were terrorized by the local police and other white people his neighborhood.

The first instance occurred when he was three years old, after his white neighbors falsely reported to police that Leroy had attempted to molest their daughter, who was several years older than him.¹⁶ Fortunately, the police left soon after when they realized the allegations were impossible, but this event deeply affected his political consciousness.

¹³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁴ Booth, "A White Migration North from Miami."

¹⁵ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016. While I was unable to locate any reports of this event, Florida has a long history of state-sanctioned and vigilante terrorism.

¹⁶ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

Sometime in the near future, a brick was thrown through the living room of his home with a note tied to it that read: “*GET OUT NIGGER.*”¹⁷

By the time Leroy was six years old, his mother’s boyfriend had moved into the home. As was the case with Leroy’s father, his mother’s partner was unemployed and often was violent towards the family, which Leroy claimed was a typical practice in his brand of Haitian culture that was passed on in his family.¹⁸ Although this man was generally absent from any type of mentorship in Leroy’s life, he would insist on being a father figure when it came to discipline. This suggests that he was sadistic and narcissistic, perhaps, because he felt powerless in his own life. Leroy resented the fact that this relative stranger contributed nothing and stayed home watching television, while his mother worked long hours as a nurse to support the family. Already weary of placing authority in father figures because his father had abandoned the family, Leroy continually clashed with this person and their volatile relationship would lead to the former’s first arrest two years later.¹⁹

It was a school day and Leroy’s mother hadn’t done laundry, so she told him to wear his older brother’s shirt. Mike was not present at the time, because he had already been dropped off by his stepdad, who picked up the brothers from their schools later that day. Mike became furious when he saw his brother wearing his shirt without asking his permission, and a physical altercation erupted in the car. When the three of them arrived at the house, Leroy’s mother left his stepdad to reconcile the situation because she was on

¹⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁸ Ibid. The details of this are unclear, but Leroy did recall in the same discussion how his uncle had accidentally blinded his niece while he was beating her with a stick.

¹⁹ Ibid.

her way to work. After each of the brothers told their version of the story, the man took Mike's side in the matter, and consequently began spanking Leroy and whipping him with his belt.²⁰

Aside from not wanting to be beaten, Leroy's frustration was compounded by the fact it was his mother who had purchased the shirt and instructed him to wear it that day. So, when his brother tried to participate in the assault, something flipped Leroy's mind, and he started thinking: "I'm not just gonna allow you to fuck me up."²¹ He ran into the kitchen and grabbed a kitchen knife to defend himself or at least scare off his attackers. Upon their retreat, he dropped it and ran into the backyard to climb a tree. After a few minutes, several police officers arrived with their guns drawn and ordered him to come down. He complied and they handcuffed him, before guiding him into the back of a police cruiser and taking him to a local processing center.²²

The police took him to a local juvenile detention center, where he was incarcerated for 21 days.²³ In this facility, Leroy claimed that the guards would exercise control over the population by incentivizing children to punish one another or carry out the violence themselves, stating: "a guard cracked a kid in the mouth with a walkie talkie... another roundhouse kicked a kid in the mouth with boots on."²⁴ When he was later incarcerated in South Florida juvenile between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, it was a radically different experience than it was during this period in the late-nineties,

²⁰ Ibid. Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

²¹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

²² Ibid.

²³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016. As a minor accused of a crime in Florida at this time, the standard legal proceedings involved the alleged offender being incarcerated for 21 days, before being released for a time, and then returning to court to be sentenced.

²⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

which was extremely violent and hardly anyone would get charged for fighting.²⁵ Many children who were incarcerated were around his age, but most of them were older and up to 21 years old. As a frightened child of small stature, he was unable to defend himself from larger and tougher aggressors. They bullied him and stole his food, so he was often forced to fight, even though he didn't want to:

Now I'm eight now... I'm only eight at this time... like I'm literally eight years old like... Um.. so I go to the detention center... its all older people... All my charges through elementary school was domestic... fighting my brother and step-dad... but I had to fight kids in there for robbery... murder... all try to steal my food... all 12 to 13 years old... These kids are like pickin' on me and shit... tryin' to take my food... tryin' to fight me and shit... so I just started fightin' and back then I still cried when I fought.²⁶

Leroy completed third grade soon after his release, but was incarcerated at the same detention center three more times in the fourth grade for fighting with his brother and stepdad at home.²⁷ Leroy claims that Mike often started fights and then ended up calling the police on his brother for fighting back with the knowledge that he would be more “out-of-control and belligerent” when they arrived.²⁸ At this point Leroy was already traumatized from his experiences at juvenile facilities and unable to feel secure at home. He started smoking cannabis with friends that year and became more involved in the activities of local street gangs.²⁹

In the fifth and sixth grade, his stepdad was no longer around to monitor him, so while his mother was at work, he would often stay home from school to drop LSD,

²⁵ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

²⁶ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

²⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

²⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, April 2016.

²⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

smoke cannabis, and play video games.³⁰ Although he received good marks on assignments, his chronic absence forced him to be held back another year in the sixth grade, but he quickly demonstrated his aptitudes and was moved back into the seventh grade halfway through the year.³¹ This suggests that while Leroy was intelligent and capable of being successful in school, his educational progress was hindered by his troubled home life, a lack of mentorship, and being targeted by the US criminal justice system during this period.

In June of 2001, just two days before he entered the 7th grade, Leroy was involved in the primary incident that resulted in him being sent to BBA. Some of the children in his community were all friends, or at least knew each other, and went to the same school. So, when a few of them wanted to retrieve a Nintendo 64 controller, which had been borrowed and never returned, they decided to play a prank on the culprit, and Leroy was willing to participate in what seemed like harmless fun.³² While Leroy served as a lookout from his yard one house down, two other boys climbed into their friend's house through his open bedroom window. They collected the controller, deleted saved gaming files, shuffled around cartridges, and unplugged cords.³³

One of the children accidentally cracked the window climbing out, and upon its discovery by the child's parents who owned the home, they reported the incident as a burglary to the authorities. Later that night, the police and the other children involved

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

³² Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

³³ Ibid; Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. Leroy told this story during the first interview, but it wasn't until 5 years later that he explained he had only been involved to the degree that he never left the yard of his family home.

presented themselves at his front door; all of whom were white. According to Leroy, for being phenotypically Black and of Haitian descent amidst heightened racial tensions, he was singled out as a being fully responsible for the incident. Leroy recalled that the other children “said they saw nigger Leroy running away from the scene.”³⁴ To avoid accountability for prank, they mischaracterized it as a burglary and he was arrested on the spot.³⁵

While in court weeks later, in light of Leroy’s previous domestic violence arrests, the judge at his trial argued that his behavioral issues were starting to leak out of the home and flow into the streets.³⁶ In a context of heightened racism and xenophobia, the criminalization of his acts of self-defense were linked to false allegations of burglary to protect the perpetrators. During the super predator era, he was framed as a growing threat to public safety that had to be addressed before his criminal behavior grew more extreme. At first the judge threatened him with a level 6 (moderate risk) or 8 (high risk) program in public juvenile detention programs in the local area, or the alternative option of being incarcerated in a private program.³⁷ Although he was not religious, his mother, who Leroy described as being “brainwashed by Christian missionaries in Haiti,” decided to send him to the latter.³⁸ After the judge denied her request to send her son to a program called Teen Challenge, on the basis that it was too lenient, he accepted a sentence of 13 months at BBA.³⁹

³⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

³⁸ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

³⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

III. LEROY ARRIVES AND LEARNS THE ROPES AT BBA

Leroy's mother drove him to Lucedale in June of 2001, just two weeks before his 13th birthday. Given his experiences in other programs, Leroy wasn't scared about being sent to BBA, which he expected to be easy-going compared to the brutality he had experienced in South Florida juvenile facilities.⁴⁰ They pulled up to a "family-style" house for orientation where they were greeted by Mrs. Fountain with a sandwich platter.⁴¹ This building was originally the Fountain's home, but was repurposed to the "administration building or "admin. building."⁴² Leroy and his mother were given an introduction and tour of the facility, which at the time consisted of a barracks building, a dormitory, a barn, a church, a running track, obstacle course, and a chow hall.⁴³

When Leroy and his mother returned to the administration building, she was led away temporarily, leaving him alone with the owner's son and employee, Joshua Fountain. Leroy recalled that, at the time, the senior drill instructor had blonde hair in a "high and tight" style and was wearing "full military fatigues" and glasses.⁴⁴ As soon as Leroy's mother couldn't see or hear what was happening, Fountain leaned down close to his face and whispered: "You're gonna wish you died and went to hell."⁴⁵ Although he did not necessarily understand the weight of these words in this moment, it was a statement would haunt Leroy from that day forth. Upon realizing the danger he was in,

⁴⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid; Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, April 2016.

⁴⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Leroy begged his mother not to leave him at their mercy, but she refused and drove back down the driveway:

I'm like mom... "don't leave me with these crackers..." [laughing] I'm in the middle of Mississippi... I'm like... 'mom...' There's a church on the compound and shit... I'm like 'mom... what they told you... I'm not sure what you're used to in Haiti, but ummm... do not leave me here...' [laughing] ...don't know what the fuck... but the deal was done... she left my ass.⁴⁶

The staff members immediately threw Leroy into the first stage of the program called orientation. He was told by his orientation guides that any refusal to follow instructions results in immediate physical punishment. They stripped him of his personal possessions and made him change into the military style uniform, which consisted of "blue dickies and blue shirts."⁴⁷ Next, they violently shaved his head with the same clippers they used on the dogs on the property: "They cut my braids off and shit... I had long braids and shit... they were cutting my braids with dog clippers n shit... my head was bleedin."⁴⁸ After going through processing he was immediately introduced to extreme physical training (PT) or "wearing you out," which describes a practice whereby staff members would force the captive children to exercise under threat of violence:

If they got a dude off the street... they met you ten minutes ago tells you to do five hundred push ups, a thousand jumping jacks, a thousand sit ups in back to back in rapid succession they gonna say you fuckin crazy... the way they get you to do it is they beat the fuck out of you and you end up doing that many push-ups... that many jumping jacks... that many sit ups... like... your first day.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

After PT, the staff began a process of breaking down his sense of identity. They separated him from his possessions, set rules limiting his freedom of expression, and dismantled anything that gave him sense of individuality, in order to render him vulnerable to the influence of the program. Leroy recounted that there were “no personal pronouns... like you... own nothing... it’s cadet... you don’t say ‘I’ you say ‘cadet.’”⁵⁰ Under threat of violence, he could only speak when ordered to or with permission:

You have to ask for permission to speak... you be like ‘Cadet so-and-so requests permission to speak’ and stand at attention... then say you need to use the bathroom... you’d say ‘Cadet so-and-so requesting to make a head call, sir!’ They they’d say ‘yes..’ ‘no...’ or whatever.⁵¹

The staff members made it clear from the start they would exercise violence on Leroy within and beyond the program’s protocols, and that he was never allowed to defend himself from staff members or attack them for any reason. At the same time, he was instructed to use violence against other captive children in the facility except under two circumstances.⁵² The first reason he could attack another captive child, which was both permitted and mandated as part of the program, was when staff members ordered him to. Aside from the fact that he would be punished for disobedience if he failed to comply, he was also incentivized with luxuries, more desirable responsibilities, and a pathway towards promotion.⁵³

The second reason Leroy was both allowed and mandated by staff members to commit acts of violence against the other captive children, was in retaliation for someone

⁵⁰ Ibid. Given that all of the residents of BBA were assigned male at birth, it is implied that the ideological category of the “cadet” is inherently male. I never uncovered any evidence of a military style ranking system at BAG.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid; Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

⁵³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

calling him a “faggot” for any reason, as this was seen as the ultimate insult in this context because of its fundamentalist roots.⁵⁴ Those who are labeled in this way (as if it were a rank) by staff members or other children could be attacked by other children without repercussions. If a captive child called another by this homophobic slur, who had never been accused of not being straight, the former could be reprimanded by staff members and had the right to attack their aggressor. If a captive child had, however, been found to have strayed from the heterocisgender character of the ideal subjectivity the program was discursively aimed at producing, they were denied protection from the attacks other children to increase the pressure to conform.⁵⁵

Although the program was designed to destroy queer thoughts and behaviors, Leroy believes it had the opposite effect and actually produced them, because the boys were held captive in a hypermasculine environment as teenagers without any contact with females. He heard about a number of sexual relationships while he was there, many of which resulted in punishments, but never heard of any sexual assaults because: “If you raped someone in Bethel they might kill you... [laughs] If you don’t die you wish you were dead!”⁵⁶

In addition to the program’s rules, he also had to memorize various pledges and oaths (the content of which is unknown), as well as military verbiage.⁵⁷ For example, the bathroom of the barracks was referred to as “the head,” the door was called “the hatch,”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁵⁵ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁵⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

a mop was a “schwabe,” and the middle of the floor was termed the “deck.”⁵⁹ They trained him to store and maintain his uniform and equipment in the barracks. He was also given instructions on the appropriate way carry out mandated hygienic procedures, such as showering and brushing his teeth.⁶⁰ All communications were limited and censored by staff; including letters going in and out, which were inspected. Phone calls were rare, coercively scripted, and always directly monitored.⁶¹ If the captive children attempted to report being abused to the outside world, they were severely punished by staff members.⁶² Although he isn’t certain, Leroy believes there was at least one camera on the outside of a building while he was there.⁶³

Almost all of the drill instructors were either in the Marine Corps reserves or military veterans of some kind,⁶⁴ suggesting this was their primary qualification to work with vulnerable children. Herman Fountain, who held the highest rank and was the only person permitted to wear non-military clothes.⁶⁵ Whereas the other staff members were seen as employees, the reverend was treated as a kind of a “god figure” on the compound,⁶⁶ who Leroy claimed would actively assault children and order others to do so for any reason or none without recourse: “he didn’t have to explain himself to us.”⁶⁷ Most of the staff were either part of the Fountain family and “ex-cadets” who had “grown up in the camp” and become instructors afterwards.⁶⁸ Some staff members were described as

⁵⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁶⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁶⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁶⁸ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

“crazy” and “sadistic,” such as the head drill instructor and superintendent William “DI” Knott,⁶⁹ others were merely opportunistic, or left the facility quickly as they realized it was abusive.⁷⁰

Knott, who Leroy recalls as being the most abusive staff member, left two or three times intermittently after allegations of abuse would arise against him. According to Leroy, John Fountain, a son of the reverend, left at one point because he didn’t get along with Knott and protested his brutal methods.⁷¹ John Fountain had never served in the military, and according to Leroy, was the most supportive staff member. He also spoke highly of a man named Thomas Fortenberry who arrived several months into Leroy’s incarceration.⁷² Fortenberry was the boxing coach, who had trained Roy Jones Jr. early in his career, and brought the children to smoker fights in the area.⁷³ Leroy claims that upon realizing the degree of abuse happening, Fortenberry stayed briefly to look out for some of the captive children. And, when he finally left, took several children with him who had been abandoned at BBA by their parents.⁷⁴

The exact population of the camp is unknown because there are no public records available, but Leroy remembers there being around 50 children held captive when he was there.⁷⁵ Most were from rural or suburban communities; whose wealthy parents had sent

⁶⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. Leroy said that Knott claimed to be a former member of a Gangster Disciple set in Detroit, before serving in the Marine Corps in some capacity. He believes that Knott suffered some type of cruelty at the hands of white people and saw the job as an opportunity to “torture rich white kids.”

⁷⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

⁷¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁷² Ibid; Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020. Whereas as Leroy spoke fondly of Fortenberry, Brandon characterized him as cruel and abusive.

⁷³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁷⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

them there in order to avoid the responsibility of having to raise their child, perhaps to conceal sexual violence within the home.⁷⁶ The majority were taken to the facility by their parents or transport teams, and were allowed to leave within a year, but some children were abandoned by their parents and left to grow up in the program; most of whom, would join the Marine Corps afterwards.⁷⁷ Around “one-fifth” of the captive children were in the foster care system, who had been sent to BBA either by their guardians or the state, because they were suspected of having a sexual relationship with someone in their host family.⁷⁸ “[A] lot of them were foster kids that ended up fucking the foster parents’ kids and shit like that... they didn’t want to give’em back up, so they just send they ass away.”⁷⁹

In addition to staff members, Fountain’s family, and the captive children, there were also dogs on the property. One was a pitbull named “Polo” who lived in the barracks⁸⁰ and belonged to Knott,⁸¹ who Leroy suspected was involved in local underground dog fighting rings.⁸² Another, was Herman Fountain’s personal dog, a German Shepard named “Saber.” There had been other dogs while Leroy had been there, but these two had been known to attack children on command, whether on their own or by command, and were “nut trained” specifically to bite people’s genitals.⁸³ Leroy recalled that while incarcerated there, Saber was hit by a car to the delight of many

⁷⁶ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁷⁷ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁷⁸ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁷⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁸⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁸¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid; Benton, “Boot Camp Ordered to Pay Seymour Men \$900G.” This was the same BBA practitioner who lost a lawsuit against Paolillo Sr. and his son, who reported that he experienced this same kind of assault, among other brutal techniques, while held captive at BBA in 1998.

children, who like himself, resented the fact that “that dog had more rights than us!”⁸⁴ Thus, suggesting that the dogs were treated better than the children held captive at BBA; a bootcamp style behavior modification program that was owned and operated by a family of religious extremists and former US military in the swamps of Mississippi, where children convicted of crimes could be court ordered to attend.

Enforced through a violent political system, daily life at Bethel was rigorous and traumatic for the children held captive there. Staff members permitted them only four-to-six hours of sleep each night and they could not sleep during the day without repercussions.⁸⁵ The captive children were forced rise at 4:30 am to brush their teeth, then start five-mile “motivation runs” in formation, usually stopping in town for PT.⁸⁶ Leroy stated that most days he completed more one thousand pushups throughout the day.⁸⁷ Sometimes, in order to be stronger than the other children, he exercised by his own volition. More often, however, he was forced to by staff members, who would take turns systematically kicking him in the ribs as he exercised: “‘Down... up!’ (Impersonating staff member) Boom! Kick you in the ribs... ‘Down... up!’ Boom! Kick you in the ribs.”⁸⁸

After returning from morning exercises, the children went to chow hall, where they were not allowed to speak to one another and had a limited time to eat all of their food or face punishment. Leroy remarked that the one thing he could not complain about “for the most part” was the quality of the food, which was often consumed by the

⁸⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Fountain family and other staff members.⁸⁹ He claims that it was of decent quality, consisting of hearty Southern classics prepared each day by Mrs. Fountain,⁹⁰ and the children who were often permitted “second servings.”⁹¹

After eating, the children would return to the barracks briefly, to perform hygienic procedures and prepare for the day, which consisted of school, extracurricular activities, working on a construction crew, and Christian worship.⁹² If they went to school, the children completed Christian-based “bullshit packets,” with the assistance of public-school teachers who lived outside the compound.⁹³ Aside from these scheduled classes, the captive children were sometimes allowed to continue their education during “free time” in the evenings, when they had the choice to catch up on schoolwork or lift weights.⁹⁴ They still had to follow protocols during this time, but according to Leroy, “were not being constantly harassed” by staff members.⁹⁵

When they weren’t working after school, the staff forced the captive children to participate in various extracurricular activities depending upon what day it was. The staff forced the captive children to practice team drills twice a week, such as land navigation and marching in formation. They also forced them to perform extreme PT twice a week,

⁸⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁹⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

⁹¹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020. Leroy made this comment in response to the Tipps brothers’ radically different description of their culinary experience at BBA, in that they complained that the food was low in quality and quantity; to the degree that they were hungry enough that practitioners could bribe them with food that might be otherwise be unappealing to incentivize their obedience. In addition to their accounts of Thomas Fortenberry’s behavior and questions of Leroy’s degree of involvement in the Tipps brothers’ escape, this topic put the greatest distance between the consistency of their stories. However, it is, perhaps, explained as a consequence of Leroy having had ruthlessly worked his way up the ranks for around nine months before the Tipps arrived and gain privileges.

⁹² Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁹³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

⁹⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

sometimes for 12 to 14 hours. In addition to boxing drills, they were also forced spar with one another and staff members full contact in “the pit”⁹⁶ and boxing ring at least twice a week⁹⁷ to instill “confidence and morality.”⁹⁸ They usually completed the obstacle course once a week, but also used it for a variety of exercises frequently.⁹⁹

Portrayed as therapy or character building by the staff members, Leroy and other children worked on construction projects both on and off the compound, including building three houses for Fountain’s employees, a bridge over a waterway in a secluded area of the property, and a new barracks at the relatively new BAG in Petal. While it was difficult and dangerous, working for one of the Fountain’s construction companies was an attractive offer to the captive children at Bethel because it allowed them to escape school responsibilities, leave the compound, and tone down the military culture to some degree:¹⁰⁰ “You didn’t have to deal with the military bullshit mumbo-jumbo, but it was still working.”¹⁰¹ Groups of children were leased out around the area to repair the roofs of buildings, construct bridges, and raise houses in the local area. This was all done in unsafe conditions without pay,¹⁰² sometimes for 12 hours straight.¹⁰³

The low-status work teams (often those still in orientation) were called “nigger teams” or “nigger crews,” which were responsible for menial tasks like cleaning the barracks, picking up trash, washing dishes, and clearing brush.¹⁰⁴ Aligning with

⁹⁶ Ibid. The pit” refers to a shallow hole in the ground filled with a few inches of sand.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

⁹⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁰² Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁰³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

Fountain's fundamentalist belief in the mark of Cain, this suggests that participants were being trained to see non-white people as sub-human and worthy only of subjugation. The teams were forced to clear a large portion of land while he was there known as the "back 40,"¹⁰⁵ which required the moving of branches into piles to be burned.¹⁰⁶ In addition to work, exercise, and school, Leroy's life at BBA was centered around being trained by staff members in Fountain's theology. The staff forced him, as a non-Christian, to memorize and recite bible verses and pray regularly. He also had to attend the reverend's services at the church on Wednesdays and Sundays.¹⁰⁷ There he was forced to worship with staff members, many of whom lived on the property, as well as their parents when they would occasionally visit. The captive children at BAG were also driven to the boys' compound in Lucedale to attend these sermons. During these services, the children from both programs were forbidden from communicating or even making eye contact.¹⁰⁸ While the reverend claimed his program was effective at bringing residents close to God, Leroy recalled that he gave up on religion the moment he was beaten by the reverend during church, and he asked himself: "God sent me here?"¹⁰⁹

Throughout his incarceration at BBA, the staff members would constantly use violence within and beyond the official protocol of the program to maintain the political system: "they'd punch us... drown us...¹¹⁰ they'd electrocute us... they had like tasers

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. Aside from when Leroy was forced to build the barracks at the BAG compound, church was the only time he ever saw the girls.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Follow up discussion with author, April 2016. When I asked Leroy what he meant by "drowning" he was speaking to two separate practices. The first of which, was very similar to a technique that has come to be commonly known in the as waterboarding. The second, some sort of Christian ritual

and shit.”¹¹¹ The fact that the abuse exceeded what was necessary to control the children and, perhaps, even exacerbated their rebellion, suggests that the staff members at BBA might have sought after their role to be sadistic to children. Aside from being held captive and being beaten, the most common form of punishment implemented by staff members was extreme PT:

[I]f you piss them off they’ll take you out of school and PT you all day... it was called ‘wearing you out...’ it was calisthenics until you puke... pretty much. When they wear you out they have certain terminology they’ll use like ‘faster!’ and you be like ‘faster aye sir!’ everything you’re doing you’re always countin’... like ‘one sir... two sir... three sir...’ then they be like... ‘pushups... jumping jacks... mountain climbers... eight-count bodybuilders.’¹¹²

Another common PT punishment was called the “electric chair,” where captive children were forced to support themselves against a wall, often holding weights, for extended periods of time.¹¹³ Leroy explained that while it may not seem like it to those who have never experienced it, this was one of the most excruciating practices that was used, because staff members forced himself and others to do this for hours until their bodies “violently shook.”¹¹⁴ The staff also implemented the use of electric cattle prods, as well as, beatings with both fists, kicks, and a hickory switch.¹¹⁵

Although he was never subjected to this mode of torture, he also remarked that there was a small isolation room in the barracks near the showers, where children were taken to be beaten by staff members or held in solitary confinement.¹¹⁶ In the same

where captive children were held under water in the swamp or swimming pool while it was briefly operational.

¹¹¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹¹⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹¹⁵ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹¹⁶ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

building, captive children were forced to perform an exercise known as a “sweat party,” where the drill instructors would raise the temperature of the barracks by turning on the showers and dialing up the thermostat. During these sweat parties, the staff forced the captive children to exercise, such as holding themselves up in push up position or doing “duck walks,” as they poured bleach on the floor.¹¹⁷

Although some of the punishments were purely sadistic, while working or completing exercises, children were ordered to play a game called “smear the queer” or “murder ball” to engrain a violent response people who identify as LGBTQ+. The game began when a ball was thrown into the air. Whoever it landed near had to pick it up and was designated as “the queer,” who then became the target of all the other captive children’s vicarious attempts to tackle and beat them until they got the ball away.¹¹⁸ Aside from being a regular past time, “smear the queer” was also used as a disciplinary practice used by practitioners, who would order the children to swarm and physically assault someone who had violated the rules.¹¹⁹

While many exercises/punishments involved all of the captive children, most of the violence was not equally distributed amongst them. Leroy recalls that most of the violence was focused on about 20 percent of the population, which had a pedagogical effect on the other captive children who witnessed or heard about it. Aside from their identity, one’s personal conduct also shaped how they were treated. For example, after someone was caught masturbating, the other captive children and staff members started

¹¹⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020; Moore, “Daddy’s Place?”

3. Leroy explained that this was a game at first, but I asked him about Moore’s claim that the term was also used to describe a punishment and verified this was also true.

belittling him and calling him “chode,” to the extent that it had a profound effect on his personality and he became “an asshole” in Leroy’s terms.¹²⁰ After another child, with a last name that started with “Pen,” soiled himself when the staff members refused to let him use the restroom, he was relentlessly reminded that he was “shitty pens.”¹²¹

IV. EMBEDDED IN THE CARCERAL POLITICS OF BBA

Leroy was one of less than 10 children of color in the entire facility,¹²² and the racism he had experienced in South Florida continued at BBA. He believes the employment of DI Knott, who was the head drill instructor and camp superintendent, to some degree toned down the degree of explicit racism at BBA.¹²³ However, Leroy also remembers being targeted by staff and other captive children based on his race. In one instance, he recounted that while working on “the back 40,” which was an undeveloped wooded swampy area on one side of the property with no structures or paths, when he got into a fight with a young drill instructor. The who was ex-cadet who had spent years in the program before becoming a staff member when he turned eighteen. For one reason or another, this white man called Leroy a “nigger.”¹²⁴ An altercation erupted, which resulted in Leroy’s most serious physical injury while he was there:

We were working on the back 40 and he called me a nigger or some shit like that... it was actually the time we got into a fight... and I ended up beating his ass... and I was 12... he ended up throwing a brick at me... so he literally like lunges and like I swear to God it was gonna hit me in the chest... I dove out the way and it like hit me in my kneecap... and it me in

¹²⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹²¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹²² Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

¹²³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹²⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

my knee.. it literally hit me so hard my body like spun... like probably like 180 degrees...¹²⁵

His knee swelled up and he was incapacitated, so the staff took him to a clinic in Mobile, Alabama where his knee was drained, he received shots of cortisol, and was ordered to wear a knee brace. Injuries were frequent at Bethel, but they were largely concealed by staff, who would retaliate if the captive children reported abuse to staff, parents, or other outsiders.¹²⁶ Although Bethel representatives told the parents that there was a camp nurse, there was no medical care available at the camp, and Leroy believes that the staff members would drive the children that far because they wanted to conceal the injuries and needed a physician would not report signs of abuse.¹²⁷

Soon after he got back to BBA, he got in a fight with another captive child for which gained respect from the others because he won with a knee brace on. Leroy's injury occurred just before Thanksgiving, when some cadets were allowed to return home for three days. His mom picked him up from the compound and took him to his aunt's house in Atlanta. When his mother asked Leroy about his knee brace, Leroy told her about what had happened and confessed to other abuses, but she did not believe his story. He got in a serious fight with his brother after he called Leroy a "faggot," which he had been trained to react violently to, which further destabilized his familial relationships.¹²⁸ This suggests that Leroy carried heterocisgenderist attitudes with him into the outside world, where responding to accusations of having a queer identity as he had become accustomed was culturally inappropriate and criminalized.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

When Leroy's mother dropped him off at BBA after the holiday, she questioned the staff about the injuries, who denied the allegations and accused Leroy of trying to manipulate her. After she left, Leroy was subsequently punished by staff members for having told the story to his mother.¹²⁹ The feelings of hurt associated with this incident were exacerbated when his friend Enrique's mother picked him up from the facility. Leroy was claiming Folk Nation and Enrique claimed Latin Kings, so they got along and always shared a mutual respect for both their shared circumstance; as people of color with street gang affiliations and experiencing captivity in US carceral facilities. One day, knowing that his mother wouldn't approve of what was happening to her son at BBA, Enrique clandestinely gained access to a phone and told her what was happening. Soon after, his mother drove to Lucedale in a minivan and released him from the program.¹³⁰ Leroy was happy that his friend got away, but begrudged the fact that his own mother had sent him there, and that she didn't believe him about what was being done to him.

Feeling as if he was on his own, Leroy further embedded himself into the formal and informal political structure at BBA. The captive children were assigned different responsibilities based on their official rank in the program depending on seniority and their degree of compliance by staff members. Aside from evading punishment, obedience was incentivized with "rewards" and "privileges," such as food from the outside world, better living conditions, and leading orientation instead of working or going to school.¹³¹ Most children held the rank of cadet, but there were a few who held the ranks of private

¹²⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹³⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹³¹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

first class, lance corporal, corporal, sergeant, and senior cadet.¹³² The structure and titles of the ranking system of staff members¹³³ and captive children transformed over time. For example, right before Leroy had arrived, a senior cadet had a sexual relationship with a younger child in the program, before running away with four other senior cadets. After this incident, they removed the rank of senior cadet.¹³⁴

In addition to the official ranking system, there were also informal names for different types of people in the program. For example, those labeled as “bootlickers,”¹³⁵ who were mostly the smaller and weaker children that tried to improve their political position by demonstrating loyalty to staff members. One such strategy used by bootlickers was to befriend Herman Fountain’s younger children, because this behavior would come with benefits like being assigned to play dates rather than working or eating in the Fountains’ house.¹³⁶

The bootlickers were considered distinct from those who attempted to rise through the ranks through snitching and enforcing rules away from the eyes of staff members because they believed in the program’s discourses. These were those persons that Leroy considers to have been “brainwashed” to various degrees; measured by the extent to which they had lost their individuality and connection to the outside world and “become the program.”¹³⁷ According to Leroy, those children held captive for more than two years were referred to as “lifers.”¹³⁸ They were the most impacted because they spent

¹³² Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹³³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. According to Leroy, head drill sergeant Knott’s title changed to first sergeant when Thomas Fortenberry arrived.

¹³⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

the most time there, but not all lifers were brainwashed, nor were they bootlickers. However, those who grew up in the program were usually (but not always) the most brainwashed of the captive children, because they grew into adulthood with having been minimally exposed to other versions of social reality outside of the compound.¹³⁹ Most of these children had no connections with other people in the free world when they left BBA as adults, so many of them stayed because they had nowhere else to go.¹⁴⁰

In Leroy's words, there were also people like himself and Enrique who were "thug motherfuckers against the system" because of their experiences in other carceral facilities before BBA. They had learned the consequences of allowing oneself to be made vulnerable and how to navigate political systems in captivity; so these people were looking out for themselves, even if it meant playing both sides. According to Leroy, these were children who were willing to carry out violence on behalf of practitioners for personal gain, but still broke the rules when they latter weren't surveilling them. Put differently, he often complied when his superiors told him, "Fuck him up or get fucked up!" because he believed them, but did not uphold the program structure when there was nothing to gain and never snitched on anyone.¹⁴¹ Leroy claims that he was never "brainwashed" because he hadn't been at Bethel very long and knew he would leave within a few months, but simply adapted to the environment: "I wasn't brainwashed, I

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020. Leroy remembers one such practitioner named who had entered the program when he was 12, then worked at BAG after aging out. He ended up marrying a girl who lived at BAG when she was old enough. In the state of Mississippi, the earliest someone can consent to marriage is seventeen years old, but with permission from a guardian a child can marry at the age of fifteen. It is unknown what the case was here.

¹⁴¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

was just doin' what's best for me.”¹⁴² This suggests that while Leroy did not believe that adhering to the program would save his soul or enrich his character, he complied with the orders of practitioners to avoid being punished and improve his political position.

Under the circumstances of his life at this time, where he felt frustrated and isolated in captivity and the free world, Leroy often made the decision to carry out acts of violence on behalf of the staff members in order to earn privileges and protection from violence. Since one's rate of advancement in the program was based on the willingness to follow such directives from staff members, he and some of his friends had been given rank during their stay, despite frequent misbehavior. Aside from the fact that forcing captive children to do their dirty work, staff members could not physically control dozens of children and needed to conscript some of them towards their mission: “[W]e had the strongest personalities so they knew it would be easier to get us to control everybody than to get someone else to control us.”¹⁴³ Aside from protection from violence, more desirable options for spending one's time, and advancement in rank, staff members enacted this political structure through bribery with fast food.¹⁴⁴

After he graduated from orientation, Leroy was given the responsibility of facilitating the orientation of new cadets a few months into his sentence.¹⁴⁵ At first, he was “as bad, if not worse, than DI” because he was an “angry motherfucker” who “hated everybody.”¹⁴⁶ After witnessing, falling victim to, and carrying out, acts of violence

¹⁴² Ibid. Leroy made this statement during a discussion about how the Brett Tipps had described him as “brainwashed” while in captivity at BBA after using the term.

¹⁴³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁴⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. Leroy made this comment during a discussion about how he behaved towards other captive children, where he described himself as “one of the

violence, he became desensitized to it: "We fought so much you didn't get angry anymore... You may fight more than you brush your teeth at Bethel... It's like a rage button... and everybody at Bethel's got it."¹⁴⁷ Since the violence didn't bother him anymore, he continued to comply in order to avoid punishment and/or maintain the privileges it provided him. Most of violence took place on the compound, and manifested in public spectacles of punishment, but he was also charged with recapturing children who had escaped into the surrounding community. In one such instance, Brett Tipps, who became Leroy's friend at BBA, tried to escape on the day he arrived, in an event discussed from the fugitive's perspective in the next chapter:

You get caught running away they'd... like anybody could beat you... then umm... they could get a free meal... they could beat whoever the fuck they want... they would beat the fuck out you.... I remember that Brett Tipps got caught trying to escape by [Johnson]... [Johnson] fucked him up like broke his orbital bone and shit... fuckin he looked like an alien... that was like right when he got there.¹⁴⁸

While most of the violence he experienced at BBA was ordered by staff members, some captive children carried out racially based attacks on Leroy and his comrades by their own volition. A few months before he was released, one of his Black friends was attacked and injured by a group of white children as a form of racial terror. Shortly after, the non-white people in the facility formed a small organization for self-defense, who chased down the children who had hurt their friend and then "burned them with an iron:"

You have to remember we're in Mississippi with all these rednecks right... .. Dangerfield was black, I'm black, Hanes was Mexican and we were fightin' like white kids and honestly like... we were all the minorities... so I never really... when I first got there... there was other

predators" at BBA. He added that he thought his perspective from such a positionality would be useful because TTI survivor narratives often frame the subject of the story purely as a victim.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

Asians... [indiscernible] I wanna say for the most part were the only minorities in there... so I never really looked at like that but they were some country old fuckin rednecks and the Blacks and the Mexicans teamed up and beat up those white kids.¹⁴⁹

While Leroy's friends had never ratted on their friend's white attackers, nor had they been reprimanded, the bootlickers and brainwashed children reported what had happened soon after the incident.¹⁵⁰ The accused were assembled in the administration building by staff members. When none of them would confess, Joshua Fountain randomly selected one and attempted to "make an example out of him;" by verbally and physically assaulting the him with stomps, punches, and kicks to his head and body.¹⁵¹ In rebellion against this act carried out on his friend and comrade, Leroy stepped out of line and refused to get back into formation despite being ordered to do so, to stand in solidarity with his comrade. Then, a staff member named Fortenberry "got in his face," poked him in the chest, and pushed him.¹⁵² Leroy shoved the drill instructor into the wall, which knocked over a bird cage and collapsed the surface of the drywall. He then ran out the front-door and took off down the road, pursued by other children and staff members on four-wheelers they used to navigate the property. When they caught him, his pursuers kicked, punched, and stomped him for several minutes on the ground. After this experience, Leroy realized that he had always be punished even when he did his best to conform to the rules and that BBA could only destroy him: "At that point I was content

¹⁴⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁵⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

with fucking up... like from day one I was a fuck up even when I tried there so they used to always fuck with us.”¹⁵³

Leroy increasingly rejected the program as his release date grew nearer; by accumulating pornographic magazines, huffing clothing starch, and creating escape plans. The facility’s architecture could not effectively incarcerate the children held captive there. However, Leroy claims that escape was still difficult because people in the local community knew abuse went on there, but thought it was an effective program and benefitted from the cheap labor and jobs it provided them.¹⁵⁴ He remembers hearing reports that some members of the town had taken the escaped children’s allegations of abuse seriously in the past, but were helpless to intervene because they were legally bound to report fugitive children to the police, who would return them to BBA.¹⁵⁵ Others saw the children as manipulative, and because they viewed the escape as a form of misbehavior, called Herman Fountain personally so they could come pick up the escaped child.¹⁵⁶ When I asked Leroy how he thought local residents thought about BBA, he stated:

I think they thought it was a good program, but they knew they fucked us up in there like it was not secret cause they like returned us to the program and shit... like kids that would run away towards like houses and shit and tell them like “they...[staff members] they did whatever... whatever... whatever... Would you call the police?” But they would really call the program.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

While Leroy did not escape, based on his experience working on a bridge near the back 40, he did create a plan near the end of his sentence, which he shared with his comrades when he learned that DI Knott would be returning from one of his sabbaticals. Having spent time on the edge of the property, Leroy realized traveling in that direction would allow a fugitive to bypass some of the community surveillance that was present in other directions and travel through the area undetected under the cover of forest. The plan involved distracting the staff and concealing the escapee's absence as long as possible, through collaboration with those left behind. With his guidance, a half dozen captive children escaped into the woods, including Brett and Brandon Tipps, but half of them were recaptured. Leroy never attempted to escape because he knew he would be leaving in the approaching months anyway.¹⁵⁸

V. STRUGGLING TO RECOVER AFTER BEING RELEASED

Soon after his friends escaped, in July of 2002, Leroy completed the court requirements and was approved for release and he returned home at the age of 14.¹⁵⁹ His mom drove up to the compound, picked him up, and took him back home in Florida. When I asked him if other people noticed if he was “different” when he got back, Leroy recalls that he was different in both demeanor and appearance: “I used to be a skinny

¹⁵⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. During this discussion, which followed the Tipps brothers' interviews, I asked Leroy why he didn't try to escape too, to which he responded by explaining that his 13-month sentence was almost over and he didn't want to be rearrested when he could just finish and move on.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

little kid with braids came back big with bald head... my own brother didn't recognize me."¹⁶⁰

He no longer trusted or respected his mother or obeyed her; because he viewed her as responsible for his incarceration at BBA and since she did not believe his allegations of abuse. Their hostile relationship further derailed the sense that his home was refuge. He started selling pills, cocaine, and cannabis in South Florida.¹⁶¹ When he found out he wasn't on probation and would not be subject to drug tests; he started smoking cannabis regularly, did cocaine for the first time, and began drinking heavily to cope with the trauma.¹⁶² At night, he wandered the streets with his friend, talking about what had happened and listening to music. While he was awake, he carried a deep sense of anger and confusion. He described himself as having grown anxious, paranoid, and depressed: "I was crazy when I got out."¹⁶³ When he slept, he would wake up and scream "attention on deck!" as he had in the program. As he lay in his bed each morning, he listened for the heavy footsteps of the staff members unlocking the dorm and walking up the steps.¹⁶⁴

Leroy returned home just a month before he started classes in the 9th grade with students he grew up with, but had not seen in over a year. Although the program was discursively intended to normalize him, Leroy found that "reintegrating was weird."¹⁶⁵ He struggled to hold a normal conversation because he had to ask for permission to speak

¹⁶⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁶¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

¹⁶⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. Leroy mentioned this after I explained how the Tipps brothers had the same experience after they left BBA: waking up suddenly and screaming: "Attention on deck!"

¹⁶⁵ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020.

for everything while he was at BBA.¹⁶⁶ Having spent the last year in a regimented program, the disorder of public school where people “moved freely” was too much for him. He described a “racing heart” and claimed that he started suffering from anxiety and panic attacks, especially with the chaos and noise of walking through hallways in school. To cope with the stress of following social norms and catching up to his peers who had remained in public school, Leroy started drinking a 32 oz. bottle of malt liquor and taking Xanax pills to “pass out the first two periods.”¹⁶⁷

In the four months after he returned from BBA, he was arrested three times.¹⁶⁸ From the time he left BBA, until he reached adulthood, Leroy was in and out of programs and detention centers for either fighting his brother, fighting other children in his neighborhood, or for his involvement in a street gangs around South Florida.¹⁶⁹ He experienced (victim of and party to) multiple instances of violence and arrests related to drugs, but avoided long-term prison sentences due to being a minor, his mental health status, and because he always hired lawyers or was represented by the father of a friend to whom he sold cocaine.¹⁷⁰

The first arrest occurred two weeks after he had started high school. Leroy was arrested and charged with “disrupting a public function,” after a teacher kept trying to wake him up while he was passed out at his desk and he threw a book at her.¹⁷¹ He was incarcerated at Sago Palms Corrections (formerly known as Pohokey Youth Development

¹⁶⁶ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁶⁷ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁶⁸ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁶⁹ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid; Wun, “Angered,” 433. As a consequence of the he had incurred before and during his time at BBA, Leroy’s behavior here reflects how “discipline policies penalize students for the anger caused by experiences with multiple intersecting forms of violence.”

Center) for 21 days, but his court date to be sentenced was scheduled for later. This was the facility he would have been sent to if he had not gone to BBA, so Leroy was surprised to find that it was a “cake walk.”¹⁷² His involvement in gang activities escalated during this period and he fought frequently. The facility partially flooded during a hurricane, which temporarily disrupted the power grid and ripped off a section of the roof off of another part of the structure while he locked in his cell.¹⁷³

After finishing his sentence, Leroy was arrested again because of another incident at school. He had learned that his friend was being threatened by two other children from his neighborhood. One of them was in one of Leroy’s classes, so after the bell rang at the end of class and everyone shuffled into the hallway, he assaulted the would-be aggressor. When he saw the school security running towards him, he ran out of the school and walked home. He started skipping school to avoid arrest, but a few days later he received a court order in the mail that he was being summoned to respond to some charges related to the incident. When Leroy went to court, he ran into Enrique from BBA at the courthouse, who he learned was being tried for drug related charges. Leroy ended up being incarcerated around 60 days at Sago Palms Corrections before being released.¹⁷⁴

Whereas the first two arrests in the months following Leroy’s release from BBA had been based on incidents at school, the third arrest occurred because of something that happened at home. After fighting intensely with his older brother inside, Leroy started spreading gasoline on the porch and sides of the house, before setting it on fire. When the police arrived, he surrendered, and was incarcerated for more than a year at Sago Palms.

¹⁷² Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

He would have had to stay longer, but his mother hired a lawyer who got him a reduced sentence. While inside, he also managed to build a connection with the director's wife, who worked in the medical unit where Leroy was assigned work responsibilities. She put the good word in with her husband, who was able to approve Leroy's early release.¹⁷⁵

While Leroy was incarcerated at Sago Palms, his mother moved to Daytona temporarily, where he lived briefly upon being released. After getting involved in a dispute between Black and Asian gangs in the area, he was arrested on concealed weapons charges and spent a few months at a carceral facility called Hastings Youth Academy in Hastings, Florida. When Leroy got back to his old neighborhood in Ft. Lauderdale, he found that some of his enemies had since formed a clique and ended up getting stabbed in the head by one of them with a fantasy-style blade during an altercation.¹⁷⁶

He got out of the hospital the day before his 17th birthday. A few weeks later, several of his friends were attacked at a party during a gang-related dispute, which put Leroy at odds with a clique from Jacksonville. When he ran into them at a restaurant, Leroy started beating them up in the parking lot and more than a dozen people started fighting. After an enemy combatant slashed his face with an umbrella, he went to the car he had arrived in and retrieved a machete from the trunk. Leroy's group injured several other people and damaged their vehicles, before they got in their vehicles and entering the highway towards Ft. Lauderdale before police arrived. He was on the run for almost a month before being arrested by police for the incident at the restaurant.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Leroy was once again sent to the facility in Hastings, but this time the former director at Sago Palms, who had approved his early release previously, was in charge. The director was excited to see Leroy, because when he had moved to Daytona, the staff members at Sago Palms were concerned that he may have been killed because he hadn't been incarcerated there for a while:

Everybody in the Sago Palms correctional institution like watched me grow up... like one point they thought I died cause they stopped seeing me, but it was just cause my mom moved to another part of Florida.. and I was going to jail up there... they were like "he's not locked up cause we ain't seen him... and we know he ain't stop getting in trouble."¹⁷⁸

Leroy turned 18 years old in Hastings Youth Academy and was released short after.¹⁷⁹ When he got out, he temporarily went back to dealing drugs, but when he realized there was no future in it for him, decided to try other pathways.¹⁸⁰ He studied small motor repair and audio production briefly, before he started training and competing in mixed martial arts. In the wake of his experiences, however, he struggled with stage fright because it was difficult to separate real violence from sport. Since then, he has worked his way up in the legal cannabis industry, working for major companies before venturing out into his own extraction and genetic research enterprises.¹⁸¹

Although he feels that he his mental health has vastly improved since the time of his release from BBA, Leroy claims he never entirely recovered from his experience in that program and believes he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder to this day. He said that it took him around six years to be able to function in society again after 13

¹⁷⁸ Leroy, Interviewed by author, April 2016.

¹⁷⁹ Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁸⁰ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020; Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

¹⁸¹ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021.

months in BBA: “[W]hen I left there I was barely able to function for a while... it wasn’t til’ like I was like 20 and shit that I was back to like functioning normal... it took like six years to recover from that shit.”¹⁸² Thus, suggesting not only that BBA’s the “tough love” approach failed to address the serious challenges Leroy was facing in his life, such as living in a white supremacist society and abusive home, but that his experience at Lucedale exacerbated these issues by traumatizing him and disrupting his social relationships.

VI. CONCLUSION

As a Black boy who grew up in an abusive household in South Florida, during a period of heightened racial tensions catalyzing the white flight of the 1990’s, Leroy has been particularly vulnerable to the US criminal justice system his entire life. This was the same region where The Seed and Straight Inc. were founded and operated for roughly three decades during the Cold War, War on Crime, and War on Drugs, amidst heightened fears of multiculturalism amidst immigrants and refugees. The purpose being, to filter white children out of the swelling state-sanctioned juvenile detention facilities being operated, at immense financial cost, and funnel them into self-funded privately owned and operated ones. While, at the same time, cultivating public support for the directorates of policing and prison regimes through the ideological production of the troubled teens; those conceived of as children driven to immorality by cosmopolitan culture, but capable of redemption through ““tough love”.”

¹⁸² Ibid.

Having been terrorized by local police and community members for years as one of the only people of color in his neighborhood, being incarcerated multiple times for domestic violence, and then being falsely convicted of crimes related to breaking into a house in his neighborhood, Leroy was court ordered to attend BBA. With her son facing incarceration in a high security juvenile detention facility in Florida, Leroy's mother agreed to pay for him to attend BBA for 13 months, because she wanted to protect him from the dangers of the correctional system and instill him with Christian beliefs. While living on the BBA compound, Leroy was subjected to a rigid disciplinary program focused on Christian worship, physical training and drills, and laboring in dangerous conditions without pay. He was under almost constant surveillance from practitioners, who would reward him for obedience or punish him if he was unable or unwilling to meet their expectations.

Within and beyond the official parameters of the program rules and structure, Leroy was also targeted for abuse by white practitioners and children on the basis of his racial identity, as had been the case in his community. As a Black boy in the care of mostly white male evangelical fundamentalists, veterans, and other captive boys under their control; he was dehumanized by the program's discourses and left unprotected from white supremacist vigilantism, regardless of whether he complied with the rules or not. In this way, his experiences at BBA illustrate how the structures and processes of white supremacist regimes problematize Foucault's theorization of the modern economy of power.¹⁸³ This is because their violent and pedagogical effects have the "*structured*

¹⁸³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11-22. Foucault describes how the techniques and philosophies of punishment in Euro-American societies had shifted between the 18th and 19th centuries,

impossibility of disciplining, correcting, or otherwise assimilating certain pathologized, abject bodies into the graces of white civil society, or the trappings of the “free world.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, this disciplinary regime was particularly harmful to the bodies and minds of people who are non-white, non-Christian, and/or identified as LGBTQ+, because they depart from the ideal subject they aimed to produce.

Leroy’s story sheds light on the disciplinary program at BBA during his time there, as well as the political structures that he had to navigate in order to survive, which involved individual acts of rebellion and organizing with other captive children, as well as strategic submission to the regime. Through torture, neglect, and rewards for obedience, Fountain and his employees coerced Leroy to behave in ways that did not reflect his wishes or sense of self while in captivity. Unsusceptible to the discourses pushed on him through faith-based and behavior modification technologies, Leroy was without meaningful allegiance to the regime, but intentionally displayed compliance to secure relative safety and reap other benefits.

Unable to escape the political pressure and feeling abandoned by his family, who did not believe his claims that he was being abused, Leroy conformed to the program as an enforcer responsible for punishing other children and capturing escapees. Though complicit with the program’s demands of him on the surface, however, his survival as a

alongside the emergence of the human sciences and modern nation-state. He claims that economy of power was no longer constituted through public spectacles of corporeal torture as it had previously, but rather, through the medico-juridical normalization of the body politic within and beyond the walls of its carceral institutions. In other words, by transitioning from the classical “art of unbearable sensations,” the state’s approach to punishment had “assumed as its principal object loss of wealth or rights” and “corrective detention” as necessary components of finding a “cure” to the offending citizen’s “medical-legal” abnormality.”

¹⁸⁴ Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, 43; Also see Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in US Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Black boy and mobilization with other non-white children to protect themselves from the racially motivated predations of white children. In this way, Leroy's story speaks to how "interpersonal behavior in relational contexts usually reproduces but sometimes modifies macro structural patterns."¹⁸⁵ This is because the manner in which he navigated the white supremacist structure of BBA both reinforced and disrupted the structures and processes of the US criminal justice system and fundamentalist movement.

After being released, the social consequences of his criminal record, ongoing problems at home, and individual trauma, led to him being incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities in South Florida. By examining his behaviors as embodied within a matrix of overlapping political structures at different scales of analysis, Leroy's account serves as evidence and illustration of why residential programs for children that employ a "tough love" approach are ineffective and harmful to participants. In this way, the production of the "troubled teen" by these programs is not merely discursive, because residents incur corporeal and psychological trauma that is conducive to developing "troubling" behaviors.

The social consequences of BBA are the result of unqualified and sadistic religious fanatics who sought out the profession of torturing children, with minimal oversight or accountability from the state, despite many of the residents being court ordered to complete the program. The US criminal justice system and fundamentalist

¹⁸⁵ Cecilia L Ridgeway, "Linking Social Structure and Interpersonal Behavior: A Theoretical Perspective on Cultural Schemas and Social Relations," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (March 2006): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20141725>. Ridgeway explains this process when she states that "actors create and enact structure by means of several types of shared cultural schemas," which "represent or imply relations between specific or abstract actors" on a macro level. The result is an ordering schema containing "fundamental sentiments ... social identities, and status beliefs," which effectively "disaggregate the meanings of identities, settings, and events from their embedded contexts and represent them in abstract form."

movement pushed children into BBA for the discursive purpose of improving their earthly wellbeing, saving their souls, and protecting society. For Leroy, however, this was a flesh for cash enterprise that commodified the ritualized torture and labor of children, fetishized through Christian and medico-judicial discourses that equate their suffering with participants' moral growth.

In the same vein as this one, the next chapter tells the story of Brett and Brandon Tipps, who were captured and held captive at BBA near the end of Leroy's sentence in 2002. This narrative describes their experiences navigating white supremacist structures from different positionalities before, during, and after, being held captive on the Lucedale compound. Like Leroy, at the interstices of consent and coercion, the brothers each made strategic choices to either comply with the demands of practitioners or disobey their commands. After roughly three months in captivity, they managed to successfully escape from the compound and work their way back to their home in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where they have continuously struggled to live with the trauma of institutional child abuse, while continuing to encounter new political challenges from sources beyond their control.

CHAPTER 6:

THE TIPPS' STORY OF SURVIVING BETHEL BOYS ACADEMY

I. INTRODUCTION

As previously discussed, Leroy first encountered twin brothers named Brett and Brandon Tipps while incarcerated at Bethel Boys Academy (BBA) between June of 2001 and July of 2002. Drawing on interviews and follow up discussions with the Tipps, this chapter speaks to how they make sense of their experiences before they were incarcerated at BBA, what it was like to be there between March and June of 2002 near the end of Leroy's sentence, and how they were affected by the program afterwards, as well as their insights on the efficacy of the "tough love" programs for troubled youth. It describes their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, as white, Baptist, heterocisgender males, as they navigated white supremacist political structures to navigate and survive the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI) and greater US carceral system.

After acting out at home in response to their father's sudden passing when they were 12, the brothers were incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities, group homes, and the faith-based rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge, where they learned to navigate the political structures of US carceral facilities. When they were 15 years old, the Tipps brothers were sent to a Teen Challenge bootcamp by their mother, who was desperate to protect her children from the criminal justice system and otherwise raise them to be functional adults. When the staff members were unable to break their rebelliousness after repeated escapes and radical organizing, they were kicked out of the program and their mother was recommended to enroll them the BBA program, which they thought would be better equipped to manage and extinguish their unruly behavior.

Because Brandon was staying at a girlfriend's house to avoid being sent to BBA, his mother led him into an ambush by a private transport team she had contracted, which also transferred Brett there from a juvenile detention facility.¹ In addition to being abused and neglected by BBA's practitioners, they were assaulted by other children, including Leroy, who was ordered to do so. They worked on various construction projects around the compound and were coerced to recapture fugitive children. Unwilling to accept their political condition while incarcerated at BBA, where they were subjected to intense controls because of their history of rebelling against institutional regimes, they escaped the compound in June of 2002 with the help of Leroy. After working their way back home, they struggled with trauma, as well as the weight of an enhanced willingness and capacity for violence due to that which they had experienced, witnessed, and carried out, at BBA.

The brothers were forced to confront the dark side of their religion, but it was unable to shake to their faith, destroy their identities, or break their solidarity with one another. Like Leroy, however, they did at times conform to the program as a survival strategy in ways that haunt them to this day, and their battle for survival was far from over after they managed to escape and return home. Not only were they deeply traumatized by the abuse they experienced at BBA, but they continued to encounter bizarre situations that built upon their difficulty trusting people and desensitization to violence. The brothers forgive their mother for sending them to BBA, which she also

¹ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020. The circumstances of Brett's incarceration are not explicitly clear from the interviews. However, rather than being alternatively sentenced, it appears he was released and then transferred by his mother's accord. This is based on his comments related to whether he saw his mother as accountable for sending her sons to BBA given the institutional child abuse they experienced there.

regrets, but remain traumatized by what they experienced as a result, as well as hostile towards the BBA regime and other rehabilitative models in US carceral facilities.

They believe that programs like BBA, or other abusive residential disciplinary programs are harmful, and hope that their participation will convince parents not to enroll their children in the future. The chapter concludes with some of their insights on the BBA program and their recommendations for addressing the injustices they faced. It also includes a brief discussion of the Tipps brothers discussion of the role that parents play in the production of the TTI and why they emphasize that one of the best strategies for reducing institutional child abuse is to starve the market by raising awareness of institutional child abuse, as is the case with WWASP Survivors. The conclusion also briefly connects the Tipps brothers' theory of the political structure of BBA to Leroy's, given the entanglement of their stories around the topic. The purpose being, to demonstrate why the concept of advancing through a "tough love" program does not necessarily reflect the success of its disciplinary technologies; Especially, when the political structure relies on coercing captive children to police one another and rewarding obedience to the administration.

II. EARLY STRUGGLES AND REBELLION AT TEEN CHALLENGE

Brett and Brandon Tipps were born in Chattanooga, Tennessee during the mid-eighties. In response to the interview questions, they identified as being straight, white, males. Neither had served in the military and both held Christian Baptist beliefs.² They

² Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

were raised by strict religious parents with one other sibling until the brothers turned 12 years old and their father passed away suddenly.³ While the significance of this event to Brandon's life are unclear from the interviews,⁴ Brett was designated to be a turning point in their behavior and relationships.⁵ Following this event, the brothers started skipping school, staying at girlfriends' houses, and smoking cannabis, among other "troubling" behaviors. Because these activities were criminalized, the twins were both incarcerated in various group homes, boot camps, and juvenile detention centers, during their childhood.⁶ They had a positive relationship with their mother, but often broke her rules and she was unable to control them, so she enrolled them to prevent them from being convicted of crimes.⁷

Seeking to protect her children from getting caught up in the criminal justice system, but without the knowledge of how to do so, their mother started exploring the internet for answers and resources. After conducting some research online, she found a private faith-based program called Teen Challenge. Knowing it would be more difficult for her sons to escape and return home if they were further away, she organized their stay at bootcamp-style program in Bonifay, Florida, and dropped them off at the facility.⁸ Although the timeframe is uncertain, the twins were held captive there for roughly six

³ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁴ Doris Nilsson and Teresia Ångarne-Lindberg, "Children Who Lose a Parent Suddenly: What Kind of Assistance do they Feel Provides Relief? A Content Analysis Study of Children and their Parents," *Child Care in Practice* 22, no.2, *Child Care in Practice* (2016), 198. DOI:10.1080/13575279.2015.1118014. According to Nilsson and Lindberg: "Losing a parent, as with other forms of trauma, is to be regarded as a potentially traumatic event, and research has indicated that the impact of trauma varies depending on several factors such as age, family and social surroundings, past trauma and the surviving parent's ability to deal with the situation."

⁵ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁶ Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁷ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸ Ibid.

months beginning in the later months of 2001 into early 2002. Brett recalled being there when the World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001, which he learned about on television while he was supposed to be standing at attention. After a staff member started yelling at him for being distracted, Brett pointed out what was happening. Then, according to Brett, the staff member proceeded to use the event to motivate the captive children to be compliant, stating something along the lines of: "Yup! We're all going to war! We're all going to war! "You boys better get straightened up ... You better get ready! Cause we're all going! ... We're all goin'!"⁹

The program consisted mostly of children their age and was less violent and strict than BBA would later be, but they were subjected to and witnessed physical and verbal abuse.¹⁰ The brothers were unwilling to accept their political condition and their solidarity with one another gave them the fortitude to continue rebelling. Brett attributes his resistance to the program to what he had learned from being incarcerated at other facilities, as well as, the support he and his brother supported one another, which gave them an edge over the children held captive there were isolated from their social networks.¹¹ When the twins refused to comply or participate in the regimented activities, the staff members threatened them with being transferred to BBA by private transport teams. The weight of these threats reached beyond their ongoing captivity at Teen Challenge, as it was also rumored that their parents could pay "bounty hunters" to abduct

⁹ Ibid; Coloff, "Remember the Christian Alamo." Founded near the Tipps hometown, Teen Challenge had spread throughout the country by the time George W. Bush's gubernatorial administration aimed to attract evangelical support for his presidential campaign through the deregulation of faith-based treatment programs for troubled youths. Given his support for Teen Challenge, it should not be surprising that the organization's practitioners would support Bush's policy decisions, especially in a bootcamp-style setting.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

them from their family homes in the middle of the night.¹² Even with these threats, the staff members weren't able to effectively transform the twins' thoughts and behaviors to conform to the program's discursively constructed ideal subjectivity.

Emboldened by one another, the brothers escaped from the facility at some point in their incarceration. The details are unknown, but they returned soon after, upon realizing that if even if they made it back to Chattanooga, their mother would just send them back. With this understanding of their situation, they started trying to think of a way to secure their exit from the program and return home, rather than just remaining on the run. They learned of such a strategy after two others were expelled from the program when staff members supposedly found them having a sexual encounter, which Brett pointed out to the others. Although neither Brett nor his brother nor himself "performed any sexual acts or encouraged anybody to do it," there were others who were and did following their discussion.¹³ Eventually, the brothers got kicked out because they "kept running and encouraged others to do the same."¹⁴ Their mother was ordered to take her children from their custody and urged to send them to BBA, which the Teen Challenge staff members considered to be a much stricter program that was supposedly better equipped to manage and break their rebelliousness.¹⁵

III. CAPTURED AND TRANSPORTED TO BBA

¹² Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

¹³ Brett Tipps, Follow up discussion with author, January 2021. The only revision offered by other of the Tipps brothers was that Brett wanted to make it more clear that he and his brother were not involved in this incident outside of discussing it in a group conversation focused on criticizing the regime.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

After their mother picked the twins up from Teen Challenge and drove them to Chattanooga, they were enrolled at Hickson High School in February of 2002. When they continued their “troubling” behaviors in the three weeks after they had been expelled from Teen Challenge; their mother started warning them that if they didn’t change, she would have them transported to BBA by “bounty hunters” against their will. Brandon had already heard rumors about this disturbing practice at Teen Challenge and was unwilling to comply. He started taking measures to protect himself and told his mother that he would protect himself from being abducted with violence if necessary: “[I]f you have one of these bounty hunters come.. you know.. wake me up in the middle of the night.. I'm gonna tell you I'm gonna cut one of'em.” You know? I slept with a knife underneath my bed.. you know.. for three or four days until I got out of there.”¹⁶

Brandon was looking to avoid that inevitable violent outcome, however, he took measures to avoid capture by hiding out away from home and skipping school. He stayed at his girlfriend’s apartment for a few weeks near the end of May and early April of 2002, where he the bounty hunters could not legally enter and capture him. It worked for a while, but after developing walking pneumonia, he called his mother to ask if she would take him to the doctor and she agreed to pick him up from school. While sitting in class the day of his appointment, Brandon was called to the principal’s office. After being guided into the room, the principal closed the door behind Brandon, and only then did he notice two adult men in the room wearing green shirts and badges. These bounty hunters tried to forcibly detain him, but he managed to push them both away and ran out into the

¹⁶ Ibid.

parking lot, where he was captured, shackled, and transported to the BBA compound.¹⁷ Because Brett was not attending school or staying at home for the same reasons as his brother, he only found out later from some of his friends.¹⁸

When Brandon arrived at the BBA compound a few hours after being captured at his school, he was taken to the barracks building on the BBA compound. He realized this would be the area where he would be sleeping the next few months, which was filthy and so was the bathroom. Then, Brandon was introduced to the staff members, who already had been given information about he and his brother regarding their rebelliousness through conversations with their mother. After they explained to him what to expect during his indefinite stay at BBA, Brandon decided he was going to escape and just ran off into the woods while staff members were focused on something else.¹⁹

The staff members had not noticed that he had escaped, suggesting that they were incapable of keeping tabs on all of the children in the program on their own. However, a captive child who had been abandoned on the compound by his parents several years previously and gained high status had seen Brandon trying to escape and a foot chase ensued. Being out of shape and knowing very little about the geographical terrain, Brandon ran far enough that he thought he was safe before laying down in the brush to conceal himself from anyone in chasing him. Soon after, his pursuer quickly caught up and found his target. The child and dragged him out of the woods, then proceeded to

¹⁷ “WWASP Programs.” It is unknown how she identified or located this teen transport company, nor if it was one affiliated with the WWASP network, but it is important to note that BBA was at the time.

¹⁸ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

¹⁹ Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020; Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, January 2020. It is worth noting that the brothers’ story slightly conflicted here and that Leroy concurred with Brett’s account after I asked him about it. Whereas Brandon believes that his brother arrived the day after he tried to escape the first time, Brett and Leroy believe it was in the following weeks.

brutally punched and kick Brandon in the head and body with combat boots on. When Thomas Fortenberry arrived to the scene, he also starting beating Brandon, who suffered serious injuries to his head, face, and body, which didn't fully heal for months.²⁰

After this incident, through which the staff members, perhaps, realized they needed to strengthen their political grip on Brandon, they attempted to gain his compliance by cultivating his friendship and loyalty. For example, Brandon recalls how John Fountain approached him kindly and started taking him on drives off the property to ask him questions and earn his trust, but this strategy failed: "Basically, he was just try'na get in my head... you know... to see how I think... ... A couple of times he was trying to be nice to me.. you know.. he.. was fishin' for something that he couldn't get. Then, he quit being so nice... you know?"²¹

Aside from these trips, Brandon was confined to the compound and had no communication with the outside world throughout his remaining time in captivity there. When the staff members failed to gain his compliance, he quickly learned that, unlike Teen Challenge, the staff members at BBA would resort to extreme physical violence against the children held captive there for even minor infractions. And, therefore, it would be much more dangerous difficult to navigate BBA's political structure, which he could not escape, through overt modes of rebellion. Like all new arrivals, he was assigned to the orientation platoon, where the staff member show arriving cadets the ropes, familiarize them with the rules of the program and daily regiment, as well as attempt to break their will to resist authority through physical and psychological violence:

²⁰ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

²¹ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

Orientation's where you got your ass whooped everyday.. you know... they broke you down... you know.. you didn't get fed.. you know... like everybody else did. You know? You got leftovers. You know? It was um... that's what... you know and that went on for like a month period.. you know.. to really break you down... to make you feel like you know... (impersonating staff member) 'you can't come in here...' cause like I said... cause like I said man... A lot of them kids went in there thinkin' 'you can't hit me.' Um.. 'You can't put your hands on me.' Um.. [Chuckles] and.. you know [chuckles][indiscernible] but go down that driveway and you're there man... I mean that's what I'm saying... You're greeted with assault.²²

As Brandon put it, under threat of being beaten or otherwise punished by staff members or other captive children, he would have to follow every rule and be “broken down” through physical training (PT) in order graduate.²³ In orientation, he would rise in the early hours of the morning, before beginning intense PT and boxing drills. In addition to being forced to box other captive children in the ring, he recalled having to spar full contact with Fortenberry, as well as bigger and more experienced fighters like Leroy, who were looking to prove themselves. Depending on the day, he would attend classes, work around the property, exercise, and participate in Christian religious practices. He had to ask permission for everything, including to speak, move, or use the restroom. If he refused or failed to comply with the program, he would be subjected to a variety of punishment techniques, most often beatings with fists, kicks, and objects: “[T]here... there was no... you know... [pause] no.. no.. no mercy... You know? There was no... You know what I mean? You would absolutely get your ASS whooped. You know what I mean? Damn near... til... til you're damn near dead.”²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Brandon was aware compliance did not guarantee him total safety, especially since he would inevitably be tortured to some degree anyway since the program was fundamentally abusive and the practitioners were sadistic. He knew that, without being able to escape, that more or less conforming to the program was desirable and necessary to protect himself. This is because those who could not (or would not) conform to the program's expectations were targeted for abuse by staff members or other captive children who were rewarded for their obedience. In turn, aside from the violence he faced from staff members in and out of the ring, Brandon described finding himself immersed in a competitive culture that pitted captive children against one another for survival. And, aside from the possibility of earning individual rewards, the captive children also held one another accountable to the rules of the program, because they would be collectively punished if one of them acted out: "[C]ause you wanna act a certain way... everybody else gets punished. It's a threat thing... It's a threat thing... You know what I mean? [impersonating staff member] 'Well, cadet Tipps was sittin' up in his rack beat all to hell... You all gotta do ten times the PT because he's not able to do it.'"²⁵ The apparent strategy here was to make the captive children accountable to one another's conduct to exert more pressure on them to conform.

While Brandon was going through this ordeal, he was unaware²⁶ that Brett was about to be transferred to Bethel from a juvenile detention facility in Tennessee in the following weeks. Herman Fountain and Thomas Fortenberry were waiting when the bounty hunters arrived at the compound with Brett in their custody. At this point, aside

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

from learning what to expect from his brother, the staff members were already aware that Brett had a history of rebelliousness, skipping school, as well as, running away from home and other programs. Although he felt somewhat prepared to resist psychological manipulation based on his previous experiences in other programs, he quickly learned that he would be subjected to a degree of corporeal punishment that exceeded his expectations: “I already been through this type of thing before... with the first bootcamp... they did the same thing.... you gotta sit here and think about it... you can't take kids who think they're badass or you can't tell'em shit. You gotta break'em down somehow and that's what they did.”²⁷

The reverend directed Brett, who was carrying his belongings, to the office of the administration building, before asking him questions about his background and what brought him there. When he finished the interrogation, he left the new arrival alone with ThomasFortenberry, who proceeded to degrade and assault him:

[T]he drill sergeant older man got my suitcase and dumped it on the ground... and told me to pick it up. So as I go to pick it up on my hands and knees... he rears back and kicks me in the stomach.. and then rib cage. Knocked breath out of me.. I mean it knocked the breath out of me.. I can't breathe..²⁸

As Brett was gasping for breath, the reverend walked back into room and asked: “What happened to you?”²⁹ Through his experiences at Teen Challenge, Brett recalled understanding this violent ritual as a means to communicate the consequences of disobedience to their authority and the futility of reporting abuse to adults, so he

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

responded: “I fell.”³⁰ A few minutes later, Fountain and Fortenberry accompanied Brett to the barracks to drop off his belongings, when he saw the state of his brother, whose injuries made his head look like a “purple pumpkin.”³¹ Not only was he affected by his brother’s physical appearance, but when Brett got to ask his brother about what happened to him, he realized Brandon being hunted down by the other children was “like sicking the dogs on him.”³² Thus, speaking to both the weight of the political structure at BBA for those on the bottom and how it dehumanized all of the children held captive in the program, even those who had climbed the ranks.

Before he was transferred to BBA from the juvenile facility, his mother had warned the administration that her sons were unruly as individuals, but were even more difficult to manage when they were together, so she encouraged the staff members to keep the twins separated. This suggests that she presumed they were going to rebel against the regime and attempt to escape if they were allowed to conspire. While their experiences in other facilities had in some ways prepared them to navigate BBA, their reputation followed them there, and shaped how the staff members attempted to control their thoughts and behaviors. In Brandon’s words, he and his “brother were treated differently from the get-go because they [staff members] were warned about us... that we were runners and... that we had come from another bootcamp.. and.. so they already had an idea of us and what to expect.”³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

His political status and that of his brother, were as Brandon put it, in contradistinction to that of a “weak kid.. comin' in.. that doesn't have a clue” and was on their own.³⁴ With this in mind, Brandon believes the staff members knew he and his brother were less naïve than other kids and that they would support and conspire with another. And, consequently, this is why he believes staff members targeted their bodies and tried to turn them against one another: “Instead of trying to mentally break us down... they went straight to the physical... . . . because they knew you're not.. you're not gonna break me down mentally.. you know what I mean? It's just not gonna happen.”³⁵

On the day of Brett’s arrival, the staff members took steps to limit their interaction and compromise their loyalty to one another. As his brother returned from the barracks, Brandon was ordered to accompany his platoon to the top of a hill and throw rocks at his brother and other captive children in orientation, as they attempted to scale the mound of red earth that had been formed by a bulldozer during a nearby construction project. When he refused to participate, the staff members, told Brandon something along the lines of: “It's either you or him... You throw them rocks or ya'll can switch places and he can throw rocks at you.”³⁶ Because he refused, Brandon made him join the group of children who were getting rocks thrown at them.

The brothers’ solidarity during the exercise didn’t let it shatter their relationship, but because the staff members had been urged by their mother to keep them separated, they were assigned to different platoons. Brett was held in orientation, while Brandon, who had already graduated from that stage of the program, was sent to the main platoon.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Because of their reputation for running away and rebelling against authority, the brothers rarely attended school and never left the property to work like the other captive children. Instead, they were assigned to separate work details on the compound mostly building a house for one of the members of the Fountain family without pay and under threat of violence:

If I wasn't getting' PT'd... puttin' through a boxing ring... puttin' in the you know what I mean? Puttin' a position that I didn't want to be in... I was working on that damn house... [pause] That was on the property... That was on the property, yes. That was owned by one of the family members... So yeah... [chuckles] Child labor laws! [chuckles] Ya'know what I mean? I done a lot of work for them. [chuckles]³⁷

Being in orientation, Brett also had responsibilities working in the kitchen, such as preparing food, serving it, and washing dishes. The only time he was ever able to communicate with his brother was when he was dishing out food to a cafeteria style line of captive children, which was brief and exposed to surveillance. While one might assume that their tuition would pay for healthy and delicious food, Brandon recalled overhearing staff members say that much of it was provided for free from a local foodbank.³⁸ Both brothers said it was low quality and mostly expired, but welcomed by hungry and exhausted children who had a very short time consume it three times a day in the chow hall.³⁹ The normal portions given to regular platoon could satisfy their hunger, but those in orientation would receive only the leftovers, which created a disciplinary mechanism to conform and advance to platoon.⁴⁰

³⁷ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

³⁸ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

³⁹ Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁴⁰ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020; Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020. As remarked in the previous chapter, while Leroy had stated that the food was abundant and high quality, the Tipps reported that the food was cheap

IV. TORTURE AND BRAINWASHING AMONG CAPTIVE CHILDREN

Although the captive children actively reproduced the hierarchy of violence at BBA, its foundational underpinning was the violence directed at them by staff members. In other words, the children were violent towards each other while in captivity, but only because BBA's practitioners coerced them to with torture and neglect. Aside from regular beatings and extreme physical training (PT), Brandon was tortured using other techniques, including being forced to grab an electric fence. He regularly witnessed public punishment spectacles of children being brutalized to build compliance among their ranks, such as one child being seriously injured from being "kicked in the face" by drill instructor while in push up position.⁴¹ He also heard stories of other abuses taking place elsewhere privately, including some cases where they were "held under water."⁴² Neither said they had heard of any instances of sexual relationships amongst captive children and staff members, Brandon believes that it's possible that it occurred but their families would not have believed them.⁴³

Although most of these punishments were carried out on the "weaker ones"⁴⁴ publicly for their pedagogical effects on the larger and/or more rebellious children, Brandon said that staff members would also take them to secluded areas to carry out

and sparse. Both, however, claimed that BBA's practitioners offered food to captive children in moments when they demonstrated obedience to the regime, such as recapturing a fugitive, assaulting them, and then returning them to the compound.

⁴¹ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The exact meaning of this phrase is unknown, but it is presumed that these were children who would be less likely to retaliate against BBA's administration.

punishments, which had a similar but distinct effect.⁴⁵ One such location was a laundry room where staff members would lock the children inside and “beat the shit out” of them.⁴⁶ Another site was the back forty, where staff members would force the children to intermittently PT and assault them, before bringing them back to the barracks. This powerful symbolic gesture simultaneously illuminated and mystified the ritual; even though the other children didn’t witness these punishments, it was clear that whatever the person had experienced deeply affected them, stoking their fears and encouraging compliance. The knowledge produced through these terrifying pedagogical rituals shaped the minds of those who witnessed and participated in a way that reproduced a specific political structure.

In addition to the emotional trauma the captive children incurred from deprivation, exhaustion, isolation, and assault, the staff members were also verbally abusive. Unlike the physical brutality they were subjected to, however, these strikes were often directed at their most intimate sensibilities. For example, in one such instance, Brett witnessed a child be forced to sing the song “I’m a little teapot” in the barracks while other children and staff members laughed and mocked him for being overweight according to the program’s standards.⁴⁷ Since they struggled to gain total compliance from Brett, when the staff members found out that his father had recently passed away, they targeted this specific vulnerability intensely:

[I]t's.. not just physical... You know what I mean? They'd humiliate you... I mean... just to the core... ... [T]hem drill sergeants man... it was like dude.. they would do anything... like I said man.. I lost my dad when I was 12 years old. You know what I mean? and they'd like you know what I

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

mean? And they'd turn around and say 'I'm your daddy.' You know what I mean? 'I'M YOUR DADDY NOW.' And I'm like... 'No... you're not.' You know what I mean... you know what I mean? and.. you know for somebody like a kid going through.. you know what I mean... that ain't... that ain't right...⁴⁸

Although Brett said that during his time at BBA he generally conformed to the program because of what was at stake, but in certain moments, such as when he was ordered him to call one the drill sergeants “daddy,” he “wasn’t necessarily gonna.. um... really take their shit.”⁴⁹ When faced with disrespect for his late father, he said he often retaliated, even though he would get punished for it: “taking an ass whooping was not something that I was afraid of... A lot of them kids were.”⁵⁰ Since he saw Herman Fountain as “evil” as soon as he arrived, Brett doesn’t believe the staff members were able to control him through his faith, nor through the other explanations for why he was there. In other words, because he never viewed Herman Fountain as a man of God, Brett’s encounter with the BBA’s expression of Christianity at BBA did not shake his faith, nor did it allow his beliefs to be transformed or harnessed politically:

I'm still Christian. I didn't.. I didn't let that... that.. you know that evil... I knew evil when I seen it. You know what I mean? My mom always raised me to be Christian. You know what I mean? And all that. And... you... you know... you just look at the man... listen to the man [Herman Fountain]... he's evil... you know what I mean? So, I didn't let that... I didn't let that.. um... evilness I guess.. know what I mean.. control me with my beliefs in God.. and you know my beliefs.. I guess you could say.⁵¹

However, he acknowledges that they were, to some degree, able to control his behavior through physical violence and limiting his access to food. Although Brett never

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

subscribed to the discourses, he was so hungry that the staff members were able to exercise great power over him by promising something as meager as a “moldy ass honey bun” for recapturing and beating other children on their behalf.⁵² Brett never wanted to participate in this system, but if he disobeyed staff members or attempted to protect other people, either they would assault him or order another captive child to do it. Through the (relatively) systematic application of this system of rewards and punishments, the staff members were able to control dozens of children at once despite being outnumbered, by breaking down and alliance and manipulating some to govern the others.

According to Brett, some of the children accepted as truth the program’s mission to improve their lives, save their souls, and protect society. However, the majority of children became suggestible to authoritarian directives because of the political context: [I]t’s kind of like that pitbull sick’em... You know.. you can’t... here you are... rewarded for hurting people... [pause] and... you know and.... in a place like that you... you... you lose touch with reality.”⁵³ Faced with brutality from every direction, the captive children were so high strung and insecure, that even in their sleep, were hyper aware of their vulnerability to violent attacks by staff member or other children at any moment. Brett remembered how he and other children would lay awake in their beds at night trying to process the situation. Scared even in their sleep, they would often sit up in the middle of the night screaming “Attention on Deck!” in the middle of the night.⁵⁴

Some children were more willing to comply with directives from staff members than others, either because they believed that obedience would improve their lives and

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

save their souls, or they were motivated by the prospect of earning the rewards offered by staff members. Brett doesn't remember many people from his time at BBA, but remembers Leroy as the "head guy" among the captive children, who the former considers having been "brainwashed"⁵⁵ by the program:

You got a lot of kids who are brainwashed... and that got favored a little bit more than others.. you know what I mean? It was like rank... and uh.. basically you know... they turn around.. and like I said... they'd get rewarded you know... and uh... [Leroy] was one of those guys.. [cont.] I don't remember how long he'd been there but like with him... [pause] more or less you know he was like um... [pause] He was the head guy... I guess... you know... he'd been there.. and a lot of the shit... you know.... you know I think he was really kind of brainwashed in a way.⁵⁶

Similar to what had happened to his brother when he had tried to escape, Brett was once forced to enter the boxing ring and fight Leroy, who after knocking him down continued to strike him on the ground; not only because this practice disallowed scared children to simply give up and avoid fighting, but also because it would earn the winner clout.⁵⁷

Although Brett acknowledges that the program had deeply affected Leroy's behaviors, he does not necessarily believe that the program's influence over Leroy's thoughts extended beyond his conscious fear of being punished for disobedience and the prospect of earning rewards for compliance.

Like Leroy, Brett never condoned the violent political system of BBA or subscribed to the beliefs that it pushed on him, but he also acknowledges that he enacted it at the expense of other captive children in order to survive. One of his responsibilities

⁵⁵ Ibid. It is important to note that Brett used the word "brainwashing" earlier in the interview multiple times before I asked this question. I included my own words from the interview because I wanted to include both passages, and my statement shaped his response.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

in orientation was pacifying new arrivals when they were distraught. He was also responsible for recapturing the ones who attempted to run away from the compound and then beat them up as punishment. For his obedience, they would compensate him with snacks and leniency from the vicious rigors of life in orientation, which he had no chance of otherwise evading.⁵⁸ Thus, speaking to how controlling his food functioned as a disciplinary mechanism that molded his behavior to reproduce the political structure of BBA.

While Brett complied with the program to a degree, he never lost the desire to personally intervene or get outside help when he witnessed abuse, but thought he would fail and be punished if he tried.⁵⁹ However, the more interpersonal violence he witnessed and participated in, the more desensitized he became to the suffering of victims.⁶⁰ On one occasion, Brett was ordered to recapture a younger child in orientation who had made it off the property on foot. By the time he located and caught up to the fugitive, they were on the porch of a nearby home. The child was crying, screaming, and beating on the door with his fists, when a scared and confused woman answered the door. Shortly before staff members and other captive children caught up, Brett proceeded to drag the much smaller child off the porch and towards the property, while she stood by and watched. Based on her posture, he does not believe this was the first time the “woman had witnessed something like this,” and that she did not intervene because children held captive at BBA were troubled teens.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Except for recapturing escaped children in the immediate surrounding area, Brett never left the property or had contact with anyone outside the program while held captive at BBA, including his mother. This made him vulnerable to the disciplinary regime because he was alienated from outside communications and information, while being subjected to intensive indoctrination. Brandon only interacted with the local community once, not because he left the compound, but because they flocked to it for some type of yard sale event. He believes they were either complicit to the violence taking place there because they subscribed to the regime's discourses or oblivious to it.⁶² In this way, the systematic fetishized torture of captive children constituted subjects outside the compound through its violent and pedagogical effects. According to Brandon, outsiders acted like "they didn't have a clue" about the abuse taking place at BBA, but had:

...heard stories about you know kids and runnin' and... they you know.. you know.. was beat up... and their.. they would go and bang on neighbors' doors and stuff like that in the surrounding area... and you know... they just... they always ended up right back you know? Uh.. I just.. I don't.. I don't see... how.. that community could not.. didn't.. didn't know what was goin' on... .. But.. at the same time... they had us so threatened.. to say anything to anybody.. because.. they convinced us that nobody was gonna believe us.⁶³

Therefore, implying that the captive children tended not to seek help from people outside the compound, as they were unconvinced that local residents would take them seriously and feared being punished by staff members for reporting abuse.

V. THE TWINS ESCAPE AND RETURN HOME

⁶² Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁶³ Ibid.

Whether or not there was a specific catalyst is undetermined,⁶⁴ but about three months after Brett had arrived, he was no longer willing to accept his political condition. Contributing to this attitude was the fact that he had been permanently segregated in orientation without the prospect of advancement. While the primary catalyst was not mentioned, he was decided to risk an escape attempt in June of 2002: “I couldn't take it anymore... you know what I mean... it got to the point like... if this gonna be my life ... I'm willing... ... You just take off one way... you know what I mean? And just keeping going.”⁶⁵ The program was a game that gave him the freedom to pursue rewards through compliance or accept punishment for rebellion, neither of which were desirable, so instead he opted to take the third option; attempting to escape and return home.

While assigned to kitchen duty in the middle of the day, Brett saw his brother and approached him about escaping, which Leroy claims he strategized, prompted, and helped facilitate.⁶⁶ According to Brett, his brother was reluctant to try and run away after what had happened the first time, but decided to go with him anyway because life at BBA was so terrible.⁶⁷ Although Brandon was hesitant to make another escape attempt, his brother's incitation gave him the courage to try again despite the fact that staff members said it was impossible, stating: “[T]hey.. bragged and bragged and bragged and bragged

⁶⁴ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Leroy Follow up session, March 2021. Although a catalyst for Brett's decision to escape that day in particular was never stated, Leroy explained that he had played a key role in this event before and after I explained the former's recollection of the story. As discussed in the previous chapter, Leroy claims that he told Brett that he should try to escape because DI Knott would be returning from a brief sabbatical, before explaining to him that he should travel towards the back 40 to avoid being reported by people in the local community. In addition to sharing this information, Leroy claims that he strategically distracted the practitioners on duty at a time that would give the fugitives a head start because no one would know they were missing for hours.

⁶⁵ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

⁶⁶ Leroy, Interviewed by author, March 2016; Leroy Follow up session, March 2021.

⁶⁷ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

about how people did not escape... you know? Well.. [laughter] ...til' they met me and my brother! You know?"⁶⁸

The brothers immediately informed some other captive children who had expressed interest in escaping. They acquired a bag of Jolly Ranchers candy and some kitchen knives to try and prepare for whatever came next.⁶⁹ Then, when the staff members were distracted, they walked out of the building and started running through the back forty with three or four other captive children. They didn't know exactly which direction to go, but they had heard stories about a Walmart beyond the woods from Leroy. The initial group got into an argument about which direction to go in and fractured. Another captive child, "Jack," decided to go with the twins because his destination was Nashville, which was in the same general direction as Chattanooga.⁷⁰

Although they were happy to have escaped, the rigors of life as a fugitive child set in quickly. Soon after they reached the woods, Brett was regretting his decision to escape, but pressed on: "Now within.. within ten minutes of this adventure I done fell in the swamp and I was like alright I want to go back... [Laughing] It was a long journey we was going through and I was already soaking wet.. and we're walking to an unknown destination."⁷¹ They reached a road about the time it started getting dark. After checking for cars they ran across it towards the light on the horizon. Worried their battle dress uniforms (BDU's) would draw suspicion from the local community, BBA residents, staff

⁶⁸ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁶⁹ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁷⁰ Ibid; Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁷¹ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

members, and law enforcement officials, the fugitive children changed into some clothes they found in bags on the side of the road.⁷²

They continued moving away from the compound and got far enough quickly enough and no one caught up. Without food or access to clean water, they treaded through the swampy woods of Mississippi in the middle of July for four or five days.⁷³ During this part of the journey, they able to obtain a small battery powered camping light and a lighter in a hunting stand, which they used to start small campfires at night. According to Brandon, they eventually reached a clearing of peanut fields, which gave them some relief, but they were so hungry that they considered roasting a stray dog.⁷⁴

Exhausted and filthy, the group followed some railroad tracks where they picked up some empty bottles along the way with the intention of finding clean water to fill them. Soon after, the group saw a water spicket on near building that looked like a church. As Brett approached the building, in odd clothing with bottles in hand, Brett saw a woman gripping a child's arm and whipping them with a switch.⁷⁵ She spotted the group of boys and retreated into the building before promptly returning alone to greet them and ask if they need help and what their situation was, because they appeared to be in poor health.⁷⁶ Since they were afraid she would report them to the authorities, they lied about their identities and the nature of the situation. Brandon told the woman that Jack was his cousin and that they had run away from home in Lucedale because of "family

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁷⁵ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

⁷⁶ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

problems.”⁷⁷ In response, she said something along the lines of “come in here and nobody’s gonna judge you... I think I got somebody that I think might be able to help you.”⁷⁸

While they were reluctant to trust her, they were so exhausted and hungry that they were willing to take the risk, so they followed her into the church. According to Brett someone from the church drove to McDonalds and returned with “five big macs... five large fries... five large drinks.”⁷⁹ Despite being famished, Brandon recalled that they struggled to eat because they were full so easily: “Like we could eat, but we could only eat like a.. a.. take ten minutes to eat one hamburger... I guess our stomachs shrunk.”⁸⁰ As they were eating, the man from the church who had brought them food continued to question them about their identities, circumstances, and intentions. In order to protect their mission, Brett elaborated on Brandon’s strategic explanation with a story conducive to their objective: “he was askin’ us what our situation was... I told him my mom... lived in Lucedale... and I told him you know my mom beat me... this... this... and that... you know a made up story you know to tell them... and I told them that [Jack] was my cousin.”⁸¹ Their choice to follow this strategy suggests that they were aware of their vulnerable condition as fugitives of BBA and that adults will claim to offer help in order to betray and exact abusive systems of control over them.

Soon after they arrived, they agreed to be transported to a Teen Challenge halfway house near Mobile, Alabama, where they remained for over a month while trying to figure

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

⁸⁰ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸¹ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

out how to get to Chattanooga.⁸² Throughout this period, the staff members at the facility kept asking them questions about their identities -such as their names, ages, and social security numbers- but the three boys continued to lie in order to avoid recapture. Since they wouldn't reveal any information about themselves, the staff informed the boys they had to leave the facility.⁸³ When a pastor who worked or volunteered at the Teen Challenge asked if he could drive them somewhere, they told him needed to get to Tennessee, where some family members lived who are willing to take them in. He said he transported them that far, but agreed to drop them off at a local Walmart, which he did. Before he drove away, he informed them there was a homeless shelter if they needed resources and to call if he could do anything.⁸⁴

The twins knew they couldn't call their mother or risk being returned to BBA or worse. They were, however, able to call a family member and have money wired to them through Western Union, which they then used purchase bus tickets.⁸⁵ Unknown to the twins at the time, at some point in this process, Jack secretly called his girlfriend and told her that he planned to travel back to Nashville by bus. The group got a ride to the Greyhound station from the pastor. They got on a bus and arrived in Atlanta, where they split with Jack. The twins got on another bus towards Chattanooga while he headed towards Nashville. Both groups made to their destinations, but as soon as Jack arrived, he was recaptured by bounty hunters and transported back to BBA. The twins would later learn that his girlfriend had told her parents, who had then proceeded to contact Jack's mother and explain the situation,

⁸² Ibid; Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸³ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020. Brandon says his girlfriend's parents bought the tickets; Brett says it was his grandparents.

because they were concerned for his safety.⁸⁶ Thus, exemplifying how the carceral capacities of BBA extended beyond the compound by hijacking the social networks of the children who were held captive there to surveil and discipline their behavior; a political dynamic that would breed paranoia and a deep sense of betrayal.

At this point, the BBA regime had never contacted Brett and Brandon's mother to inform her that her sons had escaped. It is presumed that she continued paying for their tuition while they were missing. She didn't become aware of the situation until someone told her they had seen the brothers walking through the mall where she worked at a hair salon six weeks after they had had left BBA.⁸⁷ While they had made it back to Chattanooga, the twins were deeply impacted by their experiences in captivity. Despite remarking that they were physically fit, the brothers struggled to readjust to being at home in different ways, but especially because they were paranoid and angry.⁸⁸ Both claim it was difficult to trust others after being betrayed by people in authority who were supposed to protect them, an attitude that Brett expressed when he stated: When you.. come out... ... you think everybody's against you... you know what I mean? Can't trust anybody... You know... everybody that are put in that position.. to help you... You notice that they're doing nothing but breaking you down and hurting you.⁸⁹ And, in the same vein, Brandon said: "I don't trust anybody... you know.. to this day. You know? Because.. You know? Everybody's that was put... [pause] you know... that was supposed to be a.... I guess a role model or summem' like that... you know... was always lettin' me down."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Brett Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸⁷ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

⁸⁸ Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

⁸⁹ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

⁹⁰ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

As they settled in, the brothers started feeling ashamed about what had happened at BBA and struggled with the realization that he must try to function after missing out on his only chance at an education and a normal childhood. According to Brandon, because BBA's practitioners had systematically put him in competition for survival with children for three months, it has since been difficult to build and maintain meaningful relationships with other people, who he feels could betray him at any moment. Not wanting to be at home, he started staying at his girlfriend's house again, where he learned that even though he had escaped BBA while awake, he could not escape it in his nightmares. While sleeping in the twilight hours, he would wake up in the night screaming, crying, and sweating. Sometimes, as his brother had witnessed other children do in the barracks, Brandon would wake up and yell: "Attention on deck!"⁹¹ Aside from having been trained to express abnormal behaviors at BBA that stayed with him, like eating as if he only had one minute or asking for permission to use the bathroom.⁹² Since he was ashamed of what had happened at BBA and how it had affected him, he had low self-esteem and his frustration was compounded by his sense that nobody believed what had happened to him.⁹³ Since he was profoundly affected by the program after only a few months, Brett believes that those children who were held captive there for years, some "cause their parents didn't want'em," must have struggled with trauma far more: "I could not imagine! I could not imagine! What that kid would come back out on these streets... actin' like. ... You've made a monster!"⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

They were struggling to reintegrate into society due to the debilitating nature of their experiences at BBA, which made them capable of being violent towards other people and motivated to do so if it serves their interests. Brett, who at first continued the rigid sleep and exercise routine from BBA when he returned home, said he relished in the power of his physical condition, skill in combat, and the willingness to use it:

[I]t.. kind of numbs you. You gotta think man you come out of that... you come out of that program man you're so swole... you're so cut... you have... you don't really have any feelings... you gotta think your mom and your dad are the people who sent you there... You know what I mean? You can't trust them. ... it would make you... it does make you cold hearted...⁹⁵

As an outlet to his anger his anger, he immediately confronted anyone he had any issues with before he left for BBA and was eager to fight while inhabiting a “hate mode.”⁹⁶ Due to Brett’s physiological and psychological architecture at this time, he no longer feared going to other carceral facilities; because having been imprisoned in both already in life, he perceived juvenile detention facilities to be much more lenient than life at BBA.⁹⁷ Despite only having been there a few months, the program’s mechanisms of punishment were burned into twins’ minds and they had trouble breaking free from the fear impending violence for failing to comply with the program.

Even though the brothers had survived BBA, they still had to make it in the world and their experiences there did not signify the end of their problems. Two or three years later, Brett had apartment in Chattanooga and was selling cannabis on the black market. Soon after an acquaintance named Philip Badowski stopped by and made a purchase,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Brett was investigated by the police. It turned out that his customer had murdered his parents before he came to Brett's, then returned home to dispose of the dismembered bodies before police arrived. He told me this story was significant to his experience at BBA, on the one hand, because this intensely horrific event further impressed upon him by forces beyond his control, further advanced his paranoia, frustration, and overall suffering. And, on the other, because he puts the staff members at BBA in the same category as this person, in that they carried out the most traumatic, disturbing, and violent, acts in his immediate life.⁹⁸

It is unlikely that some guardians are not aware of the circumstances to which they are subjecting their children in private residential “tough love” programs for troubled teens given the widespread availability of information about their history. However, Brett emphasized that his mother had no intention of exposing her sons to abuse. Instead, she was concerned with managing their trauma response to losing their father. This is why he believes that BBA and other TTI programs are attractive to many parents because they are marketed as a way for desperate parents to help their children by any means, but do not know how to do so. People tend to be drawn to them either as means to prevent their children from themselves and criminalization. They also attract clients through stories of “false phony hope” intended to coax people to enroll their children.⁹⁹ He expressed multiple times that he forgives his mother for sending them to

⁹⁸ Ibid; “Badowski Says Killed Parents Because ‘God Told Me To,’” *The Chattanooga*, December 10, 2004, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2004/12/10/59715/Badowski-Says-Killed-Parents-Because.aspx>.

⁹⁹ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020; Maia Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*. Szalavitz makes this same argument throughout her book.

BBA because he and his brother were rebellious as children.¹⁰⁰ He believes she was only trying to help her sons and doesn't imagine she would have sent them if she had known what would take place.¹⁰¹ With that in mind, he wants to warn other guardians from making the same mistake,¹⁰² and encourage them to consider approaches for managing their children's behavior other than subjecting them to an abusive Christian bootcamp, such as talking to them about their needs.¹⁰³

VI. CONCLUSION

This chapter has told the story of Brett and Brandon Tipps, which delineates their memories and analyses of the events leading up to their incarceration at BBA, what it was like to be there, and how they were personally and socially affected. In conjunction with their family's religious beliefs and the bloated criminal justice system in the neoliberal age, the brothers' trauma response to losing their father made them vulnerable to state-sanctioned policing and prison regimes, including private transport teams and residential facilities for troubled youth. After the Tipps brothers were ejected for escaping, rebelling, and encouraging others to do the same, the administration of Teen Challenge recommended to their mother that they be enrolled at BBA because it was more suited to her needs and those of her children. However, if they knew the administration knew it

¹⁰⁰ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. According to Brett, she claims that she was unaware that they would be abused and that she still feels guilt and regret about sending the twins to BBA. When he told her about his participation in the project and shared information about the program from other sources, she expressed regret and guilt for her decision to send her sons there.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

was particularly abusive, it is very possible that this was a scheme of revenge against the Tipps for having made them look like failures.

Upon returning home, the Tipps continued to violate the rules set by their mother and the state, so she began researching and planning to send them to BBA without their knowledge. Brandon was ambushed at his high school by a private transport team she had contracted and taken to the compound, where he tried to escape but was recaptured and brutally beaten. Brett was transferred there from a juvenile detention facility about two weeks later. Since their mother had warned the administration that they had a troubled history and acted more troubled when they were together, the twins were kept separated in different stages of the of the program's developmental model and the practitioners took measures to pit them against one another.

Like Leroy, the Tipps described a gendered disciplinary environment at BBA, where they were forced to wear BDUs and participate in hyper-masculine exercises while living on a compound where they rarely interacted with females. In addition to both working on construction projects on the compound, Brandon was on kitchen duty and Brett was assigned as an orientation guide. Without adequate access to healthy or desirable food, the former would use as an opportunity to steal, while the latter while the latter was able to acquire extra food by recapturing runaways for rewards from staff members. These distinct strategies suggest that, from distinct political positions, the twins exploited localized opportunities to meet their basic needs in a strictly controlled environment where they had had limited options; which speaks to Leroy's willingness to be violent on behalf of staff members given his strength and skill in hand-to-hand combat.

Rather than their Baptist beliefs making them vulnerable to BBA's disciplinary controls, their departing conceptions of the Christian faith acted as a shield to Fountain's theology, but the twins were still impacted politically by the torture and neglect that it vindicated. They were coerced to fight other captive children in the boxing ring, at least once resulting in Brett being knocked down and continuously beaten on the ground by Leroy. In addition to being both purveyors and victims of physical violence, they witnessed so much punishment and interpersonal combat that they became desensitized to the aversion to it they had felt when they first entered the program. Coupled with the results of their daily exercise regimen, they were both dangerous opponents with hair trigger tempers, heightened paranoia, and compromised social networks.

Tired of enduring the rigors of orientation for months on end, Brett and Brandon gathered supplies and ran off the compound with other boys in June of 2002 while Leroy distracted the staff members. Although several other children were recaptured, the Tipps and Jack were successful at getting away. They traversed a wooded swamp before encountering some railroad tracks and crossing a road, where they changed out of their uniforms, and then hiked through some fields and camped in the woods for nearly a week without food or clean water. Famished, exhausted, and desperate, they conscripted the assistance of some members of a church they wandered upon, by misleading them about their identities and circumstances.

After spending roughly a month at a Teen Challenge halfway house near Mobile, Alabama, they managed to contact relatives and convince them to wire them money to buy bus tickets so the group could get home. The Tipps made it back to Chattanooga, where they received word that Jack had been recaptured by a private transport team and

transported back to BBA. They were stunned to learn that their mother had never been notified that her sons had escaped nearly six weeks previously and she gave up on trying to keep them incarcerated in private facilities. After returning to everyday life in Chattanooga, the twins reported suffering from low self-esteem, shame, paranoia, and anger, associated with their experiences at BBA, which led them to be aggressive towards people they were hostile towards before attending. Within the first few years of escaping from BBA, Brett was investigated by state authorities after he sold cannabis to a local man who the former was unaware had just killed his parents, which further compounded his trauma.

The disciplinary technologies at BBA program did not achieve their discursive objectives to transform the Tipps brothers into obedient and law-abiding boys. However, the process did move their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, closer in line with the ideological model of the troubled teen. Aside from being shaped by the official parameters of the program, the informal political structures and processes at BBA were just as significant to how the residents were affected after they returned home. Leroy operationalized three categories of captive children; “bootlickers,” “brainwashed,” and “thug motherfuckers against the system.”¹⁰⁴ As a self-prescribed thug motherfucker against the system, Leroy was willing to carry out acts of violence to serve his personal interests while at the same time aligning himself with residents. Brett acknowledged this to be true, but he also characterized his behavior as that of someone who was

¹⁰⁴ Leroy, Follow up discussion with author, March 2021. As discussed in the previous chapter, whereas bootlickers did not necessarily believe in BBA’s discourses, they sought political advancement through demonstrations of obedience to practitioners, often at the expense of other captive children. Those who were brainwashed, on the other hand, bought into the program’s discourses, but did not necessarily prey on others to advance.

“brainwashed.”¹⁰⁵ The difference in their uses of the term “brainwashing” lies the fact that while Leroy views brainwashing as conducive to the embodiment of an abstract hegemonic ideology, Brett acknowledges how the imagined threat of violence or reward itself functions as an ideology in a well surveilled disciplinary environment with extreme consequences for violations.

Based on Brett’s use of the term, it is possible that Leroy and the Tipps, who rejected the program’s abstract theological and medico-juridical discourses, were “brainwashed” not with an abstract ideology, but a physiological and psychological trauma response had helped them to survive. These survivors may have deeply engrained in themselves the tendency to approach social interactions as if they were structured by interpersonal violence and competition rather than intimacy or support. In other words, they learned that trusting other people was dangerous and that expressing themselves is conducive to suffering and death. The result is a moral, political, and onto-epistemological, condition produced by surviving institutional child abuse through the long-term embodiment of a radically fragmented identity; one that has walked on the razor edge of domination and resistance in high pressure situations for extended periods of time. This is BBA’s curse; a physiological state of “hyperarousal,”¹⁰⁶ which has persisted into their adulthood; one that consistently destabilizes their sense of security and well-being to the detriment of their lives. It is the individual and social consequence

¹⁰⁵ Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Marlene Winell and Valerie Tarico, “The Crazy-Making in Christianity,” in *Christianity is not Great: How Faith Fails*, John W. Loftus eds. (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014), 385. According to Winell and Tarico, because “the experiences of infancy and early childhood provide the organizing framework for the expression of a child’s intelligence, emotions, and personality... when children are exposed to chronic, traumatic stress, their brains overdevelop the fear response and automatically trigger that response later on.” Thus, forming a condition called “hyperarousal,” which violently disrupts “feelings of well-being and emotional stability.”

of coercing children, who are both critical thinkers and isolated in a bizarre and cutthroat environment, to survive by conceiving of sociality as a sick game; one where the clock is always running, everyone is playing, the stakes of victory are high, and the dealer always wins in the end.

Near the end of the interview,¹⁰⁷ Brandon and I discussed what we thought the motivations of Herman Fountain and the staff members were in running a privately owned and operated residential program for troubled teens. He said that while he never believed it was to help kids or serve the fundamentalist movement. For a long time he considered the involvement of the owner and staff members to be rooted in the program's profitability, or the opportunity to accumulate wealth directly from tuition payments and by forcing the captive children to work on construction projects.¹⁰⁸ As Brandon has grown older and thought about it more, however, he now questions this explanation after realizing the implications of the fact that Fountain and his practitioners were vicious beyond what was necessary to maintain control over the children in their care. Therefore, rather than viewing the torment he experienced at BBA to be a consequence of Fountain's efforts to maximize profits, Brandon imagines that it was a haven for "a bunch of men... [pause] that... [pause] I guess.. got off on torturing children... ... [I]t's cruel... It's a.. you know.. a bunch of.. fuckin' weird people that.. enjoy beating and torturing kids."¹⁰⁹ The trend of sadistic behavior among "tough love" practitioners in previous chapters and this one, who sought out and pursued the profession of coercing other

¹⁰⁷ Brandon Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Brandon's frame of analysis was exemplified by an instance where his brother was intentionally mismatched in a full contact boxing match against Leroy, who "twice his size," because the staff members "thought it would be funny."

peoples' children to conform to their gendered model of an ideal child, suggests the TTI's fundamentally abusive character attracts adults who desire to torture children without repercussion.

Based on their experiences in privately owned carceral facilities and those run by the state, the twins are critical of both the execution and rationale of rehabilitative violence as a solution to social problems.¹¹⁰ Brandon believes that military schools for children should not be tolerated in society and questions the idea that “damaged” people who serve in the military or recover from addiction are necessarily qualified to guide and care for vulnerable children.¹¹¹ His brother also feels that residential programs for troubled teens, which he likens to the adult prison system, should be closed because they are harmful to residents and society at large.¹¹² Although both the brothers, adamantly disapprove of “tough love” programs for troubled teens and want to discourage parents who are sending their children, Brandon made a suggestion to those who would still consider this as an option. After being forced to smile for pictures to represent BBA in a positive light and controlling communications, he urges parents to at minimum spend some time researching and investigating the program before they make the choice to leave their child in the care of other adults and authorizing them to shape their behavior.¹¹³

Advancing this discussion, the next chapter discusses the relationship between the findings of previous chapters and the mission of the contemporary TTI survivor

¹¹⁰ Ibid; Brett Tipps, Interview with author, December 2020.

¹¹¹ Brandon Tipps, Interviewed by author, December 2020.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

movement. It begins by delineating a metanarrative of the stories told so far before describing the strategies and objectives of survivor-led organizations. After considering the strengths and dangers of reform, I argue that privately owned and operated residential facilities that use a “tough love” approach should be abolished by any means necessary and that evidence-based treatments be made more readily available to vulnerable children. It concludes with discussion of how these findings endorse and advance the three-pronged mission of WWASP survivors to raise awareness of institutional child abuse in private residential facilities troubled teens, support survivors, and advocate for policy change.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

The time has also come to recognize the painful truth that traditional Judeo-Christian moral values of pain and pleasure in human relationships have contributed substantially to child abuse and to the prevalence of physical violence in Western civilization. The religious system upon which our culture is based holds that pain, suffering and deprivation are moral and necessary to save one's soul or to make one a "good person."

-James W. Prescott, "Child Abuse in America Slaughter of the Innocents," *Hustler*, 1977.

I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The preceding chapters have discussed the history, techniques, controversies, of TTI programs, as well as how survivors make sense of their experiences before, during, and after they were held captive there. The stated purpose of these programs has been to improve the lives of residents, save their souls from eternal damnation, and protect society from their troubling behaviors. However, the testimonies of survivors and research conducted by their advocates suggests that not only are they ineffective at meeting their discursive promises, but also the therapeutic approach is harmful.

The rise of the TTI in the second half of the twentieth century occurred during the neoliberal restructuring of the state; including the deinstitutionalization of publicly funded mental health services, the expansion of the US criminal justice system, and intense post-war imperialism in the Third World during the Cold War. Public support for these programs were supported was garnered by appealing to the deep-rooted white supremacist culture, Judeo-Christian ideas about child-rearing, and a public interest in the budding behavioral sciences. Yet, even before behaviorism was applied in US carceral facilities, similar techniques were being deployed by fundamentalists like Reverend

Lester Roloff in his residential homes for adults and children, which formed the foundation of Bethel Boys Academy's (BBA) therapeutic approach decades later.

US history and that of the TTI cannot be separated from the mission of white Anglo-Saxon protestants (WASPs) to enact a global Christian utopia organized according to their white supremacist theology. When their ambitions were compromised by the outcome of the civil war and growing influence of modern sciences and philosophy, the formation of the fundamentalist movement in the early-twentieth century was catalyzed by fears that WWI and the British occupation of Israel were signs of the forthcoming apocalypse. It was within this context, soon after the emergence of behavior modification, that the faith-based rehabilitative technologies Frank Buchman's ministry and Alcoholics Anonymous were blossoming and becoming integrated into the US criminal justice system.

As Roloff began his crusade to forcibly convert adults and children in his residential facilities to his Independent Fundamentalist Baptist (IFB) theology after WWII, the US government was conducting experiments on behavior modification to fight the Cold War both domestically and abroad. Soon after, Chuck Dederich combined syncretized the AA method with "brainwashing" technologies to form Synanonian therapeutic communities, the treatment model of which was implemented within and beyond the walls of US carceral facilities for adults and children. The WASP backlash to the end of racial apartheid in the US garnered widespread support for the growth of the US carceral system amidst the War on Crime and War on Drugs, as well as fear of its consequences to white children, which spawned Synanonian programs for children like

Daytop Village, Phoenix House, as well as the privately owned and operated programs called CEDU and Élan School.

By the time The Seed and Straight Inc. were established as “tough love” programs structured by the Synanonian approach, and Synanon itself had established its own youth bootcamps, Roloff was operating numerous residential programs for children across the Southern US. Whether rooted in fundamentalism, behavioral science, or an amalgamation, these programs have been consistently praised and criticized by residents and others, who have communicated wildly distinct positions on their efficacy. As wilderness programs popped up around the country in the 1980’s, the Roloff Homes were exiled from Texas for refusing to submit to licensing requirements on the basis that it violated the religious freedoms of practitioners, but not before inspiring Roloff’s protégé Reverend Herman Fountain to begin his own youth programs in Mississippi where such laws did apply.

In the decade following the founding of Bethel Baptist Home for Children in 1978, hundreds of children ran away and reported being abused by Fountain and his employees, which he both denied and defended, prompting numerous police raids, Fountain’s arrest, and his incarceration for assaulting state troopers. Throughout this period, the founders of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs (WWASP) were developing and institutionalizing their Synanonian approach for children across North America and around the globe. Within years of Fountain’s release, around the time BBHC was rechristened as BBA and Bethel Academy for Girls (BAG) was founded in 1999, his program became affiliated with WWASP.

In the early 2000's, after having been incarcerated in numerous state-sanctioned carceral facilities for children, Leroy and the Tipps brothers were sent to BBA, where all three were subjected to institutional child abuse at the hands of practitioners and other captive children. After being falsely convicted of breaking into his neighbors' home during a period of heightened racial tensions in South Florida, Leroy was court ordered to attend BBA, where he continued to be targeted for exploitation and elimination by white supremacist structures. Near the end of Leroy's sentence, the Tipps arrived at BBA in the custody of private transport teams, which had been hired by their mother in an effort to protect them from the criminal justice system. While incarcerated, all three were immune to the program's discourses painting them as "troubled," but while they continuously resisted the will of their captors, they also strategically conformed to the program in order to survive. After they left BBA, all three were debilitated by the institutional child abuse they had experienced there, which rather than protecting them, made them vulnerable to the carceral capacities of policing and prison regimes.

Before they were implemented at BBA, the efficacy of the therapeutic approach employed residential programs founded by Lester Roloff and WWASP were consistently contested and supported by residents and their parents, as well as politicians, law enforcement officers, court officials. The history has been fraught with controversy and pushes for reform, which were most effective at reducing and ending institutional child abuse when the facilities were closed entirely. The residential programs for troubled teens that were operated in Lucedale have closed and others have followed suit since then, leaving countless survivors of institutional child abuse to reckon with the trauma they incurred while in captivity. At the same time, hundreds of other TTI programs remain in

operation and new ones have opened, which remain largely unregulated by the state, but survivors and their advocates are working to liberate their residents, support survivors, remember the fallen, and build a better future.

Leroy and the Tipps participation in this project has advanced the mission of WWASP Survivors and the greater movement to address the harms caused by the TTI. By telling their stories and those of other survivors, sharing their insights on the TTI, as well as the history of BBA and other facilities, this project represents a tool for raising awareness of institutional child abuse, supporting and validating the concerns of survivors, and advocating for children still held captive in these programs. On the surface, this document is comprised of fragments of stories weaved into a metanarrative, but in its depths there are also important considerations for anyone concerned with rectifying the injustices they describe.

These interconnected stories tell us not only that these programs were ineffective at improving the lives of most residents, but also that the experience was disruptive and traumatic long after they were released. Not only because of what was done to them, but also what they were made to do to themselves and each other. These stories tell us that children were exploited and tortured under guise of therapy or character building and at the profits were reaped by the owners. These stories tell us that practitioners pitted against one another to avoid the cost of hiring employees and accountability for abuse. These stories tell us that most of the children in these programs only conformed to the ideal subjectivity prescribed by the program to avoid punishment, not because their character was transformed. These stories tell us that owners and practitioners exploited the absence of federal regulation, to avoid regulation by moving their facilities and

trafficking children across state lines. These stories tell us that state agencies, politicians, and law enforcement officials, knew that these programs were abusive, but allowed them to continue to operate for decades. These stories tell us that owners and practitioners of faith-based schools implement and defend institutional child abuse as constitutionally protected by the separation of church and state. These stories tell us that the practitioners and many residents of these programs are sadistic and unqualified to treat children. These stories tell us that many guardians of residents were unaware that these programs were abusive and regretted enrolling their children, and subsequently won lawsuits. These stories tell us that minor reforms were inadequate and further legitimized these programs, which only ceased to be abusive when they were closed.

This dissertation has demonstrated that TTI programs are not only unjust for the damage they cause to participants, but also because they reproduce renditions of racist, classist, ableist, heterocisgenderist, and colonial relations through their violent and pedagogical effects beyond their walls. Further, that residential programs for troubled teens are particularly traumatic and dangerous for people whose identities depart from the ideal subjectivity they aim to produce. In particular, those who are mentally ill, non-white, and LGBTQ+, who are more likely to be targeted by staff members and other captive children within and outside the parameters of the program. The ideological production of the troubled as redeemable victims of racialized criminals bolsters public support for the expansion of the US criminal justice system. Further, they filter mostly wealthy and white children out of the criminal justice system; both in terms of preventing them from being arrested and keeping them out of state-run facilities where they are more vulnerable to criminalization.

This chapter proceeds to describe the current state of the survivor movement, as well as some considerations moving forward in relation to the growing abolitionist movement, who might together be more effective at addressing these injustices. Specifically, the dangers and futility of reforms that enable the reproduction and expansion of the TTI and the potential of abolitionists and survivors of institutional child abuse in privately owned and operated residential facilities working together. By flushing out the strategies and objectives of both movements, it becomes clear that they share the same interests and would benefit from formal and informal collaboration.

II. THE CURRENT STATE OF TTI SURVIVOR MOVEMENT

The owners, practitioners, and advocates of the TTI, contend that “tough love” programs are a response to an increasingly morally depraved, criminally inclined, and substance abusing, youth population in the neoliberal age. However, research suggests that today’s children are not only safer and less violent than they have been historically,¹ but also that they are using drugs and alcohol less frequently.² The previous section of this chapter has established that either by doing nothing³ or providing access to

¹ Christopher P. Salas-Wright, Erik J. Nelson and Michael G. Vaughn. “Trends in Fighting and Violence Among Adolescents in the United States: Evidence From the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2002–2014.” *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 6 (April 2017): 966-982. DOI:10.2105/AJPH.2017.303743.

² “Drug Use Is Lower Than Ever (Mostly),” National Institute on Drug Abuse, January 8, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2022, <https://archives.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/teens-drug-use-lower-ever-mostly>.

³ Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 268, 295-296. It is well documented that children are known to test boundaries and often outgrow their questionable behaviors without professional intervention. Though most children try drugs and alcohol before adulthood, most do not qualify as having either substance abuse issues or substance dependence as defined in the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic manual for psychiatric problems (DSM).

alternative treatments⁴ are more effective paths than residential programs that use a “tough love” to address the issues associated with troubled teens. Just as the TTI has garnered widespread criticism in recent years, there has been a growing public awareness, concern, and mobilization to dismantle the bloated capacities of law enforcement agencies, courts, prisons, jails, and immigrant detention centers. Yet, while the discourses and processes that catalyzed their concurrent growth are deeply entangled, the survivor movement and abolitionist movement have remained distinct political forces.

There is a barrier between these movements, perhaps, because the TTI’s historical relationship with racism has not been as frequently or coherently articulated. It could also be because legislative reform is aimed at bolstering the capacities of policing and prison regimes to criminalize the activities of people in residential programs for children, which could potentially affect the children incarcerated there as much as the owners and practitioners. Further, as previously remarked, opting to reform TTI programs according to the prescription of survivor organizations, threatens to further legitimate and embed them in the US carceral system as private juvenile detention facilities.⁵

⁴ See Szalavitz, *Help at Any Cost*, 314; Citing Scott W. Henggeler, Sharon F. Mihalic, Lee Rone, et al., *Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Six: Multisystemic Therapy*, Boulder: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1998; Also see Scott W. Henggeler, “Multisystemic Therapy: Clinical Foundations and Research Outcomes,” *Psychosocial Intervention* 21, no. 2 (August 2012): 181-193. DOI:/10.5093/in2012a12.

⁵ Dylan Rodríguez, “Abolition as Praxis of Being Human: A Foreword,” *Harvard Law Review* 132 (2019): 1576-1577. Speaking to the movement to reform the criminal justice system in the age of “mass incarceration,” Rodríguez states that “in addition to being ineffective at achieving their generally stated goals of alleviating vulnerable peoples’ subjection to legitimated state violence, reformist approaches ultimately reinforce a violent system that is fundamentally asymmetrical in its production and organization of normalized misery, social surveillance, vulnerability to state terror, and incarceration.”

Many survivors like Sarah Golightly,⁶ Bhad Bhabie,⁷ as well as the founders of WWASP Survivors,⁸ Breaking Code Silence, and Unsilenced, have called for the abolition of residential programs for “troubled teens” on the basis that they are inherently abusive and cannot be reformed. As far as I can tell, however, only Deirde Sugiuchi, a survivor of Escuela Caribe in Costa Rica, has publicly called for a collaboration between the TTI survivor movement and the “larger movement for abolition.”⁹ As an abolitionist and ally to the survivor movement, who has studied both extensively, I share Sugiuchi’s position for the aforementioned reasons and others.

Accreditation has been demonstrated to improve treatment efficacy and reduce institutional child abuse in some facilities.¹⁰ However, “tough love” programs are not only largely unsuccessful at treating the substance abuse issues, mental health issues, and behavioral issues, of vulnerable youths, but they often exacerbate them. Further, the existence of TTI programs distract guardians and the state from effective treatments and divert resources away from effective ones. While, at the same time, leaving larger structural issues unaddressed that are conducive to “troubling” behaviors or being labeled as “troubled.” Therefore, those concerned with ending institutional child abuse in the TTI should not employ strategies to fix “broken” programs, but instead adopt those aimed at

⁶ Sarah Golightly, Twitter Post, March 15, 2022, Accessed June 8, 2022, 5:00 AM, https://twitter.com/s_golightly/status/1503657412477304833.

⁷ Bhad Bhabie, Twitter Post, March 15, 2022, Accessed June 8, 2022, 12:34 AM, <https://twitter.com/BhadBhabie/status/1503590321082490880>.

⁸ “What is a WWASP Program?”

⁹ Dierde Sugiuchi, “Like Paris Hilton, I Am a Survivor of a Troubled Teen Treatment School and it was a Nightmare,” *Huffpost*, October 5, 2020, Accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/paris-hilton-this-is-paris-provo-canyon_n_5f79dfbec5b64cf6a251c23c.

¹⁰ Kenneth M. Coll, Margaret Sass, Brenda J. Freeman, et al., “Treatment Outcome Differences Between Youth Offenders from a Rural Joint Commission Accredited Residential Treatment Center and a Rural Non-Accredited Center,” *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth* 30, no.3 (2013): 227-237.

abolishing them and supporting alternatives. Especially, with consideration of the remarks made by Leroy and the Tipps regarding the motivations of Herman Fountain and other practitioners, who they believe was motivated by his sadistic desire to torture children.

The abolition of the TTI would not only serve the children who are held captive in them, but it would also emit cultural and political ripples conducive to decarceration for at least three reasons. First, because the onto-epistemological, production of the troubled teen as redeemable victims of the urban drug trade and other forms of cosmopolitan culture bolsters the directorates of policing and prison regimes to garner public support for their expansion. Second, because dismantling the TTI would render children across social groups vulnerable to the criminal justice system, who might have otherwise escaped the stigma of criminalization; to the effect of shifting the attitude of the US population away from criminalization and towards evidence-based and trauma-informed therapy. Third, and finally, the abolition of the TTI would challenge the abstract carceral logics that are institutionalized in other carceral facilities for children and adults, by problematizing the deep-seated Judeo-Christian belief that torturing people is a natural, necessary, and desirable, way to organize social relations. And, in doing so, destabilize the legitimacy of other policing and prison regimes in the US that reproduce white supremacy through their violent and pedagogical effects.

For these reasons, I advocate for the type of abolitionist future shared by members of groups like Critical Resistance and Anarchist Black Cross, who seek “a radical configuration of justice, subjectivity, and social formation that does not depend on the existence of either the carceral state (a state craft that institutionalizes various forms

targeted human capture) or carceral power as such (a totality of state-sanctioned and extrastate relations of gendered racial-colonial dominance.”¹¹ This lived vision of the future is not only constituted by a longing for the disappearance of violent institutions, but also the creation and reproduction of democratic social formations that depart from Christian racial capitalism’s telos.

As discussed in the introduction and throughout this dissertation, although residential programs for troubled teens in the US are harmful and ineffective, they receive state and federal funding and are largely unregulated by the state. Seeking to address these injustices, are individuals and survivor-led organizations and individuals who have turned to the internet to garner public support for their cause by raising awareness, supporting survivors, and lighting the pathway to social change. In recent years, survivors like *New York Times* Journalist Kenneth R. Rosen, author of *Troubled: The Failed Promise of Behavioral Treatment Programs*¹² have been outspoken about the TTI in interviews with journalists.¹³ Marcus Chatfield, a doctoral student in History at the University of Florida who survived Straight Inc., who interviewed survivors for his master’s thesis,¹⁴ has written numerous op-eds on the TTI, and has since published a book titled *Institutionalized Persuasion: The Technology of Reformation in Straight*

¹¹ Rodríguez, “Abolition as Praxis of Being Human,” 1576.

¹² Kenneth R. Rosen, *Troubled: The Failed Promise of America’s Behavioral Treatment Programs* (New York, NY: Little A, 2021).

¹³ Kenneth R. Rosen, “Kenneth R. Rosen: How ‘Troubled Teens might Be Troubled No More,’” *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 9, 2021, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/02/09/kenneth-r-rosen-how/>.

¹⁴ Mark Morton Chatfield V., “Adult Perspectives on Totalistic Teen Treatment: Experiences and Impact,” Masters Thesis (University of Florida, 2018).

Incorporated and the Residential Teen Treatment Industry.¹⁵ In addition to sharing his story in his book titled *Surviving Bethel: Overcoming the Odds*,¹⁶ BBA survivor Allen Knoll has attended protests, given interviews about his experience, created a Facebook page for BBA survivors¹⁷ to connect with one another, and is currently working to produce a documentary film called *Bethel Movie*.¹⁸ As a survivor of Agapé Boarding School for Boys in Missouri, Knoll's efforts and testimony were key to the passage of the Residential Care Facility Notification Act in Missouri¹⁹ last year and has recently cofounded a non-profit called Troubled Teen Advocate Group in Seattle, Washington.

In conjunction with the efforts of these survivors and others, organizations like WWASP Survivors, Breaking Code Silence, and Unsilenced, are leading the movement to end institutional child abuse in the TTI. Breaking Code Silence is a non-profit organization established in March of 2021, which dismisses the very possibility that “safe” TTI programs exist and seeks their abolition. According to the organization's website, it aims to serve as “a vehicle for the TTI survivor community – ever striving to uplift, organize, and inspire present and future generations, while promoting youth rights and evidence-based alternatives.”²⁰ The organization consists of survivors and allies

¹⁵ Marcus Chatfield, *Institutionalized Persuasion: The Technology of Reformation in Straight Incorporated and the Residential Teen Treatment Industry* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

¹⁶ Knoll, *Surviving Bethel: Overcoming the Odds* (2018), Kindle.

¹⁷ “Surviving Bethel,” Facebook, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/SurvivingBethel/posts/>.

¹⁸ “Bethel Documentary Group #BethelBoys,” Facebook, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/BethelDocumentary/posts/>.

¹⁹ Alisa Nelson, “Missouri Boarding School Abuse Victim on New Law: “We Can Finally Say We Are Heard,” *Missourinet*, July 14, 2021, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.missourinet.com/2021/07/14/missouri-boarding-school-abuse-victim-on-new-law-we-can-finally-say-we-are-heard/>.

²⁰ “About,” Breaking Code Silence, Accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.breakingcodesilence.org/about/>.

“committed to promoting appropriate, healthy, and effective alternatives to programs within the Troubled Teen Industry” by supporting “policy change, creating awareness, educating stakeholders, and investigating facilities and holding them accountable.”²¹ In addition to connecting various youth rights advocacy groups and supporting legislative reform, the organization conducts research on the TTI and provides resources for survivors, parents, and professionals.

Like Breaking Code Silence, Unsilenced is an organization of survivors and allies who are “committed to promoting appropriate, healthy, and effective alternatives to programs within the Troubled Teen Industry” by supporting “policy change, creating awareness, educating stakeholders, and investigating facilities and holding them accountable.”²² Their mission is, by “empowering self-advocates to promote last change,” to build a “world where youth are free from institutionalization and the voices of young people are respected in the development of their own mental, emotional, and physical well-being.”²³ To achieve this vision, the organization attacks at five angles, through an Advocacy Lab, an Investigative Research Team, an Information Technology (IT) team, a Policy Team, and a Communications team.

The advocacy lab seeks to “educate caregivers, school and justice systems, and child-placing agencies on the detrimental effects of institutionalization.”²⁴ On the one hand, this is achieved through its Survivor Independence Initiative, which provides resources focused on “education, reintegration into society, mental health, and life skills”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

to survivors and caregivers. And, on the other, it partners with trauma and cult experts to train therapists across the country on the experiences and struggles survivors of institutional child abuse in the TTI. Whereas Unsilenced's Investigative Research Team collects data and metrics to study the long-term outcomes of institutional child abuse on the lives of survivors, the IT Team seeks to "educate and raise awareness" by constructing a TTI program archive. Not only does this serve as a resource for guardians to investigate programs to which they are considering sending their child, but the "optical character recognition" process makes this record visible in search engines before the official website of dangerous programs. Thus, making it more difficult for programs with an abusive history to conceal these facts and/or change their names to detach their reputation from the stigma.

In addition to raising the awareness of lawmakers and the public to the prevalence and social consequences of institutional child abuse, the Policy and Communications Teams at Unsilenced are concerned with mapping the TTI's state of regulation across the US and pushing its own federal bill called the Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act (SICCA) of 2022.²⁵ As a survivor of the Provo Canyon School in Utah, Paris Hilton has in recent years used her celebrity as a platform to raise awareness of institutional child abuse in the TTI, including sharing her story on social media, giving interviews with reporters about her experiences, and creating a documentary called *This is Paris*.²⁶ She has also participated in protests with other survivors and given testimony before

²⁵ "The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act: Policy Memo," Unsilenced, June 8, 2022, <https://www.unsilenced.org/stop-institutional-child-abuse-act/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

politicians to support regulatory legislation in Utah and is currently working with advocacy organizations Breaking Code Silence and Unsilenced²⁷ to advance SICCA.

In line with the missions of these survivor organizations and others, SICCA incorporates multiple strategies to “prevent abuse and neglect by establishing rights, enhancing oversight, and providing funding for community-based care.”²⁸ This will be achieved by establishing a “Youth in Congregate Bill of Rights,” which is focused on protecting the physical, emotional, and social, well-being of children, assuring their essential needs are met, and establishing mechanisms to report abuse without fear of retaliation.²⁹ To prevent programs from evading the scope of SICCA through legal loopholes, the bill would also define terminology like congregate care, congregate care facility, institutional child abuse and neglect.³⁰ Another way this legislation would target institutional child abuse is to establish the SICCA Commission under the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which in addition to referring cases of institutional child abuse to the attorney general, would be responsible for reviewing state licensing plans and publishing data from each state.³¹ The SICCA commission would require that all congregate care facilities become licensed to receive DHHS funding, which would also be allocated to protection and advocacy organizations to identify and report programs that violate the Youth in Congregate Care Bill of Rights, as well as “community-based alternatives to congregate care programs and facilities” that comply.³²

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

If legislation like SICCA had been passed and effectively implemented decades ago, it is possible that millions of people who are living in the US today would not have experienced institutional child abuse in state-sanctioned residential programs or have had to cope with the trauma afterwards. At the same time, however, it does not appear that religious schools are included within the definition of a congregate care facility, which would leave faith-based programs free to operate and incentivize others to adopt their legal status. Since many are funded by donations and do not receive state funding, as had been the case with facilities owned by Roloff and Fountain, they would be unaccountable to SICCA's licensing requirements and the legal reporting mechanisms attached to accreditation. Therefore, while this legislation would be an effective way to reduce institutional child abuse in residential facilities, it is unable to tame the powerful spirit of Protestant Christianity and its influence on how children are raised in the US. While at the same time, by projecting the image that facilities licensed by SICCA are safe and effective, guardians may be more likely to enroll their children in residential programs when inappropriate.

III. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Since this dissertation engages a broad range of topics across time, there are numerous limitations and potential avenues to follow in order to extend this research. The second chapter engages the relationship between evangelical fundamentalism and the rise of the TTI, but much could be learned from further research interrogating why WASPs have widely supported the expansion of the US criminal justice system in the neoliberal age, as well as the scope of their influence on

contemporary disciplinary technologies. Chapters three and four interrogate the history of the Roloff Homes and Reverend Herman Fountain's ministry, yet there are countless other residential programs for troubled teens that have not been adequately examined, nor their political implications considered. While chapters five and six offer the stories of three TTI survivors, there is a need to study the perspectives of other survivors across time to further substantiate and elaborate on their claims, including those who believe the program improved their lives, saved their souls, and protected society.

This dissertation has explored the experiences of girls in the Roloff homes, Bethel Baptist Home for Children, and BAG through secondary sources, which revealed useful information pertaining to how the discourses and practices differed from the boys' program. However, it would also be generative to interview survivors of BAG, both to understand their perspectives on BBA and elucidate how the disciplinary regime was differentially gendered in accordance with fundamentalist theology. Constructing their stories would elucidate why residents imagine they were sent to this WWASP affiliate, what it was like to be there, and how they were affected by the experience afterwards as minors and in adulthood. Not only would this research reveal useful information about BBA and BAG through the eyes of women, but also the political system in which their stories and these programs were situated, including how it was enacted through their violent and pedagogical effects. Specifically, how the production of ideal gendered subjectivities, as well as the trauma they incurred while in captivity, influenced their onto-epistemological character as political subjects in the free world. To understand these findings, it would be necessary to delve further into the academic literature engaging the

relationship between gender and fundamentalism, in addition to how other carceral institutions have reproduced heterocisgenderism and patriarchy.

In addition to revealing the limitations of this dissertation, the findings have raised questions beyond the scope of this study that are significant to the prison abolitionist movement. Most significantly, the question of why and how Christian beliefs and practices enact political systems of domination and simultaneously have the potential to catalyze emancipatory action. Just as Christianity in the US has a complicated relationship with state institutions, many abolitionists have had adversarial relationships with Christianity, while others have drawn on its power in the pursuit of liberation. Therefore, by examining the relationship, I hope to gain insights into the power of Christian thought as a source of justice and injustice, in order to inform my strategies and objectives as a prison abolitionist.

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