

BEAT THE DEVIL.

Janet Reno's Coerced Confession

Janet Reno used a 17-year-old undocumented Honduran worker to help her win a fierce re-election battle for Dade County prosecutor back in 1984. Ileana Fuster, the young woman in question, received a ten-year prison sentence as a reward for testifying against her husband, Francisco, who pulled six life terms plus 165 years.

What is troublesome here is the manner in which Clinton's nominee for A.G. pressured Ileana to turn against her husband. If outlined in a human rights report the methods endorsed by Reno would justly be called brainwashing. They included isolation, quasi-hypnosis, conditioned response and kindred mind-bending techniques.

Having presided over the reduction of the young Honduran woman to psychic flotsam, Reno then huddled next to her, holding her hand while the prosecutor's hired "psychologists" guided Ileana through the catechism that produced her own confession and her husband's ruin.

The Country Walk case in Miami was a benchmark in the growth of our own century's echo of the Salem witch trials, the "ritual abuse" persecutions that have landed scores of innocent people in prison with hard time. It began less than a year after the McMartin preschool case started in Los Angeles in 1983 [see "Beat the Devil," February 12, 1990]. The account of it that follows is drawn from a compelling report by Debbie Nathan, now being published in *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations* (Vol. 5, No. 1, available by calling 507-645-8881). Another account of the case, *Unspeakable Acts*, by Jan Hollingsworth, and an ABC docudrama based on her book are both seriously flawed by Hollingsworth's financial, political and personal ties to parents and investigators involved in the prosecution.

In 1984 Francisco Fuster, a 36-year-old Cuban immigrant, was running a home-based babysitting service with Ileana in the wealthy Miami suburb of Country Walk. The case began when a 3-year-old boy asked his mother to "kiss my body. Ileana kisses all the babies' bodies."

As a Miami-based anthropologist, Rafael Martinez, consultant to the Dade County Medical Examiner's Office, told Nathan, in traditional Latin American cultures "kissing and hugging is common with children up to three and four years old. It is common for females to kiss children all over the place—including on the genitals."

In the North American culture of those early Reagan years, on the other hand, adults were learning that kissing and hugging of young children, or even more genteel contact with them in a day-care center, could swiftly lead to charges of oral copulation, sodomy, forced consumption of mind-altering drugs and alcohol, anal penetration with a crucifix, obscene magic ritual, unregulated transport of minors by broomstick across state lines and kindred phantasms of the circuit riders of Satanic abuse.

All this lay in store for the Fusters, whose clientele were soon being interviewed by Joseph and Laurie Braga, retained by the state as "expert" interrogators of children, though their skills were most conspicuously displayed in hectoring their tiny sub-

jects and forcing them with remorseless leading questions into following a predetermined agenda of incrimination.

Nathan's transcription of one such interrogation—in which 4-year-old "J.L." bravely insists, in the face of outrageous leading questions by Mrs. Braga, on the Fusters' kindness and proper behavior—is searing. Bullied and cajoled, "J.L." finally accepts the prepared script. God help the psyches of all these involuntary bearers of false testimony.

The Dade County prosecutor's office soon found out that Francisco had done time in New York for manslaughter, and had also been convicted of lewd assault for fondling a 9-year-old girl. On the other hand, his ex-wife denied he had exhibited any paraphilia, and other family members said his relations with children were affectionate, nonviolent and nonsexual. With one exception, no child lodged at the Fusters' displayed any physical sign of sexual molestation. The exception, Francisco's son, was deemed to have tested positive for gonorrhea of the throat. I say "deemed" because Nathan reports that the testing method then in vogue has since turned out to be utterly unreliable. Three years after Fuster's conviction researchers at the Centers for Disease Control showed that the test could not distinguish the gonorrhea culture from others occurring normally in both adult and juvenile throats (irrespective of sexual activity). When the C.D.C. examined samples from children who had supposedly tested positive for the bacterium that causes venereal gonorrhea, more than a third of the samples turned out to contain a different organism. The Fuster child's sample was destroyed before a retrospective analysis of it could be made.

Darkness at Noon

Throughout the interrogations the Fusters vehemently insisted on their innocence, and the case was threatening to become a political liability for Reno. In her re-election campaign against a strong challenger she was promising "justice"—that is, convictions.

Nathan gives an admirable account of how Reno's political emergency dovetailed with a crisis for the Fusters' defense attorney, Michael Von Zamft, who was finding that public hysteria over the Country Walk affair was imperiling his larger career ambitions. His solution was to sever Ileana's case from Francisco's and "persuade" her to confess that yes, she was an abuser, but only because she had been acting under duress. Francisco's defender thus became his prosecutor.

The only inhibition to this agenda was Ileana. She told a chaplain at the jail where she was being held that the district attorney and her lawyer wanted her to say things about her husband that weren't true. Ileana was terrified of being held in solitary. She'd already experienced such treatment during the first seven months of her imprisonment, sometimes being kept naked under a suicide watch, and she found it unendurable. By the summer of 1985 she was back in isolation again. Although she had now been separated from her husband for a period as long as they had been married prior to her arrest—eleven months—Ileana, eight weeks into solitary, insisted on his innocence.

A psychologist was mustered who duly declared that Ileana

Exhibit # 18 &



ALEXANDER COCKBURN

was a "needy child" under Francisco's domination. He announced that he could "get her to respond in any way that I pushed her . . . and she would be interested in pleasing me, so I wouldn't be mad at her." All that was now required was a confession, and Von Zamft recruited another psychologist, Michael Rappaport, who with his partner, Merry Sue Haber, ran a Miami business called Behavior Changers. You could say that Rappaport had experience in the field, having done time in Fort Leavenworth military prison for adultery and sodomy with two women he was counseling. He himself was ordered by the Florida Department of Professional Review to be under the supervision of a psychologist—namely his partner, Haber.

Rappaport visited Ileana in her cell at least thirty-four times, putting her through "visualization" exercises, contrasting the lenient treatment she would receive consequent upon a confession with the dire punishments ahead if she were uncooperative. "It's a lot like reverse brainwashing," he later told Nathan. "We just spent hours and hours talking to her. . . . It's kind of a manipulation. It was very much like dealing with a child. You make them feel very happy, then segue into the hard things."

While this exercise in applied mental disintegration was going on, Ileana was, according to Rappaport, receiving a surprising number of visits from prosecutor Reno, whose involvement in the case had become fanatical.

Ileana broke on August 21, stating during a polygraph test that she and Francisco had molested the children. Confessions were conjured out of her in subsequent depositions, often with Reno holding her hand while Rappaport hugged her. As Nathan puts it, "When viewed chronologically, Ileana's 'confession' depositions also suggest that many of her statements were confabulations or fabrications cued by her jailhouse visitors."

The material in the confessions echoed many of the staples of ritual abuse charges. The Bragas were enthusiastic missionaries for the "discoveries" about such "ritual abuse" then being elicited in the McMartin case in Los Angeles. Reno, similarly obsessed, had already been active in urging changes in evidentiary law to allow the admission of videotaped charges leveled by children and other star-chamber innovations advocated by the burgeoning ritual abuse lobby.

Snakes and Snake Oil

Ileana, prompted and coached by Rappaport, had been led into a world of fantasy. She said Francisco had hung her in the garage by her hands and his son by the ankles, and that he had also rubbed feces on her legs and put snakes on both her and the children's genitals. When a lawyer probed this accusation, she answered, "Well, I remember a snake." "What about a snake?" the lawyer said. "Having bad dreams about it," responded Ileana. If she failed to recollect an atrocity on the stand, Rappaport would take her aside for private counseling and then return her to give the appropriate responses—that she remembered "a tool thing" or "crowbar" Francisco put "around" her vagina; that Francisco took a gun and placed it on Ileana's vagina and fired it; that he poured acid on her blouse.

In her statement to the judge Ileana set her confession in perspective: "I am not pleading guilty because I feel guilty. . . . I am innocent of all those charges. I wouldn't have done anything to harm any children. . . . I am pleading guilty to get all of this over . . . for my own good."

She was sentenced to ten years, served three and a half, and was deported to Honduras, having divorced Francisco while in prison. As have many victims of these persecutions, she turned to Jesus, was born again and is now sequestered from journalistic inquiry by an evangelical group. Francisco is in prison, still insisting on his innocence, while his nemesis, Janet Reno, heads for Washington.

Meanwhile, the Ritual Abuse Task Force, a subcommittee of Los Angeles County's Commission for Women chaired by "psychologist" Myra Riddell and comprising therapists, alleged victims and religious leaders, recently claimed that Satanists are poisoning them, along with other therapists and survivors of Satanic abuse, by means of a pesticide pumped into their offices, homes and cars. They invited the county's chief of toxic epidemiology to listen to their allegations, which he categorized as "outrageous."

It's doubtful Reno will be given any trouble about the Country Walk case in her confirmation hearings, or about a later one involving a Dutch youth, who was similarly isolated for long months before being found innocent of abuse charges. The January/February *Ms.* has a pseudonymous article once again promoting the ritual abuse myth.

And guess who's behind all this ritual abuse? According to the lore of the ritual abuse lobby, a man called Dr. Green or Greenbaum is the leading promoter of Satanic child abuse in the United States. As a Hasidic teenager in a concentration camp he supposedly learned the essentials of the cultic lore from the Nazis, adding his own cabalistic embroidery. So, ritual abuse ends up as a subset of anti-Semitism. Pass that cup of Christian blood.

The "Personally" Cop-Out

Aside from her role in the Fuster case I find most bothersome Reno's equable statement at her first news conference after being nominated: "I'm personally opposed to the death penalty . . . but I probably asked for it as much as many prosecutors in the country, and have secured it, and when the evidence and the law justify the death penalty I will ask for it, as I have consistently. . . ."

The idea used to be that if laws or policies are morally and intellectually repugnant to you, you should reject appointments that will require you to enforce them. Reno's position isn't qualitatively different from that of Adolf Eichmann, who said he had a personal distaste for the Final Solution, though his career situation compelled him to make topological calculations as to how many Jews could be wedged into a cattle car on the way to the death camps.

Marty's Menu

Coming soon in *The New Republic*: "Blacks in the Ku Klux Klan, the Untold Story"; "Hitler's Black Grandmother."



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Reno's Victim

On August 24 Frank Fuster was stabbed in the neck with a ballpoint pen in one of Florida's state prisons, Hendry Correctional Institution in Immokalee. For several days he was in critical condition, with the pen lodged near an artery.

Readers may recall that Frank was the Cuban-American whom Janet Reno put away for six life terms plus fifteen years (165 years in all) in the Country Walk child abuse case in Dade County [see "Beat the Devil," March 8]. Reno was district attorney at the time. The case, later turned into *Unspeakable Acts*—a movie ludicrously biased toward the prosecution in its selection of materials—involved accusations that in 1984 Fuster and his young wife, Ileana, abused children in the day care center they were running from their home. Fuster was also alleged to have abused his own son.

It was a very big case for Reno, who needed publicity in her bid for re-election as Dade County prosecutor (she won handily while the case was in progress). Eventually, after months in solitary confinement asserting their innocence, Ileana was induced into turning against her husband and herself, pleading guilty as an involuntary accessory.

Michael Rappaport, one of the psychologists who coerced Ileana's testimony, told reporter Debbie Nathan, who was investigating the case in July and August 1991, that Reno had visited Ileana in her cell at least thirty times. Later, after Reno had been nominated for U.S. Attorney General, Rappaport denied knowing of Reno's visits and even of having contact with Nathan. A state-appointed private investigator working on behalf of the Fusters, Stephen Dinerstein, tells me that he visited Ileana in the women's prison in Miami at least twice a week and was often told by the guards to wait because Reno was in Ileana's cell. Dinerstein, now retired but working pro bono for a new hearing for Frank, is convinced of his innocence and outraged by his inadequate legal representation.

Dinerstein describes Ileana being held in an eight-by-eight cage with a light burning twenty-four hours a day, naked, washed by a hose through the bars, virtually incommunicado. In such circumstances the 17-year-old woman faced a psychologist, a defense attorney and a prosecutor all working to impose a confession upon her and instruct her in testimony against her husband. Jailhouse contacts by Reno with Ileana Fuster before her confession, particularly if in the company of a psychologist, would have been extraordinary, even unethical. A Justice Department spokesman relayed to the Attorney General my inquiry as to whether Reno had seen Ileana in the women's prison prior to her confession. Reno responded that yes, she had visited Ileana, not in her cell, as part of the preparation for trial.

A Mickey Mouse Case

Fuster has always maintained his innocence and, predictably, has had a hellish time in the Florida prison system. Every once in a while some television station in South Florida reruns *Unspeakable Acts*. Then the prison holding Fuster gets calls from agitated people vowing to kill him. It had been shown in the area just before the latest attack.

Fuster has been assaulted in five separate incidents in various Florida prisons in the eight years since his conviction. His daughter Kris tells me that the most recent attack occurred one hour after he was moved from a cell to an open dormitory. When Fuster was in intensive care, prison officials never called his family and later would reveal neither his whereabouts nor his condition.

The accusations against him derived from prolonged interrogation by shrinks of small children, who made the familiar charges of penetration by crucifixes, placing of snakes on the genitalia and other baroque tortures. Evidence assembled by Fuster's supporters as they seek a new hearing for him suggests that he had scandalously inadequate legal representation and was entirely innocent, put away by brainwashers sponsored by our good Attorney General, who is so concerned about child abuse that she gave the green light for the F.B.I. to murder the Branch Davidians and their children in Waco—over seventy of them—claiming to protect the latter from the former and duly incinerating them all.

Reno's indignation is curiously spasmodic. In the early 1990s the Sexual Battery Unit she had formed during her Dade years as D.A. was shaken by the disclosure that prosecutors assigned to the unit were spending their Friday afternoons drinking beer and diverting themselves by watching porn videos filched from the evidence box for cases they were conducting. Reno declined to fire any of them.

In the fall of 1992 Frank Fuster's son, now 15, was deposed concerning the state's claim, back in 1985, that he was the main victim of sexual abuses by Fuster. He had a chance to win several million dollars in a damage suit brought by his adoptive father against the Arvida Corporation, which owned Country Walk Homes, the residential complex in which the Fusters had their house and day care business. Until September of 1987 Arvida was a Disney subsidiary. A prime factor in the ferocity with which parents and litigators pursued the prosecution of the Fusters was that they stood to win vast sums from Arvida, and indeed did so. Nonetheless, Fuster's son insists on his father and stepmother's innocence. In the 1992 deposition he gave the following account of his interrogation and manipulation by shrinks at the age of 7:

Q. "It's my understanding and impression from reviewing many documents including lots of reports by psychologists that from the very beginning when you were asked if your father sexually abused you in any way that you were very steadfast in saying that he did not; is that correct?"

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "It's my further understanding that you only said that he did when you felt that you essentially had no alternative and if you didn't tell someone what they wanted to hear they would just go on endlessly; is that also true?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "Is it, in fact, true that he did not ever abuse you?"

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "Now in saying that, you are thinking back to when you were seven; is that correct?"

A. "Yes."

Exhibit #19

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Q. "Even though you were fairly young back then, do you feel you have been able to maintain a fairly good memory about things that did happen and things that did not happen?"

A. "With my father?"

Q. "Yes."

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "Can you be more specific in telling us why you did make statements to some of the psychiatrists or psychologists, I believe they were such as Dr. Simon Miranda, indicating that there was some sexual harm caused you by your father?"

A. "As I started, I said no. And it seemed forever that they would ask me on and on and on and on. It started to get very repetitive and tedious and I started to wear down."

...

Q. "Are you now making that statement under oath, fully aware that if you're not telling the truth that you are committing a very serious crime called perjury?"

A. "My father never touched me or anyone else."

...

Q. "Now you initially saw, I think doctor either Miranda or Drs. [Joseph and Laurie] Braga; is that correct? Do you remember which was first? I know they were the early ones, Dr. Simon, Marcie Cramer and the two doctors named Braga. Do you have any recollection of that?"

A. "Are they the ones with the ponytails?"

Q. "That's right."

A. "Yes."

Q. "Your memory is pretty good. That's right, they have the ponytails. Did they try to change your original statement, that your father had not harmed you?"

A. "Yes, sir. . . . It was the continuous visits and the long hours that I was there and they were just part of everybody else who questioned me."

Q. "You mean you had to go back again and again?"

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "And did you do with them . . . tell them what you thought they wanted to hear?"

A. "Yes, sir."

'Coercive Harmony': 666 and All That

Satanic and ritual abuse is gathering its haunches for the third millennium. The National Conference on Crimes Against Children is to take place in Washington between September 19 and 21, focusing on the sexual exploitation of children and scheduling as main speaker one of Reno's predecessors at the Justice Department, Edwin Meese.

The organizers say that they hope it will pave the way for a Reno Commission on Crimes Against Children, not to mention a National Registry of Offenders, presumably with 666 in bar code imprinted on their foreheads. The program speaks of "meetings with Attorney General Janet Reno's Chief Assistant, John Hogan." Hogan, under Reno's supervision, was the man who prosecuted the Country Walk case. He is now the Attorney General's chief assistant at the Justice Department.

Active in the proceedings are a number of fabled names in the world of ritual abuse allegations, including Roland Sum-

mit, who testified against Fuster; and Bennett Braun, who believes that at least 25 percent of women diagnosed with multiple personality disorder are escapees from Satanic cults, which he likens to Communist cells. Braun is a founder of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality and Dissociation. The incoming president, also to be at the Washington conference, is Dr. Colin Ross of Dallas, author of *Satanic Ritual Abuse* as well as *Adenocarcinoma and Other Poems* and the forthcoming *CIA Mind Control*.

The notion of multiple personality (what was described in another context as the human subject "constituted by a structure that has no center, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego,' i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself"—Althusser, 1964!) is all the rage these days. I'm not sure whether M.P. is dysfunctional or functional for the bourgeois state. A series of democratically participating personalities inside the same human envelope obviously raises serious legal questions of culpability.

On the other hand bourgeois society likes "roles," since they multiply opportunities for the circulation of commodities. But bourgeois society likes the idea of many personalities ruled by a chief executive who can, so to speak, exercise the tyranny of the boardroom majority. Against this democratic centralism is what political groups of the left used to call the "right to tendency" and faction. These days we have the numbing rituals of consensus formation, a collective act of brainwashing dictated, as always, by the most unstable participant, exercising the tyranny of the hysteric, the unhinged, anybody whom sensible people in the group decide it's not worth the trouble to upset. So there's consensus, since these more-or-less stable participants realize that their concerted objective is to please this weakest member, who obviously agrees.

Laura Nader, professor of anthropology at U.C. Berkeley, gave a striking interview in the *San Francisco Examiner* the other day in which she noted the growth of "coercive harmony," a process she recognized from methods of pacification introduced by European missionaries during the colonial period to control indigenous villagers.

According to the article, "Alternative dispute resolution, she said, 'was a response to the confrontation and litigiousness of the 1960s civil rights movement.' Spearheaded by former U.S. Chief Justice Warren Burger, it aimed to free courts of cases that could be settled through mediation or arbitration. But in the pursuit of compromise, justice often has been forgotten . . . and the pursuit itself has carried far beyond the justice system.

"It's basically a movement against the contentious in anything, and it has very strange bedfellows, from people with various psychiatric therapy movements, Christian fundamentalists, corporations sick of paying lawyers, activists who believe we should love each other . . . and it's spread into different parts of American life.

"We are talking about coercive harmony—an ideology that says you disagree, you should really keep your mouth shut."

