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Master thesis

A Conservative Evangelical Truth About Rock

An Analysis of the Peters Brothers' Anti-Rock Ministry in the Context of Cultural and Religious Fears in 1980s America

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Abstract

In 1980s America, there was a strong push towards the far right politically, religiously, and culturally. As moral and Satanic panics swept the nation, conservative groups and activists flourished. One conservative endeavor that emerged from this fearful, conservative environment, was the anti-rock crusade of brothers Dan, Steve, and Jim Peters. This thesis explores the Peters brothers' Truth About Rock ministry in the context of societal and evangelical developments and changes in overall anti-rock discourse during the decade.

This thesis investigates written and audio-visual material distributed by the evangelical anti-rock activists and examines how it fits in with the anti-rock movement and the conservative movement in general. The analysis shows that, on one hand, the Peters brothers were highly original and innovative in their activism. On the other, they proved to be finely attuned to the traditionalist values that were typical of their time. While scholars have previously showed little interest in the Peters brothers, this thesis argues that they are valuable as an example of how various aspects of the conservative movement can intersect in one case. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the Peters brothers were crucial in turning the focus of anti-rock protests away from rock music itself. Instead, conservative evangelical morality became the main issue of anti-rock discourse in the 1980s.

Keywords: Anti-rock, moral panics, conservatism, evangelicalism, Christian fundamentalism, crusades, traditionalism, family values, 1980s America, popular culture

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Chapter 1: Approaching the Peters Brothers' Anti-Rock Ministry

Introduction

In late November 1979, evangelical preacher brothers Jim and Steve Peters of the Camp Zion Christian Life Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, held the first of many seminars where they told youths about the dangers of rock music. Or, as they put it: "the largest satanic power in the world today."[1] As an extension of these Truth About Rock seminars they regularly arranged rock record burnings that obliterated tens of thousands of dollars' worth of rock music records.[2] "Knowing that many rock musicians stand for atheistic and satanic principles, that they themselves lead homosexual, immoral and perverted lifestyles… we burn these albums in the name of Jesus Christ," Steve proclaimed.[3] Joined by their older brother Dan, the Peters brothers traveled the United States and the world with their Truth About Rock ministry for almost a decade, from 1979 to 1987. During this time, their anti-rock activism drew the attention of both local and national media. In the conservative climate of the 1980s, which enabled traditionalist evangelicals to influence right-wing politics to an unprecedented degree under President Ronald Reagan, the Peters brothers gained considerable recognition. They also sparked controversy and were heavily critiqued both by outsiders and fellow believers.

By now the crusading brothers have largely disappeared from the public eye, and their anti-rock publications and paraphernalia are collecting dust or moldering in landfills. Once in a while the Peters brothers resurface as a topic for online ridicule. On hard rock forums and in online reviews of their books, rock fans and readers reminiscence about their earlier encounters with the Peters brothers' ministry, sharing stories and making jokes about them.[4] A blog titled *Encyclopedia of American Loons,* labels the preachers "absolute legends of fundamentalist insanity," and one metal vocalist remembers their

[1] William Dachelet, "Rock Music Labeled a Tool of Satan," *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, September 13, 1981, A11.
[2] *The Minneapolis Star*, "Youths of Burning Faith put the Torch to Albums," November 30, 1979, 10A; Mary Lahr, "Preachers: Rock Music is Satanic: Urge Kids to Burn 'Devil' Discs," *St. Cloud Times*, January 29, 1981, 17; United Press International, "Albums, Tapes Destroyed: Pekin Church gets Burned up over Rock Music," Chicago Tribune, October 5, 1980.
[3] United Press International, "Albums, Tapes Destroyed," 2.
[4] NYCDreamin, "02/18/83 Kiss -VS- The Peters Brothers in Bloomington, MN," *KissFAQ.org*, unofficial fan website (February 18, 2010).

activism as "a whirlwind of craziness."[5] In 2019, the podcast *The Current Rewind* dedicated an episode to the curious case of the Peters brothers.[6]

While on their anti-rock tours, the Peters brothers made frequent appearances in various news media, and they also produced and distributed print, audio, and video material as part of their anti-rock crusade. Despite their intense and extensive anti-rock activism and influence, however, the brothers have received little scholarly attention in the decades following their crusading years. Scholars occasionally mention them when covering anti-rock, but then only briefly and as a supplement to more prominent anti-rock crusaders such as predecessor David A. Noebel, contemporaries Bob Larson and Jacob Aranza, and successor Jeff Godwin.[7] Some scholars, such as John Brackett, have researched and read the material by and on the Peters brothers, but spend little time discussing it.[8] Others, such as Eileen Luhr, discuss the pastors more in detail, but use a smaller selection of primary sources.[9]

Addressing research on anti-rock and conservatism more broadly, Luhr claims that the Left and other outsiders often have underestimated the depths and abilities of Christian conservatives. As Anna Nekola puts it, "scholars have had [difficulty] in understanding this opposition [to rock music] on its own terms." Consequently, she contends, they have failed to see how anti-rock sentiments are connected to the larger cultural and political landscape of American conservatism.[10] The link is there, and it is important. Even though the anti-rock crusades of the twentieth century have now lost much of their momentum, the underlying issues are still prevalent in American society. Traditionalist family values and evangelical fears of secular or satanic forces continue to inform culture wars and ideological clashes.[11] As was the case with anti-rock activism in the 1980s, current conservative opposition to queer rights, sex education and critical race

[5] G.D. "#2108: Dan & Steve Peters," *Encyclopedia of American Loons*, blog (November 25, 2018); strad., "Impaler vs The Peters Brothers," YouTube video (uploaded February 4, 2020), 12:58.
[6] Andrea Swensson and Cecilia Johnson, "Parental Advisory: The Peters Brothers' anti-rock crusade," episode 8 of *The Current Rewind*, podcast (September 04, 2019).
[7] See Brad Klypchak, "'How You Gonna See Me Now': Recontextualizing Metal Artists and Moral Panics," *Popular Music History*, 6.1/6.2 (2011).
[8] See John Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide: The Formation and Development of an Antirock Discourse in the United States During the 1980s," *American Music* 36, 3, (2018).
[9] Eileen Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture* (University of California Press, 2009).
[10] Anna Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music': Conservative Christian Anti-Rock Discourse and the U.S. Culture Wars," Popular Music, October (2013), 408.
[11] See for instance Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Berkeley: Basic Books, New York, 1988); Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Andrew R. Lewis, "The Transformation of the Christian Right's Moral Politics," *The Forum* 17, 1 (2019).

theory are all expressions of white traditionalist, mostly evangelical, conservative fears that have flourished in postwar America. This is also the case with the recent Supreme Court overruling of *Roe v. Wade*, which up until June of 2022 had secured women's constitutional right to abortion.

In this thesis I argue that while the Peters brothers might be perceived as obscure, baffling, and strange today, their Truth About Rock ministry had a substantial impact on their contemporary audience and the larger anti-rock movement. My thesis statement is that the Peters brothers, through their innovative multimedia crusade centered around popular culture, were pioneers in altering the anti-rock discourse of the 1980s. By building on established anti-rock rhetoric while also making the musical aspect less prominent, the Peters brothers were key in making anti-rock less about rock and more about preserving Christian morals. In so doing, their role in upholding white, conservative evangelical ideology in 1980s America and beyond was far greater than has previously been acknowledged.

This thesis aims to bring an additional perspective to scholarship on anti-rock, but also, more generally, to research on American conservatism during the years of Ronald Reagan's presidency. This thesis attempts to tie the issue of anti-rock closer to the moral and religious culture of American conservatives. The first main chapter of my thesis, therefore, explores the larger context that the Peters brothers were part of, before going more in-depth on their Truth About Rock ministry in the second main chapter. As such, this thesis is not exclusively about the crusading ministers. But, by studying the Peters brothers more in-depth, I hope to demonstrate how the modern conservative movement was (and still is) far from monolithic or simplistic. In particular, the primary source material showcases the complex and seemingly illogical interaction between conservative ideas and innovative practices. This interaction is key in understanding contemporary conservatism in America.

Theoretical Approach

The field of American studies spans a wide array of methodological, theoretical, and ideological traditions. While often treated separately in theory, the various scholarly fields and subfields are in practice tightly interwoven. As Kimberly Phillips-Fein shows, the dividing lines between various fields and subfields within American studies are especially blurred when researchers study twentieth-century American conservatism.

Consequently, treating each discipline in isolation results in an inaccurate analysis.[12] John Carlos Rowe claims that "these many fields are understood in terms of their relevant intersections and historically significant contacts," so that "distinctions [between them] no longer have much relevance."[13] Yet, it is useful to be aware of the differences between the fields, as their distinct approaches might yield various results and conclusions. To keep strictly within one theoretical and methodological framework, however, is certainly counterproductive to producing nuanced and extensive knowledge about and understanding of the United States of America. For my thesis, then, I have opted not to follow one single theoretical or methodological tradition. Instead, I combine aspects of various historical, cultural, and religious studies approaches to analyze and discuss my primary source material as thoroughly as possible.

Lisa McGirr writes that scholarship on the Right tends to focus on the conservative movement by looking at the most powerful organizations and those who led them.[14] Republican leader Ronald Reagan, evangelical preacher Billy Graham, and Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority are key figures in the rise of the Religious Right.[15] Studying them provides necessary context for understanding the 1980s, but a narrow focus on such individual leaders and the most wide-reaching movements tends to simplify the past. The main problem is that this focus presents a top-down narrative of a unified conservative movement winning political power through the election of Reagan.[16] As Phillips-Fein points out, even Reagan's triumph was not a straightforward and definite victory. Rather, it was marked by conflict, as "the problems that conservatives faced when in power actually became stimuli for the movement to continue to grow."[17] The overarching narrative of the successful coalition between the New Right and the Religious Right is useful, but it is not sufficient to understand the events and atmosphere of the decade when the United States reportedly turned right.[18]

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[12] Kimberly Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* (December 2011).
[13] John Carlos Rowe, *The Cultural Politics of the New American Studies* (Open Humanities Press, 2012).
[14] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001).
[15] See Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Basic Books, 2016); Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).
[16] See Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie. *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2008).
[17] Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," 742.
[18] See for instance Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*; Bruce J.

To balance out a somewhat narrow top-down approach and better understand the complex dynamics within the conservative movement, a supplementary bottom-up perspective is needed. There is a growing consensus that a mobilization of the grassroots was key in bringing conservatives into positions of political power. Even so, McGirr writes that "[w]e still lack a deep understanding of the women and men who built the movement and of the communities from which they sprang," an issue that Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie also emphasize and aim to amend.[19] Rowe suggests a focus on "cultural politics" as opposed to electoral and government politics in American Studies.[20] Some studies look at popular culture and religion to shift the angle to bottom-up. Randall Stephens, as well as Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, analyze the relationship between Christianity and rock music, as does Luhr in her work on Christian youth culture.[21] W. Scott Poole primarily uses horror films as an example of how popular culture works with or against religious conservatives, while Kyle Riismandel discusses video games, *Dungeons and Dragons*, and punk rock. Scholars have focused less on the links between pop culture, religion, and conservatism, though there are researchers who aim to, as Poole puts it, provide "a much-needed link between the study of American history, religious studies, and the studies of popular culture."[22] With this thesis I, too, hope to offer useful connections between these three interconnected subfields of American Studies.

Moral panics and fear have been recurring themes in US history, and particularly in an increasingly conservative postwar society.[23] Americans feared the end of the world, either by nuclear war or by divine intervention, and they feared the supposed weakening of morality among young people – or the nation at large. The character of moral panics changed drastically with the societal structure of the suburbs, colored by an evolving media technology and commodity culture. This is part of the reason why Phillips-Fein points to suburban studies as an important point of growth in the field of American

Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[19] Story and Laurie. *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 11.

[20] Rowe, *The Cultural Politics of the New American Studies.*

[21] Randall J. Stephens, *The Devil's Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock 'n' Roll* (Harvard University Press, 2018); Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (University Press of Kentucky, 1999); Luhr, Witnessing Suburbia.

[22] W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America: The Devil We Know* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), xxi; Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975-2001* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2020); see also Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field."

[23] See for instance Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; May, *Homeward Bound.*

conservatism.[24] In this new environment, fears and moral panics also moved beyond the typical conservative evangelical milieu. Perhaps the best example of this is the Satanic Panic of the 1980s. As such, the suburbs serve as a useful entry into investigating the growing societal and moral fears in America at the end of the twentieth century. But, as Riismandel, Luhr, and McGirr suggest, the suburbs are simultaneously the location for religious pop cultural innovation.[25] These perspectives will have important implications for my thesis.

I argue that anti-rock campaigns are a critical aspect of a fear nexus best studied using conservative history, religious studies, and popular culture. Yet anti-rock is still a minor theme in academic research. Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave's *Anti-rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll* remains the most extensive book on anti-rock, though this is an explicitly pro-rock publication aimed primarily at a popular audience. Martin and Segrave do provide important information and discussions about half a century of anti-rock trends, though the sections on the 1980s focus primarily on the Parental Music Resource Center (PMRC) that called for hearings on what PMRC labeled "porn rock."[26] The PMRC hearings of 1985 have received most of the attention in academic analyses of more recent anti-rock activism. As the main activist in this process, Tipper Gore has garnered some attention.[27] In literature focusing on the explicitly religious anti-rock activists, the discussions mostly center around Noebel, Larson, Aranza, and Godwin. Luhr provides a more nuanced academic treatment of anti-rock sentiments, focusing particularly on the developments in the 1970s and 1980s. Here she does touch on the Peters brothers, hinting that they are indeed worth analyzing further.[28] To do so, my thesis investigates their anti-rock activism through several lenses.

As a thesis in American studies, this study applies an interdisciplinary approach that might best be described as contemporary history with a focus on religious conservatism. This investigation zeros in on moral panics and the culture war. I will look at historical events and religious developments in relation to each other and to popular culture. Mainstream popular culture in general and rock music specifically are not concerns in and of themselves. Rather, this thesis deals with religious conservative

[24] Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field."
[25] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors.*
[26] Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1993).
[27] See for instance McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear.*
[28] Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia.*

reactions to them – whether that means opposition to or adoption of pop cultural themes and forms of expression. In the same way, media and marketing practices will be valuable points of reference, though not central to the focus here. Mapping the historical and religious contexts of the primary source material, as well as observing how it interacts with cultural and technological changes, is crucial to understanding the anti-rock activism of the Peters brothers. This master's thesis will provide a scholarly perspective on the Peters brothers and their place in the American anti-rock movement – but it also serves as an example of how the numerous trends, values and issues of 1980s conservatism intersected in one specific case.

Primary Sources

The Peters brothers' anti-rock activism spanned a wide array of publications and other ways of outreach. Their in-person "Truth About Rock" seminars that they held in their local church community, starting in 1979, quickly spread from local to national media, and from there on they branched out into both printed texts and multimedia materials. Most notably they published several books in the first half of the 1980s. Among these Peters brothers' publications were *Documentation I: What the Devil's Wrong With Rock Music?* and *Documentation II: Rock Music Research!*, along with an autobiographical piece titled *The Torching of Rock and Roll!* and a "media history" of their seminars.[29] *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom* was published in 1984, as was *Why Knock Rock?* The latter was co-authored with Cher Merrill, who also helped Dan and Steve write *Rock's Hidden Persuader: The Truth About Backmasking* (1985) and *What About Christian Rock?* (1986).[30] The Christian publishing company Bethany House Publishers published all of these.[31] The Peters brothers also sold cassette tapes with analyses of and interviews with both secular and Christian rock groups, as well as tapes on the topics of backmasking, their rock seminars, suicide, and a "Glossary of Rock Groups." They also released *Truth of Rock* as a video presentation and produced a film titled *Youth Suicide Fantasy* before 1985.[32] Christian bookstores sold these books and tapes, and at the anti-

[29] Peters, Steve, and Dan Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom* (St. Paul: Truth About Rock Ministries, 1984), iii. This list also includes "The Story of the Peters and Their Fight Against X-Rated Rock," but it is unclear whether this is the subtitle of *The torching of Rock and Roll*, or whether it is a separate text. Also note that this list does not include publication years.
[30] From what I have found, Cher Merrill was not involved with any book or video projects apart from the Truth About Rock publications and releases.
[31] Bethany House Publishing is now a part of the larger Baker Publishing Group, see Baker Publishing Group, *About*, Baker Publishing Group.
[32] None of the video material I have accessed state a definite year of release, but they were most likely released in 1983 and 1984, respectively.

rock seminars attendees could purchase items such as Truth About Rock buttons.[33] The Peters brothers even offered a monthly newsletter subscription service, named *Truth About Rock Report*, where they sent out lists and assessments of the latest music.[34]

I have not accessed all their publications, and none of their Truth About Rock merchandize. Nonetheless, my selection of the Peters brothers' texts and media mirrors the variety found in their output. This material should therefore be sufficient to discuss their activism, both in-depth and broadly within the scope of a 30-credit master's thesis. It will also serve as a foundation for further investigation into the anti-rock ministry of the Peters brothers.

Of their many printed publications, the 1984, 1985 and 1986 books are the only ones I have been able to acquire.[35] Because of their substantial volume, these will make up my central source materials. However, seeing how the books are both repetitive and occasionally vague or contradictory in character, they must be supplemented with other sources as well. This is also important because these books were published a few years after the "Truth About Rock" campaign first started. For the early years of their crusade, news stories and advertisements have proven important printed documents. I collected 200 clippings from the digital newspaper archive newspapers.com, and they have been especially useful in showing how contemporaries viewed the Peters brothers.

In terms of audio and audiovisual material, I have been able to access digitalized versions of the Peters brothers' cassette tape *Kiss Exposed*, their tape on backmasking, the video presentation *Truth About Rock*, as well as the second part of *Youth Suicide Fantasy*. In the cases of the first part of *Youth Suicide Fantasy*, and the remaining tapes, I have been obliged to rely on what little I have come across from secondary sources that comment on them. Clips from the Peters brothers' appearances on television between 1979 and 1987, however, have proven valuable, much in the same way as the newspaper clippings have. Furthermore, these appearances reveal how the Peters brothers talked and behaved in less controlled settings than their staged and edited films and audio tapes. Often the contrast is notable.

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[33] See Ginger Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content," *The Times* (Munster, Indiana), October 3, 1985, 11.
[34] See Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock*, film, 1983?
[35] In 1998, Steve Peters published *Truth About Rock: Shattering the Myth of Harmless Music* together with Mark Littleton, also through Bethany House Publishing. Even though it is available online, I have not included it because a) it is not published by the Peters brothers collectively, and b) because it was published a decade after the brothers' anti-rock crusade faded from the public eye.

Chapter Overview

The first step in analyzing my primary sources has been to explore the historical, societal, and religious contexts in which the new forms of rock and anti-rock activism developed. Chapter 2, therefore, opens with a general discussion of central social and religious developments in the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s. Key aspects here are the emergence of the political New Right and the Religious Right, the spread of the Satanic Panic, and other fears related to morality and American traditionalism. Here I will also address the changing trends and disputes in conservative evangelical ministry. The chapter then moves on to discuss the developments within rock culture and anti-rock discourse more specifically. This chapter relies heavily on scholarly work, though primary sources in the form of news clippings and contemporary publications are included to provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of the context in which the Peters brothers operated.

Chapter 3 focuses on the primary sources tied specifically to the Peters brothers' anti-rock crusade. I start the chapter with an overview of their background. I then explain what the brothers refer to as the "Four Fatal Flaws" of rock music, namely: lyrics, lifestyles, goals, and graphics. Throughout the Peters brothers' ministry, each of these flaws are investigated through the themes of hedonism, occultism, suicide, substance abuse, commercialism, and rebellion/violence. Consequently, I will analyze each theme and discuss how they relate to anti-rock, evangelicalism, and conservatism. In addition to analyzing the Peters brother's arguments and viewpoints, the chapter will also consider their forms of outreach. At the end of the chapter, I will delve deeper into how the Peters brothers' ministry was part of the conservative movement.

The theories, examples, and historical context presented in chapter 2 serve as the framework with which to analyze the findings from chapter 3. In chapter 4, the secondary and primary sources are brought together in a discussion of how the Peters brothers and their activism fit into the anti-rock discourse of their time. Furthermore, the conclusion places the Peters brothers in the broader context of contemporary American conservatism.

Chapter 2: Contextualizing 1980s Anti-Rock Crusades

The Decade of the Conservative Movement

Historians and social scientists often label the 1980s as a conservative decade in the United States.[36] Political and cultural events and changes in public discourse at the time suggested a sudden shift to the right on all levels of American society: national and local governments, education, media, religion, and culture. This change is remembered as dramatic in popular memory, particularly due to Ronald Reagan's landslide presidential election in 1980. Many scholars, therefore, have focused on analyzing the factors that led to this seemingly abrupt change in America.[37] As more work has been done on the rise of the conservative movement, it has become increasingly clear that American conservatism had been in the making for a long time prior. The political and societal victories of conservatives in the 1980s were not as surprising – or absolute – as one might initially have thought.[38] As liberal and progressive movements and policies became more visible and influential in the 1960s, they challenged conservative ideology. This brought conservatism to the surface and triggered a backlash of the newly formed conservative movement.

Barry Goldwater revived the modern conservative movement with an appeal to anti-communism while nurturing a deep skepticism of federal government control. In so doing, he was able to unite social traditionalists and corporate libertarians around a political goal, Alf Tomas Tønnessen explains.[39] Communism seemed to threaten Americans' way of life and the faith of traditionalists, while it presented a different economy than the capitalist system. Like communist ideas, so thought many on the right, a strong federal government could also disrupt the economic prospects of the free market. Furthermore, social conservatives had little interest in a government that meddled in their private affairs.[40] As an extension of the anti-government attitude in the two main camps

[36] See for instance Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*; Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*; Schulman and Zelizer. *Rightward Bound*..
[37] See for instance Kruse, *One Nation Under God*; Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors.*
[38] See Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field."
[39] Alf Tomas Tønnessen, "American Conservatism, the Republican Right, and Postwar U.S. Political History," *American Studies in Scandinavia*,.45, 1-2 (2014); Alf Tomas Tønnessen, "The New Right, the Turning Point of 1978, and the Fragility of the American Dream," *미국학 논집* 47, 1 (2015); see also Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000.*
[40] Kruse, *One Nation Under God*. To illustrate their willingness to oppose a controlling government he shows how religious grassroots and elected officials called for 146 amendments from 1962 to 1964 "to restore prayer and Bible reading to public schools," 205.

of the conservative movement, taxes became a central issue.[41] To these groups, higher taxes were a threat to corporate and personal freedom. Using federal regulations of farming as an example, Goldwater wrote that "an immense tax burden" put on the field of agriculture showed "[d]isregard of the Constitution" and "brought about the inevitable loss of personal freedom."[42] In the words of conservative economic Milton Friedman, "economic freedom, in and of itself, is an extremely important part of total freedom."[43] Goldwater built on already existing American sentiments, but his efforts to bring them together were key in creating the New Right. Even though Goldwater lost the run for presidency in 1964, and the conservative movement thereby lost some of its momentum, conservatism gained strength and influence in the coming years.

Traditionalists and libertarians were not distinctly separate groups. In *One Nation Under God*, Kevin Kruse shows how religious and traditional values influenced and were influenced by corporate and political America, long before the postwar conservative movement emerged as a cohesive unit. Christian faith and principles may seem incompatible with the secular qualities of capitalism, but in the United States these were successfully brought together. Moving away from the liberal Protestantism of the New Deal era, which focused on selflessness, the free-market ideology introduced an element of self-interest as a positive thing. Billy Graham linked salvation to devotion and obedience to the employer, mirroring salvation through Christian devotion to Jesus.[44]

While Kruse and Daniel K. Williams both show that evangelicals backed Richard Nixon's presidential campaigns in 1968 and 1972, the conservative movement at large moved away from national electoral politics after Goldwater's loss.[45] Meanwhile, the grassroots continued to grow and lay the foundation for a new nation-wide political surge in 1980. As the movement no longer had one clear leader, individuals and groups organized around issues that affected the well-being of the home and family. Traditionalist grassroots concerns about gender and sexuality were nothing new, as Elaine

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[41] See McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.
[42] Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, Ky.: MacFadden Books, 1963), 39.
[43] Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 9; for further discussion of this, see Kimberley Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).
[44] Kruse, *One Nation Under God*; See also Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Hilde Løvdal Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters: James Dobson and Focus on the Family on the Traditional Family and Capitalist America," *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, ed. (New York: Oxford Academics, 2015).
[45] Kruse, *One Nation Under God*; Williams, *God's Own Party*.

Tyler May and Michelle M. Nickerson show.[46] But when social conservatives intensified their attempts to protect traditional family values in the 60s and 70s, family life was politicized in a new way.[47] As such, the modern feminist truism "the personal is political" rang just as on point for anti-feminist conservatives.[48] With the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, conservatives responded with intense anti-feminism. Somewhat ironically, women were central in mobilizing against what they perceived as threats to their own homes and families.[49] Donald T. Critchlow notes that anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly "rose to prominence (…) as an organizer" as she "mobilized tens of thousands of women across the nation to block the proposed" Equal Rights Amendment, amongst other things, was central to the conservative grassroots.[50] In Florida, Anita Bryant protested gay-rights as others across the Sunbelt. They thought homosexuality was a threat to the traditional family unit. Until 1973, abortion had mainly been a concern for Catholics such as Judie Brown, one of the founders of the pro-life organization American Life League. Reaction against *Roe v. Wade*, however, resulted in a massive surge of anti-abortion activism from other groups as well.[51] The often female-led grassroots activism of the 1970s and 1980s happened to a large degree in white middle class suburbs. These stalwarts held conservative convictions about family structure and values that were deeply rooted in religion, as well as a strong sense of patriotism.[52]

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[46] May, *Homeward Bound*; Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[47] Anneke Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Identity in the Late Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, 1 (Winter 2014); see also Randall Herbert Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

[48] Emily Suzanne Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant: Women's Leadership and the Politics of the New Christian Right," *Religion and American Culture* 28, 2 (2018), 254.

[49] Balmer, *Blessed Assurance*; see also McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant"; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism.*

[50] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade (Politics and Society in Modern America)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3, 12; Donald T. Critchlow, *Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[51] Ted G. Jelen, "Religion and American Public Opinion: Social Issues," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); see also Balmer, *Blessed Assurance*; Randall Herbert Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics, and Beyond* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010).

[52] McGirr, *Suburban Warriors;* Susan D. Rose, "Gender, Education and the New Christian Right," *Religious Revival in America* (January/February 1989); Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant"; David J. Neumann, "Domestic Security: Defending the Evangelical Home in the Southern California Sunbelt," *Journal of Religious History* 43, 1 March (2019).

Traditionalists and libertarians were still united by anti-communist sympathies, though communist invasion was no longer the most voiced concern.[53] However, anti-communism and liberal threats to the conservative family unit were not at all disconnected from each other. May points out that in the immediate postwar years, family values concerns were directly linked to morality and fears of communism. She writes that "moral weakness was associated with sexual degeneracy, which allegedly led to communism."[54] It might appear as though conservatives moved away from anti-communism in the 1970s, but it could still be seen as an underlying issue as the grassroots pushed the traditional family unit to the front of the conservative agenda. What really "provided late-twentieth-century conservative ideology with internal coherence," Luhr writes, was that "the middle-class home [had become] the moral – not just economic – center of American life."[55]

As such, family values and religious beliefs were central to the Christian nationalism of the conservative movement. David J. Neumann writes that there was a "widespread American conviction that domestic stability was indispensable to the nation's well-being"[56] In the 1940s and 1950s, May argues, the connection between family and nation was a widely accepted idea. Traditional family values seemed to resonate with the American population at large, and it was taken for granted.[57] Kruse writes that already toward the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, religious nationalism was growing stronger, and religion was increasingly a matter of national identity. He states that "formal recognition of God (…) was an essential measure for preserving the country's character" in the eyes religious traditionalists.[58] With the emergence and development of countercultural ideas, norms and behaviors that had been considered unequivocal characteristics of American life and character were starting to lose hold. It was no longer granted that everyone would conform to a Christian, heteronormative family structure like the one idealized in earlier postwar years.[59] In other words, in the eyes of concerned conservatives, the future of the nation was at stake. To predominantly white conservatives like Jerry Falwell and James Dobson, there seemed to

[53] Story, Laurie. *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*; Kruse, *One Nation Under God.*
[54] May, *Homeward Bound,* 99 (this citation and page number is from the 4th edition of 2017); see also Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters."
[55] Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 23.
[56] Neumann, "Domestic Security," 90.
[57] May, *Homeward Bound.*
[58] Kruse, *One Nation Under God,* 206.
[59] May, *Homeward Bound*; Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life."

be no substantial difference between anti-traditional values, communism, secularism, and anti-Americanism.[60] Conservatives feared for their country.

Riismandel shows that other fears, closely tied to the suburbs, also contributed to widespread anxieties in American society in the wake of the countercultural 1960s. President Nixon declared a War on Drugs in 1971, and polls showed that Americans increasingly thought drugs to be a great threat to the country.[61] Riismandel argues that this, combined with new forms of popular culture, environmental pollution, and an increased focus on crime and violence due to the faltering economy, made 1970s America seem more dangerous. Especially in the suburbs, the fear led to attempts of "spatial regulation that would safeguard public space," which often led to even more unease in the suburbs.[62] It was a matter of keeping the children safe, but also of protecting the suburban, white, middle-class way of life. Fearful suburbanites, worried by the dangers lurking in what they had initially imagined to be a safe haven, were key in pushing American politics to the right.[63] Not all these fears were directly tied to conservatism. Even so, without the unsafe atmosphere of the suburbs, conservative grassroots would have been less successful in securing the Republican Party the presidential victory in 1980.

While Ronald Reagan's presidency of 1981 to 1989 is an important symbol of the conservative decade, it is only one element in an otherwise intricate conservative web in postwar America. The Reagan Revolution would not have been possible without, as Richard M. Meagher puts it, "the vital discursive and political groundwork" laid by a plethora of politicians, religious leaders, activists, and everyday Americans during the preceding decades.[64] It was not necessarily a surge of people-turned-conservative that brought about this rightward shift, but the existing conservatives getting louder and more politically active. President Richard Nixon's Silent Majority was no longer quiet.[65] In the 70s there was an increase in "moral politics," and supposed moral issues were now more

[60] See for instance Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life"; Tønnessen, "American Conservatism, the Republican Right, and Postwar U.S. Political History"; Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters"; see also Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Doubleday Publishing co, 1981).
[61] Jennifer Robinson, "Decades of Drug Use: Data From the '60s and '70s," *The Gallup Organization*, website (Washington, D.C.: Gallup Organization, July 2, 2002). In the 1980s, President Reagan would continue Nixon's "war on drugs," albeit in a new form, see Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*.
[62] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*, 122.
[63] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors.*
[64] Richard J. Meagher, "Backlash: Race, Sexuality, and American Conservatism," *Polity*, 41, 2 (April 2009), 259.
[65] Kruse, *One Nation Under God*.

tied to the Republican Party.[66] By embracing the sentiments of a revived conservative movement, the Republican Party won their landslide victory in the presidential election of 1980. The Republicans were indebted to and under pressure from various factions, but most importantly the Religious Right. The Religious Right was in turn dominated by conservative evangelicals.

Evangelical Developments

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Religious Right became a driving force in the political endeavors of the conservative movement. In these decades, the dividing lines between denominations had become less prominent, and faith had become more a matter of liberal or conservative.[67] As such, conservative Catholics and Jews joined forces with a considerable, and steadily growing, majority of evangelicals to form the Religious Right. In a time of denominational fluidity, and with many Americans leaving their churches altogether, evangelical churches grew due to innovative modes of outreach.[68] Emily Suzanne Johnson describes (conservative) evangelicalism as a growing "subculture" in the 70s.[69] In the 1980s, however, they had grown into a voting bloc of great interest to the Republican establishment. A suburban-based evangelical grassroots came to the front ranks of national religious and political discourse, and fundamentalist Baptist preachers like Jerry Falwell mobilized evangelical congregations nationwide.[70] Evangelical conservatives claimed to have once been opposed to the idea of meddling in secular politics. Yet, their growing fears of moral decline in the 1960s and 1970s, they proclaimed, pushed them to political action.[71] As Brackett writes, evangelicals realized that the battle between good and evil "could be won through political activism."[72]

Evangelicals dominated the Religious Right. Though not all evangelicals were conservative – nor were all conservative Christians evangelical. Conservative evangelicalism was characterized by a strong focus on evangelical male headship and

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[66] Lewis, "The Transformation of the Christian Right's Moral Politics"; Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*; Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*.
[67] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Jelen, "Religion and American Public Opinion."
[68] See for instance Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism*; Darren E. Sherkat, "Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion: Religious Affiliation and Patterns of Religious Mobility, 1973-1998," *Social Forces* 97, 4 (June 2001).
[69] Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant," 238, 240; see also Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism.*
[70] Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines.*
[71] Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*; [71] Story and Laurie. *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*; See also Jerry Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg, Va.: Liberty House, 1997).
[72] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide," 275.

clearly divided gender roles.[73] It was, and still is, not uncommon for conservative evangelicals to hold a fundamentalist theology, and to lean towards the right and the Republican Party. For the purpose of this thesis, one might also say that conservative evangelicals are Christians who feel conflicted about the relationship between faith, popular culture, and media. While on one hand condemning the music, radio, film and television as non- or even anti-Christian, they also embraced and appropriated these modes of expression and communication as tools to worship and evangelize.[74]

By the 1980s, American society had changed drastically from that of early postwar America – and so had evangelicalism. American evangelicalism has long traditions of being flexible, easily adapting to contemporary modes of communication, as Jason C. Bivins shows.[75] Keeping with this tendency, conservative evangelicals borrowed tactics and ideas from countercultural progressives.[76] Evangelicals became particularly prominent because of their innovative forms of outreach. In the 1960s and 70s, the Jesus Movement appealed to youth through a relaxed and casual atmosphere with music influenced by folk rock – despite being conservative in their interpretation of and relationship with scripture.[77] In the 1970s, suburbs often turned into Church communities that functioned as a whole parallel society with all the commodities and services of middle-class America at large – only steeped in a religious spirit. Susan D. Rose describes the central role of evangelical schools, while McGirr points to Christian youth centers and megachurches as key features in these communities.[78] Luhr further explains that evangelicals extended their witness practices to "commercially owned spaces" like stores.[79] Perhaps most pivotal, though, was how television, in the words of Sarah Hughes, brought "contemporary evangelical ideology into the domestic space."[80] With television as a regular feature in middle-class homes, televangelists preached the gospel on the small

[73] Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life"; Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[74] See for instance Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Stephens, *The Devil's Music*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors.*
[75] Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[76] Bruce J. Schulman, "Comment: The Empire Strikes Back — Conservative Responses to Progressive Social Movements in the 1970s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, 4 (2008).
[77] Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[78] Rose, "Gender, Education and the New Christian Right"; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors.*
[79] Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia.*
[80] Sarah Hughes, "American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970-2000," *Journal of American Studies* 51 (2017), 711; see also Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*.

screen. Believers no longer had to leave their living room to watch services, which reduced divisions between church and home.

In the bustling evangelical environment of the suburbs, Christians marketed their faith as a commodity. John Fletcher, though he talks about liberal evangelicals as much as conservative, points to how Christian communities and megachurches of the 1970s and 1980s were a place for profit-making. On the one hand church members gave their "lifetime commitment" to purchasing "a relationship with Jesus."[81] On the other, evangelicals spent their money on publications and goods marketed as Christian. Evangelical merchandise, record stores and – as Daniel Vaca shows – bookstores were nothing new, but the scale was vastly different from before.[82] In addition to holding sermons and reading the Bible, churches and individuals distributed booklets and other materials to guide believers and attract non-believers. McGirr shows that there was a surge in Christian self-help books in the 1970s.[83] The Jesus People Movement displayed the "enthusiasm" of their faith with "buttons, bumper stickers, Bible covers, posters, crosses, and other 'Jesus Junque.'"[84] Neumann writes that in the postwar years, "evangelicals routinely warned about the dangers of materialism," in the sense of consuming worldly goods.[85] Nonetheless, suburban believers embraced consumerism in the 1970s and 1980s, as long as the goods served the purpose of spreading the gospel and strengthening Christianity. The Christian message was also adapted to the optimistic consumerism of the American middle class. McGirr argues that through this new, suburban mode of living, the religious focus changed from sin and repentance to joy, in great contrast to earlier evangelicals.[86]

The Satanic Panic

But at the same time that evangelical churches thrived and basked in the vibrant optimism of communities shaped by new technology, Christian commodities, and a joyful message, many also firmly believed that Satan was a looming threat. A Harris Poll from 1994 found

[81] George Barna, quoted in John Fletcher, *Preaching to Convert: Evangelical Outreach and Performance Activism in a Secular Age* (University of Michigan Press, 2015), 228.
[82] Daniel Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019); see also Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 1995); Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters."
[83] McGirr, *Suburban Warriors;* self-help and guidance books were also popular in the 50s and 60s, see Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[84] Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 7-8; See also McDannell, *Material Christianity.*
[85] Neumann, "Domestic Security," 97.
[86] McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.

that just over 75 percent of the Christian participants believed in the devil.[87] To evangelicals, however, his work of evil seemed to increase as the end-times drew nearer.[88] The approach of the apocalypse and the existence of Satan as an actual entity were prominent aspects of an evangelical cosmology. In other denominations and religions, Satan can be a symbol, either as a metaphor for a force within humanity itself, or as a personification of destructive tendencies. But for evangelicals, the existence of Satan and his demons can be as real and concrete as any other worldly thing or being. This is exemplified by, for instance, the fundamentalist minister Bob Larson's focus on exorcism and satanism in his sermons and books, and by Christian horror author Frank E. Peretti's novels that warned of the demonic dangers lurking in everyday life.[89] As Bivins puts it, conservative evangelicalism is a "religion of fear."[90]

White conservative American evangelicals saw these secular threats through policies, laws, and the general social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. But most crucially, Satan attacked through popular and media culture. Many of the outlets that allowed evangelicals to spread their beliefs and build communities of faith were also a potential pathway for Satan into the lives of unsuspecting Christians – and particularly children. Poole, Hughes, and Bivins all point to how conservative evangelicals saw horror films as some of the vilest expressions of satanic influence.[91] Works such as the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the comedy film *Life of Brian* ironically reinterpreted the story of Jesus, causing massive protests by conservative Christians.[92] In the 1970s and 80s new forms of entertainment developed, many of which worried conservative evangelicals. This included arcade games and the fantasy roleplay game *Dungeons and Dragons*.[93] Heavy metal's rise in the music mainstream was also of great concern. Analyzing the

[87] Associated Press, "Most Americans Believe in God, New Polls Reveals," *The Times Herald*, October 15, 1994. Data from more recent Gallup Polls show that there is only a slight decrease in people who believe in the devil in 2016, see The Gallup Organization, "Religion," *The Gallup Organization*, website, Washington, D.C.: Gallup Organization.
[88] See for instance Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*.
[89] See for instance Bob Larson, *Satanism: The Seduction of America's Youth* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1989); Andrew Connolly, "Masculinity, Political Action, and Spiritual Warfare in the Fictional Ministry of Frank E. Peretti," *Christianity & Literature* 69, 1 (2020).
[90] Bivins, *Religion of Fear*.
[91] Poole, *Satan in America*; Hughes, "American Monsters"; Bivins, *Religion of Fear* Bivins, *Religion of Fear*.
[92] Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*.
[93] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; See also evangelical fundamentalist Phil Phillips' numerous books on the topic, with titles such as *Turmoil in the Toy Box* (1986) and *Horror and Violence: The Deadly Duo in the Media* (1988).

satanic trend among young people, one psychiatrist listed "[a] preoccupation with heavy metal music (…) [and] interest in role-playing games" as "red flags."[94]

In response to Satanic threats, conservative evangelicals frequently emphasized the appeals in Ephesians, chapter 6: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."[95] Evangelical resistance to Satan was expressed through a warrior rhetoric based on such biblical passages, Neumann argues. Furthermore, evangelical apocalypticism, which became more pronounced during the Cold War, also intensified the warlike opposition to the Devil. [96] The idea of spiritual warfare became even more imperative with evangelical and Pentecostal denominations and movements such as the Jesus People Movement and Assemblies of God churches. Presbyterian Francis Schaeffer was central to this development. As Williams puts it, Schaeffer "converted a new generation of evangelicals into culture warriors."[97] In addition to political involvement, Christians could fight such evil by leading a good, Christian life.

Even though their cosmology made them particularly open to it, evangelicals were not the only ones to feel anxiety about a satanic presence in the 1980s. Through television screens, fear of Satan – or those who worshipped him – spread to America at large as well, in what observers have termed the "Satanic Panic." Hughes shows that through the growth of "infotainment" programs, murder and suicide cases were linked to satanism, and Brackett points out that even more established news media did the same.[98] Even though police investigations eventually found no connection to satanism in these instances, the Satanic Panic effectively spread through television broadcasting. The "hyperreality" of television made the sensationalistic news and entertainment programs more real than reality.[99] But the fear was real. In rural Kentucky in 1988, "wild rumors about a satanic murder plot nearly emptied the schools," one newspaper reported. The same thing happened in Mississippi that same year.[100] Two years later, Minnesotans mistook a sculpture made of driftwood to be connected to devil worship.[101]

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[94] Toni Griffith, "Psychiatrists Say Satanism Evident Locally," *Vidette-Messenger of Porter County*, October 2, 1989.
[95] King James' Bible, Eph. 6:11.
[96] Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[97] Williams, *God's Own Party.*
[98] Hughes, "American Monsters," 691; Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide"; See also Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory: Music Censorship in America* (New York: Perennial, 2001).
[99] Hughes, "American Monsters," 296.
[100] John Reiter, "Bogus Satanic Panic Bedevils Schools, but Real Dangers Lurk," *Evansville Courier and Press*, September 21, 1988.
[101] Pat. Doyle, "Driftwood 'Art' Sparks Satanic Panic," *The Durham Sun*, September 17, 1990.

In addition to suicide, brutal crimes, and less severe incidents that allegedly were tied to devil-worship, occult beliefs, and rock music, a surge in satanic ritual abuse accusations (SRA) were also central in escalating the panic in American society. Elaine Showalter lists two categories of satanic ritual abuse narratives that circulated in the media and gave the Satanic Panic momentum. One was the "charges by children" who told of disturbing experiences both at and away from home. SRA stories also came in the form of "recovered memories of adults who had remembered nothing prior to therapy," but who gradually revealed increasingly traumatic experiences to their psychiatrist.[102] Showalter shows how cases of SRA gained significant attention by psychiatrist professionals, and she criticizes them for using such a vague term as "satanic ritual abuse" instead of "alleged satanic ritual abuse which has never been proven or corroborated."[103] The term was open to interpretation by sensationalists and fundamentalist "experts."[104] To Christians who believed in Satan's existence, the claims of SRA made perfect sense, even if the actual abuse was wholly secular. In the 1984 Northport murder case, where one teenager killed another, Riismandel writes that "police, parents, and news media found occultism [and satanism] a more believable cause of murder than such far likelier causes as the boys' health and home environment."[105] The belief in satanic influences also provided a link between otherwise unrelated social and criminal issues.[106]

SRA news stories, Hughes notes, "emerged in a climate where powerful evangelicals sanctified the nuclear family and demonized enemies associated with sixties liberal activism."[107] Some suggest that the inclusion of a satanic dimension to the assaults and abuse provided a certain comfort for both victims and the television audience. When crimes and allegations seemed too cruel to be the work of humans, the Satanic Panic was a way to reject one's own responsibilities as an individual, a group, or a nation.[108] Rather than asking questions and analyzing what anyone could have done differently to prevent crimes and tragedies from happening, it was seemingly reassuring to blame someone or something else. And who better to blame than Satan, the single entity furthest from God and good Christians? This interpretation of events "encourages the kind of concerned

[102] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 173.
[103] Showalter, *Hystories*, 173.
[104] Mary deYoung, "One Face of the Devil: The Satanic Ritual Abuse Moral Crusade and the Law," *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 12 (1994), 390; See also Hughes, "American Monsters."
[105] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*, 149.
[106] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."
[107] Hughes, "American Monsters," 712.
[108] Showalter, *Hystories;* DeYoung, "One Face of the Devil."

action that can restore a sense of security and of control," Mary deYoung explains, even if this action is not directed at the real root of the problem.[109]

The Satanic Panic occurred due to a peculiar combination of factors. deYoung argues that psychotherapists, religious fundamentalists, law enforcement professionals, and survivor self-help groups nurtured the satanic panic. She writes that these "disparate interest groups" were united by the satanic panic, and thereby worked together to intensify/validate it.[110] Furthermore, the surge of middle-class families moving out into the suburbs in the 1970s, combined with the new media culture developments, were critical factors in advancing American fear of Satanism. The Satanic Panic was also a form of anti-rock, as rock music, and metal in particular, was often made the scapegoat in the public discourse.

Anti-Rock Discourse

The scapegoating of rock during the Satanic Panic was nothing new. Nekola argues that rock music and culture had always been "a scapegoat for those trying to control youth."[111] Somewhat simplified, the initial protests against rhythm and blues and rock & roll in the 1940s and 50s, were about how the beat of the music turned teenagers into violent delinquents and encouraged sex outside of marriage. The term "rock & roll" was in itself "notoriously sexual," James Wierzbicki writes, while Martin and Segrave point to numerous instances and accusations of youngsters rioting and vandalizing while or after attending rock concerts.[112] Another issue was that rock blurred the cultural divide between the races, and white nationalist groups like the White Citizens' Council were appalled by the "jungle beat."[113] The racist aspect was toned down somewhat in the wake of the civil rights movements of the 60s. Instead, the anti-rock of the 1960s and 70s was more concerned with drugs and deviance. In a bipartisan meeting on drugs, led by President Nixon, radio host Art Linkletter expressed his concern that "[t]he lyrics of the popular songs and the jackets on the albums of the popular songs are all a complete, total campaign for the fun and thrills of trips." To some anti-rock activists, rock was the tool of communists, which for many was indistinguishable from the devil. Noebel, one of the major anti-rock crusaders of the 1960s, believed that communists used the beat, as well

[109] DeYoung, "One Face of the Devil," 403.
[110] DeYoung, "One Face of the Devil," 389.
[111] Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music,'" 410.
[112] James Wierzbicki, *Music in the Age of Anxiety: American Music in the Fifties* (University of Illinois Press, 2016); Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*; See also Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*, chapters 5 and 3.
[113] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

as lyrics, of rock music to hypnotize and brainwash young listeners.[114] Similarly, many thought rock music was a medium for alternative religions and eastern mysticism to reach American teenagers.[115] What all these protests against rock had in common, though, was that they showcased parental and conservative worries – and fears – about youth culture and declining moral standards.[116]

While most of these issues have consistently been present in anti-rock discourse to varying degrees, the main focus of the discourse has changed in tandem with innovations in the music scene. During the 1960s, rock & roll began to branch out into various subgenres. Folk, progressive, psychedelic, and hard rock were only some of the subgenres that developed in the countercultural decade.[117] As Martin and Segrave write, critics associated these genres with sexual liberation, drugs, and violence.[118] As rock continued to evolve, disco had its heyday in the late 70s. Some anti-rock activists simply did not like the repetitive sound of it. Disc jockey Steve Dahl, for instance, held "Disco Demolition" events. At these events, one reporter writes, Dahl "dressed in a clownish military outfit, denounced the popular disco music, then blew up a crate full of disco records."[119] But religious conservatives criticized disco because of its ties to black and gay communities, as well as to new drugs. Another controversial style that emerged was punk. In Britain, the Sex Pistols and Johnny Rotten challenged musical and societal norms with their atonal shambling sound and aggressive performance style. On American soil, hardcore punks played the bars of Los Angeles while Patti Smith and other artists and groups developed a different but still rough punk style in New York City.[120] With their disregard for authorities and tradition, punk artists "managed to arouse wrath and indignation almost everywhere," Martin and Segrave observe.[121] By the end of the 1970s, there seemed to be a new genre for every anti-rock issue.

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[114] David A. Noebel, "Columbia Records: Home of Marxist Minstrels," *Christian Crusade*, March, 1967; David A. Noebel, *Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles* (Christian Crusade, 1965); David A. Noebel, *Rhythm, Riots, and Revolution (*Tulsa: Christian Crusade, 1966); see also Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*; Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*

[115] See Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*; Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*

[116] Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

[117] Paul Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History* (Routledge, 2006); See also David Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

[118] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

[119] Associated Press, "Thursday Night Fever: 'Disco Demolition' Brings Rampage, Forfeit to Comiskey Park," *The Macon News*, July 14, 1979, 5A; See also Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

[120] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*.

[121] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*, 223; See also Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History.*

Similarly, the hard rock that started with bands like Led Zeppelin in the late 1960s developed into a heavier kind of rock. And this music, heavy metal, was the form of rock that was most clearly linked to the Satanic Panic of the 1980s. Like hard rock, heavy metal was musically characterized by noisy guitar riffs and screaming vocals, while lyrics and imagery were typically inspired by fantasy, the occult, and masochism.[122] Heavy metal grew to cover a wide spectrum of styles ranging from glam to death metal.[123] Many artists of these genres of metal donned make-up and costumes that were more extreme than seen in previous forms of rock. The members of KISS, for instance, had their faces covered in white make-up with black markings, and wore leather, chains, and spikes. Iron Maiden embellished their album covers with their mascot Eddie, a living corpse that also appeared with the band on stage as a ghoulish giant. Even though the mythological and grotesque imagery and symbolism were largely artistic expressions of adolescent rebellion rather than satanic worship, anti-rock activists and parents were deeply unsettled by it and took it seriously. As heavy metal became mainstream and gained popularity, more teens were exposed to it. To evangelical and other religious anti-rock activists, this meant more youngsters were at risk of being influenced by Satan. Consequently, heavy metal was heavily critiqued.

Costumes and other effects helped bands put on impressive stage shows, but the visual aspects of both heavy metal and other genres became more important after Music Television (MTV) launched in 1981. This channel provided artists with a platform where they could promote their music and styles with dazzling music videos. With television more common in homes – at least in the suburbs – a significant number of people gained direct access to the videos. Or, in the eyes of concerned anti-rock activists, rock musicians gained access to suburban children. As such, MTV made the home unsafe and threatened adult control.[124] One main critique of MTV was that the videos, especially those by heavy metal groups, displayed violence and occult imagery that could be harmful to minors. Another point was that many videos on the program were sexually explicit. This critique

[122] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).
[123] Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*; Titus Hjelm, Keith Kahn Harris, and Mark LeVine, "Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture," *Popular Music History* 6.1/6.2 (2011); Walser, *Running with the Devil*; Robert L. Gross, "Heavy Metal Music: A New Subculture in American Society," *Journal of Popular Culture* (summer 1990); Jason C. Bivins, "The Weight of the World: Religion and Heavy Metal Music in Four Cases," *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, edited by Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (University of California Press, 2017).
[124] Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*

also applied to pop artists like Madonna, Prince, and Michael Jackson.[125] As MTV grew, parents and other concerned citizens protested and challenged the program at local levels. In some cases, the protesters succeeded in either removing MTV completely or partially blocking it in certain areas.[126] Censoring also happened in the production of the music videos. In 1989, Jon Bon Jovi had to edit out the "steamy graphic scenes" in the music video to "Living in Sin" in order for MTV to broadcast it. "If you've got your 5-year-old watching MTV and you're not paying attention to what he's watching, then whose fault is it?" the artist retorted to the censors.[127]

Sexual innuendos and overtones had been characteristic of rock lyrics since the beginning. Already in the 50s, radio stations, record companies, and the public had protested and made attempts at censoring the offensive "leerics."[128] Starting in the mid-70s, the industry, media, and religious groups experienced a "growing anxiety over the sex rock trend," Martin and Segrave write. Even though it was a minority of artists and bands that were explicitly sexual in their music, the degree of the sexuality in these instances was too large to ignore.[129] Tipper Gore, wife of Congressman Al Gore and social activist in her own right, co-founded the organization Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC). In 1985, Gore and PMRC called for a congressional hearing about the issue of "porn rock," where they pushed for the labeling of records that contained offensive language or imagery. This hearing brought anti-rock back into national debate and led the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) to add a "Parental Advisory" sticker to certain records.[130]

Throughout the history of rock, the music has been met with anti-rock protests. As rock grew more outrageous in the eyes of adult generations, James R. McDonald writes, anti-rock activists responded with louder and more extensive attacks.[131] After the anti-

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[125] Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

[126] Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*

[127] Wire Reports, "Bon Jovi's New Video Clipped by MTV Censors," *Tulsa World*, November 14, 1989, C3.

[128] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*, 15; Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*

[129] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*, 250.

[130] Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, *Record Labeling: Hearing Before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate, Ninety-ninth Congress, First Session, on Contents of Music and the Lyrics of Records, September 19, 1985* (Washington D-C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985); Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock;* Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; McDonald, "Censoring Rock Lyrics."

[131] James R. McDonald, "Censoring Rock Lyrics: A Historical Analysis of the Debate," *Youth & Society*, March (1988); see also Ronald D. Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U. S. History," *History of Education Quarterly*, Autumn 37, 3 (1997).

rock surge against the counterculture, anti-rock had become less prevalent in the public discourse. "At the dawn on the 1980s, however," Brackett contends, "these long-standing claims relating to the dangers of rock music resurfaced and were adapted by antirock activists who reflected the political and cultural climate of America."[132] As conservatism gained political and societal power that validated traditionalist Christian ideals, anti-rock discourse developed according to these standards. The sex rock anxiety was one major theme, as illustrated by the censoring of MTV and rating of records. In a society where the belief in and fear of Satan grew stronger, another major anti-rock trend was a renewed emphasis on the music's ties to the devil.

In earlier anti-rock discourse, the evil forces had supposedly used the beat to corrupt innocent youths, but now the main concern was the messages – both those that were hidden and those conveyed openly. The idea that messages could be conveyed subliminally through various forms of media had been around for decades, but in the late 1970s and 1980s this was brought into the anti-rock discourse with full force. Fundamentalist minister and famous anti-rock crusader Jacob Aranza claimed that rock artists recorded messages that they reversed and placed on their tracks. They did this "to implant their own religious and moral values into the minds of the youth," he wrote in his 1983 book *Backward Masking Unmasked*.[133] Other anti-rock ministers, like Bob Larson, focused on what seemed to be obvious proof of Satanic activity amongst rockers. In *Satanism: The Seduction of America's Youth,* he recalled the time he went on tour with heavy metal band Slayer. He describes how "on stage, they became fire-breathing demons from rock 'n' roll hell," and around the necks of audience members there were "more upside-down crosses than a denizen of demons could concoct in a month."[134] Though many of the most vocal anti-rock activists criticized the Satanic influences in 1980s' rock, not all anti-rock protests were motivated by religious, social traditional, or conservative attitudes and values.

Just like not all anti-rock activists were conservative Christians, not all conservative Christians were anti-rock activists.[135] Rock & roll originated partially in Pentecostal and Baptist worship music, as rock artists appropriated gospel tunes and

[132] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide," 275.
[133] Jacob Aranza, *Backward Masking Unmasked: Backward Satanic Messages of Rock and Roll Exposed*. (Shreveport, La.: Huntington House, 1983), vii.
[134] Larson, *Satanism*, 12, 13.
[135] See for instance Howard and Streck, *Apostles of Rock;* Eskridge, *God's Forever Family; Preston Shires, Hippies of the Religious Right (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).*

rhythms by pairing them with more secular lyrics.[136] When rock branched out into new styles in the following decades, some religious groups adopted the now-worldly music for religious purposes. Pentecostals found it easy to re-sanctify the new types of rock, while evangelicals adhered to their tradition of adapting their ministries to contemporary trends. In the early 1970s, for instance, the Jesus People Movement embraced both the sound and style of dress of folk rock combining it with fundamentalist beliefs and a conservative value system.[137] The Christian Contemporary Music (CCM) found in evangelical record stores was often indistinguishable from its secular counterpart.[138] Initially there was stark disagreement between Christians in regard to rock's compatibility with conservative beliefs and values, as Stephens shows. Billy Graham, for instance, strongly disliked the beat of the pop-reminiscent CCM, while Falwell "included opposition to rock music as a defining principle of what it meant to be a fundamentalist."[139] In 1971, Bob Larson denied that it was possible to combine rock with Christianity in any way.[140] Eventually, though, even the most devout anti-rock crusaders accepted that the new music was, if not enjoyable, then at least useful. Larson even released the album *The Humorous Gospel Songs of Bob Larson* in 1980, which featured jazzy electric guitar riffs and a swinging organ.[141] A decade later, even Falwell had become enthusiastic about the music.[142]

As religious anti-rock crusaders proved capable of adapting to changes in the music world, metal groups emerged on the Christian music scene. But "white metal" proved to be more problematic than earlier forms of rock, as it seemed even less compatible with traditional Christian values than any other style of music. Most important was the genre's apparently close ties to satanic practices. The sound, tight clothing, and long hair and makeup on men were other issues that went against traditionalist Christian ideals and gender norms. As such, Marcus Moberg, Luhr, and Bivins all describe white metal as an "oxymoron." At the same time, these scholars argue that core aspects of heavy metal also corresponded to evangelical sentiments.[143] Evangelicals saw themselves as

[136] Stephens, *The Devil's Music*; Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*.
[137] Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*; Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*
[138] See for instance Deena Weinstein, "Rock Music: Secularisation and its Cancellation," *International Sociology* 10, 2 (1995); Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*.
[139] Stephens, *The Devil's Music*, 191.
[140] Bob Larson, *Rock & the Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1971).
[141] Bob Larson, *The Humorous Gospel Songs Of Bob Larson* LP vinyl (Supreme, 1980).
[142] Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*
[143] Marcus Moberg, "The 'Double Controversy' of Christian Metal," *Popular Music History*, 6.1/6.2 (2011); Eileen Luhr, "Metal Missionaries to the Nation: Christian Heavy Metal Music, 'Family Values,'

rebels in a secular world. While mainstream metal artists rebelled against traditional norms and values, white metal artists rebelled against the supposed godless, secular mainstream. White metalheads saw their music ministry as a form of spiritual warfare in which they went behind enemy lines to reach those who were in the most dire need of salvation. In a 1986 interview, Robert Sweet, of the white metal band Stryper, said that "[i]t doesn't seem like too many rock and roll bands (…) take a stand for God, and (…) we made the conscious decision to devote all our time [to do that]."[144] By replacing the occult symbolism and sex appeal of secular heavy metal with a clear, Christian message, Christian heavy metal bands succeeded in de-Satanizing heavier rock to a certain extent.

"The controversy [surrounding rock] was never just about music – it never had been," Stephens writes.[145] By the late 1980s, it was hardly a matter of musical style at all. The religious rock critics that dominated the discourse in the 1980s carried on traditional anti-rock concerns, but it was no longer so much a matter of anti-*rock*. Now the protesters were against secular rock, but accepted Christian rock. Another development in the discourse, was that the generation gap seemed to have grown narrower as conservative religious values had merged with the youth culture that parents traditionally had fought against. Fewer anti-rock activists condemned youth culture outright now. Instead, the evangelical anti-rock activism of the 1980s was often led by young ministers like Aranza and Larson, and many young people partook in anti-rock events. The division was not so much between children and parents, as it was between conservative religious youth culture and secular youth culture. The fear for the morals of Americans remained as the most constant aspect of anti-rock.

Despite the revigorated anti-rock scene, though, anti-rock at large dwindled. Brackett writes that "[b]y the end of the [1980s], the various religious, political, and cultural movements that enabled early fears regarding subliminal and backmasked messages to take root and flourish had run their course."[146] As the conservative movement failed to unite around a presidential candidate, scandals tied to conservative evangelicals emerged and widespread fear of satanism lessened, Brackett argues, anti-rock lost much of its appeal and validity. Though the most avid activists like Larson and later Jeff

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and Youth Culture, 1984-1994," *American Quarterly* 57, 1 March (2005); Bivins, "The Weight of the World".

[144] Stryper Tube Official Fan Channel 2023, "#Stryper- Interview With Robert Sweet at Power Hour Music Box (1986) #StryperTube" YouTube video, May 10, 2021.

[145] Stephens, *The Devil's Music*, 193.

[146] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide," 294.

Godwin kept preaching their anti-rock message well past the 1980s, the nationwide anti-rock uproar dwindled. Besides, at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, rap music surfaced as the most dangerous and thereby condemnable youth music.[147] As rock lost much of its offensive edge, anti-rock issues like violence, delinquency, and racism were instead transferred to this new genre of music.

As conservative anti-rock activism peaked in the 1980s, there was a wide array of crusaders that created a complex landscape of anti-rock campaigns and literature. The following chapter looks more closely at the Peters brothers and their contributions to the American anti-rock movement and discourse.

[147] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."

Chapter 3: The Peters Brothers

This chapter focuses on the Peters brothers and their ministry through a close reading of the available primary sources. I have chosen to start the chapter with an introduction of the Peters brothers and their Truth About Rock ministry, before presenting the main points of their ministry and the specific themes that the Peters brothers emphasized in their anti-rock crusades. The chapter discusses specific key points and general trends in their organization and ideology. My findings from the primary source reading will be connected to the relevant points in chapter 2 to show where the Peters brothers and their Truth About Rock ministry diverged and converged with anti-rock discourse, conservatism, and evangelicalism.

The Truth About Rock Ministry

Raised in the suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota, the Peters brothers grew up in a "pious" Christian home where the father, in their own words, "practiced what he preached" and the mother was "a strict adherent of the Scriptures."[148] The Peters family consisted of Josephine and Leroy Peters and their four sons Leroy Jr. (Lee), Daniel (Dan), Steve, and Jim, and all four brothers were educated at an Assemblies of God Bible college, a Pentecostal school.[149] Several of the college courses and activities they engaged in were tied to music, and allowed the brothers to develop their interest in popular music while also honing the spiritual ideas of their upbringing. The two oldest brothers went on to be ordained with the Assemblies of God, and both moved to work as ministers in other communities.[150] Dan returned to St. Paul in 1979. By this point, the two youngest brothers and father Leroy had also been ordained, albeit in the Jesus People Church.

The three of them worked at the Zion Christian Life Center. Reflecting the 1970s tendency to deemphasize denominational divides, this center was an "interdenominational ministry" that Leroy senior had founded himself.[151] In this church, the father functioned as a senior pastor while Steve and Jim served as a youth pastor and a music ministry leader, respectively. Upon his return home, Dan too joined this church as a pastor.[152] With Zion Christian Life Center, the three younger Peters brothers could further develop their beliefs and approaches to evangelization with real-world experience.

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[148] Jim Daly, "Rock Rolls to the Beat of Immorality, Minister Says," *Leader-Telegram* (Eau-Claire, Wisconsin), January 17, 1985, 5B; Steve Peters and Dan Peters, with Cher Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 44, 45.
[149] Presumably in their own community, but none of the primary sources specify which one.
[150] Jim Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock," *The Minnesota Star*, March 5, 1980, 15A.
[151] Bruce Buursme, "Pastors Hold 'Disco Infernos,'" *Chicago Tribune*, October 11, 1980, 12.
[152] Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock."

The center became the base for the Peters brothers' anti-rock ministry to such an extent that it is at times impossible to tell the Zion Christian Life Center and the Truth About Rock ministry apart.

According to a 1986 newspaper report on the Peter Brothers, their interest in researching rock music originated with youngest brother Jim, who got the idea after writing a college term paper about the dangers of rock.[153] On par with the moral panics of the time, the first anti-rock seminars were mainly a response to local youths "having troubles with immorality," Jim said, and partially the result of a challenge "to find something good about rock music."[154] The brothers claimed they were no strangers to rock before their college years, though. In interviews and in their own publications, Dan and Steve recounted that as teenagers they hid records from their mother.[155] Confessing to prior involvement with the music was not unusual for Christian anti-rock activists. Larson, for instance, often referred to his previous life with the sinful music as a way to make his witness against rock stronger.[156] The Peters brothers' story goes that when their mother inevitably found out about the hidden records and made them aware of the dangers lurking in the music, the boys threw the records away of their own free will. A home environment with strong anti-rock sentiments and a college education where they had access to anti-rock literature and ideas facilitated their entry into the anti-rock crusade that had been going on since the 1950s. The bibliographies of the Peters brothers' books include works by anti-rock stalwarts like Noebel, Aranza, and Larson, as well as less known writers on the topic.[157] This shows they had read extensively and were aware that they were well-situated within an American anti-rock tradition. Even so, the Peters brothers often presented both their findings and their methods as new and groundbreaking. Their claims of "never-yet revealed stories and new insights" were major

[153] Tom Zito, "Witness of Fire," *The Washington Post*, December 3, 1980; Bob Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil Out of Rock and Roll," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, September 14, 1986; See also interview with the Peters brothers on Morstad, Dan, and Diane Morstad, "Teen Suicide Fantasy," *The Love Lines Show*, August, 1987.
[154] *The Minneapolis Star*, "Youths of Burning Faith put the Torch to Albums"; Gordon McKerral, "Is John Lennon Burning?" *Herald and Review* (Decatur, Illinois), February 15, 1981.
[155] Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content," 11; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[156] Bob. Larson, *Rock: Practical Help for Those who Listen to the Words and Don't Like what They Hear* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980); see also Martin and Segrave, *Anti-Rock*.
[157] Steve Peters, Dan Peters, and Cher Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986); Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*; Steve Peters and Dan Peters, with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader: The Truth about Backmasking* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).

selling points in an evangelical market that overflowed with books and videos. This also fit well with general evangelical focus on the new, cutting edge, and sensational.[158]

The Truth About Rock ministry started in 1979 as a seminar on rock music, which was titled "What the Devil's Wrong With Rock Music?"[159] In the beginning, Jim and Steve were at the forefront of the seminars, while Dan oversaw the administrative tasks at the center and "[did] a 15-minute radio show weekdays at 09.45."[160] In the course of 1980, Dan joined in on the seminars. Public record burnings often accompanied these events, resulting in broad, national media coverage. This form of demonstrating against rock music was nothing new or uncommon. In 1966, for instance, there were bonfires of Beatles' records and paraphernalia after John Lennon made the claim that his band was "more popular than Jesus."[161] Even in the 1980s, at the same time that the Peters brothers made headlines with their activism, other anti-rock protesters did the same. On May 5, 1983, the "self-taught evangelist" Penny Barker burned records in Pekin, Illinois. The day after, the incident was covered in newspapers in the neighboring states of Wisconsin, Missouri, and Indiana, as well as in more distant New Jersey and California.[162] Despite being a relatively common event, the burnings proved to be effective as a tool to grab people's attention for the Peters brothers as well. By the end of January the year following their first record burning, the *St. Cloud Times* reported that the Peters brothers had held their seminars for over 8,000 people.[163] After five years, the reported number of seminars held was 1,500, with more than five million dollars' worth of rock records and related objects destroyed, according to the crusaders themselves.[164] In 1985, their estimate was that over one million had heard their anti-rock presentations, and in 1986 they told a reporter that they had "2,500 speaking requests each year (…) from churches, schools,

[158] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy*, *Part 2*, 1984 (?), retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiwGgW6JJKE (uploaded to YouTube April 3, 2013); Balmer, *Blessed Assurance*.
[159] Jeff Leen, "Minister Makes Smash of Top Rock Records and Prays for Stars," *The Miami Herald*, March 11, 1984; this news story states the press gave the seminar this title, though other sources suggest it was the name chosen by the brothers themselves.
[160] Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock."
[161] Cleave; See also Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*
[162] Barbara Parker, "Bookburners are Making a Comeback," *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, May 6, 1983.
[163] Lahr, "Preachers: Rock Music is Satanic"; researchers like Nuzum and Martin and Segrave show that record burnings were not an uncommon tool for anti-rock activists, but there seem to be none as frequent and long-lasting as the Peters brothers, see Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; Martin and Segrave, Anti-Rock.
[164] Linell Smith, "Christian Rock: Going Crazy for your Faith," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), October 30, 1984.

colleges and speaker's forums."[165] Dan and Steve also appeared together on national television and radio, which, according to their estimates, meant that "over twenty million people heard the truth about rock music."[166] There is no way to verify these numbers and statistics. Whether these estimates were correct or vastly overstated, however, the Peters brothers used them as proof that their message resonated with a broad audience. During the first half of the 1980s, the Truth About Rock ministry quickly evolved into an organization that hosted seminars across the country and even beyond the American borders. Mexico, South Africa, and Israel were among the countries they travelled to for seminars.[167] Eventually the brothers had to split up and tour in pairs or separately, because the demand for talks was so high.[168]

In addition to seminars and record burnings, the Peters brothers provided a *Truth About Rock Report* subscription service, where subscribers, by paying a "gift of $15," would receive a monthly report on the latest music – both the dangerous and the safe alternatives.[169] They routinely advertised this report in their numerous books, audio cassettes, and video tapes. The first self-published booklets *Documentation I* ("quotes, interviews, song lyrics and facts about rock stars presented in no-nonsense form") and *II* were researched primarily by Jim, but it was Dan and Steve who went on to publish full books and make lecture videos and tapes.[170]

The Peters brothers developed a distinct brand of anti-rock, though they did not manage the business on their own. In the heyday of their ministry, they had a researching team of seven people, based at the Zion Christian Life Centre.[171] Cher Merrill, with whom they published *Why Knock Rock?*, *What About Christian Rock?*, and *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, and who was also credited as a researcher in the *Youth Suicide Fantasy* film,

[165] Ron George, "'Un-Christian' Recordings Dumped," *Corpus-Christi Caller-Times*, May 1, 1985; Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil out of Rock and Roll."
[166]Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock*.
[167] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*
[168] See for instance Dachelet, "Rock Music Labeled a Tool of Satan"; Dave Richards, "There's no 'Rock and Roll Heaven' for Steve Peters," *Southtown Star* (Tinley Park, Illinois), April 24, 1983 (where Dan and Steve were in different states, and Jim in South Africa); Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil out of Rock and Roll."
[169] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*
[170] In newspaper reports, Jim seems to be the one in charge of research. He is not explicitly included as such in the Bethany House publications, though I have not been able to find information about his role in *Documentation I* and *Documentation II*.
[171] Steve Metsch, "Minister Throwing Stones at Rock Giants," *The Herald* (Crystal Lake, Illinois), October 3, 1985, 1B.

seemed particularly central to the team.[172] Other than her, it is not clear who the rest of the team were, though news stories suggest the brothers' wives were actively involved with the ministry. In 1983, Steve brought his wife Julie to assist with the seminars "because she's much better looking than me, and helps hold people's attention better."[173] Although he made the comment in jest, it strengthens the traditional idea that the two genders had different roles.[174] This also corresponds well with the tendency of conservative women to take a seemingly passive, but in fact very active, part at the grassroots level to protect values tied to family and faith.[175]

***1**: (Left to right) Steve, Jim, Dan and Leroy Senior with Dan's wife Renae, mother Josephine Peters, and Jim's wife Debbie at Zion Christian Life Center.*

The sudden and rapidly growing success of the Peters brothers' ministry – which they attributed to divine intervention rather than extensive advertisement and clever media strategies – made them optimistic and ambitious. They had plans to purchase a radio station where they could send good, uplifting, and wholesome Christian music out on the airwaves, as an alternative to secular rock.[176] Ten years down the line they imagined a Christian community with apartment complexes for single individuals and families, and with 15 radio stations available.[177] It was not uncommon for evangelicals to forge such bustling and affluent, yet "gated communities," as Luhr labels the Christian suburbs.[178] With the middle-class suburbs as a frame of reference and with a flair for evangelical entrepreneurship, the Peters brothers' vision might have appeared as a probable future.

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[172] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, Why Knock Rock?; Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*; Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*; Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.
[173] Richards, "There's no 'Rock and Roll Heaven' for Steve Peters," 14.
[174] Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life."
[175] See Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*; Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant" Religion and American Culture 28, 2 (2018): 238-268; Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism*, Balmer, *Blessed Assurance*.
[176] Their definition of "Christian music" remains musically vague throughout.
[177] Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil out of Rock and Roll," see also Deborah Hudson, "'Why Knock Rock?' Crusade Draws Fans to Denounce Music," *St. Cloud Times*, January 27, 1987.
[178] Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; see also Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*.

However, the *Truth About Rock* ministry quieted down after 1986. This was partially due to the brothers having different priorities. For one, Jim and his wife wanted to work with Christian music in their community. Furthermore, travelling and researching took too much time when they all had fathered children. But more notably, the Truth About Rock ministry lost much of its appeal for supporters and critics alike as the moral and satanic panics of the early 1980s diminished. As Americans took the satanic accusations less seriously, as Brackett shows, the impact of the Peters brothers' anti-rock activism also lessened.[179] Of the three brothers, Steve was the one who kept the ministry conversation about rock going the longest, with his 1998 book *Truth About Rock*. He also appeared on an episode of the podcast *The Current Rewind* on September 4, 2019, in which he was still critical of secular rock.[180] The Truth About Rock ministry as a vibrant Peters brothers endeavor, however, ended four decades ago.

The Four Flaws of Rock Music Through Six Themes

While the Peters brothers' activism was incredibly varied, their ministry was centered around a largely fixed set of arguments, with slight variations in emphasis, depending on format and audience. They framed their ministry with four distinctive points that they urged people to consider when looking into a rock artist or record. These were labeled the "Four Fatal Flaws" of rock music.[181] The first flaw had to do with the *lyrics*. The Peters brothers worried that bad attitudes and ideas snuck into the brains of impressionable young people through the more or less intelligible words of a song.[182] Fundamentalist Tim LaHaye, a popular leader in evangelical circles, applauded their efforts to "point up something that I have never thought of before; that is (…) the lyrics that actually attack moral values and incite sexual promiscuity, rebellion, and violence and lewdness beyond normal comprehension." [183] This, of course, was a long-standing issue in anti-rock literature. Anti-rock activists of the postwar years had warned against rock "leerics," as shown by Martin and Segrave, Brackett, McDonald, and Nekola.[184] Only four years before the Peters brothers' book, Larson had discussed the matter thoroughly in a book

[179] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."
[180] Swensson and Johnson, "Parental Advisory: The Peters Brothers' anti-rock crusade."
[181] See for instance Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[182] This is particularly prevalent in Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*. Even though speaking in tongues was and still is not unusual in evangelical circles, partially muddled speech (or song) was problematic when it appeared in rock music.
[183] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom*, foreword. By having Tim LaHaye write the foreword, they explicitly draw a link between themselves and the fundamentalist sphere.
[184] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock;* Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*; McDonald, "Censoring Rock Lyrics: A Historical Analysis of the Debate; Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music.'"

titled *Rock: Practical Help For Those Who Listen to the Words and Don't Like What They Hear*.[185] Similarly, the second flaw of rock music, the *lifestyles* of musicians and others in the music industry, had long been an issue for anti-rock activists.[186] In the brothers' eyes, many rock stars lived un-Christian lives that made them poor role models for teenagers. Consequently, one should steer away from them, lest they inspire youth to make poor life choices. Closely related to this was the third flaw, namely the musician's *goals*. If the intention of the artist was to simply make money or to make children rebel against their parents, the music was dangerous.[187] The last flaw, *graphics*, was more directly linked to the music industry developments of the 1970s and 80s. Album covers and styles of dress had been offensive to conservatives earlier as well, as Martin and Segrave discuss, but with more extreme visuals and the growth of MTV, rock imagery and appearances became more prominent in society and in the home.

Variants of these issues had been present in anti-rock discourse since the beginning, and they were still prevalent in the broader anti-rock discourse of the 1980s.[188] Even so, the Peters brothers largely succeeded in making all these flaws seem new, sensational, and dangerous. One of the things that did set them apart was how they managed to fit every issue into one coherent system and stick to it. For each of the flaws of rock music they "note how [rock music] affects our cultural values in six specific areas: (1) despondency, suicide or escapism; (2) humanism and commercialism; (3) rebellion and violence; (4) hedonism (the pursuit of worldly pleasures); (5) occultism or Satanism; and (6) drug and alcohol use and abuse."[189] They variously referred to these as "areas," "categories," and "errors," but for the purpose of this thesis I will call them themes. Note that I have opted to organize them by importance rather than follow the Peters Brothers' order. This system of flaws and themes is present in all their activism. The four flaws and six themes enabled the brothers to condense their anti-rock stance into a very simple, easy-to-remember overview. This was well-suited for media appearances and seminars alike, and they also proved a useful framework for Christian groups that wanted to discuss the issue of rock music in their local communities. In 1985, for instance, a Christian youth group in Florida arranged a seminar and record burning, modelled after the Peters

[185] Larson, *Rock: Practical Help for Those who Listen to the Words and Don't Like what They Hear*.
[186] See Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*
[187] See Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[188] See for instance Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*; Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*
[189] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 59-60.

brothers' system. In Missouri, a Sunday school teacher adapted the Truth About Rock message to her class.[190] While the system of flaws and themes was simple and accessible, the Peters brothers also used it to branch out into a complex fundamentalist take on the issue of rock music and the world at large.

Hedonism and Sexuality

Hedonism, and particularly the pursuit of sexual pleasure, is one of the two largest themes of rock that the Peters brothers investigated through their ministry. Sexual promiscuity was one of the most persistent issues in anti-rock discourse, and the Peters brothers' worry was no less profound than that of their anti-rock predecessors. If anything, their concern was more acute. In part due to changes in censorship laws, displays of sexuality in mainstream popular music and culture seemed to increase. Even the less explicit songs were perceived as a threat. For instance, "'Lionel Ritchie's 'Running With The Night' doesn't say anything explicitly, but let your mind run and see where it takes you,'" Steve was quoted as saying in 1985.[191] Like other anti-rock activists, the brothers made a direct link between rock music and teen pregnancy rates.[192] On the one hand it was the music and the lyrics that made young girls careless with their sexuality, but they also heavily blamed the artists for luring naïve teenagers into promiscuous activity. In that regard, they frequently pointed fingers at Van Halen's vocalist David Lee Roth. His paternity insurance, which served "as protection for his sexual escapades," appalled the fundamentalist brothers.[193] This blatant disregard of the traditionalist family structure was proof of the moral decay that conservatives feared, according to both May and Randall Herbert Balmer.[194] From a conservative evangelical point of view, homosexuality was another form of severe sexual abnormality that threatened what conservatives considered the American norm. Here, the Peters brothers accused the Village People of "pushing homosexuality as a viable alternative lifestyle."[195] Commenting on the AIDS epidemic that occurred in the wake of the short-lived disco phase, Steve remarked, "I'm convinced

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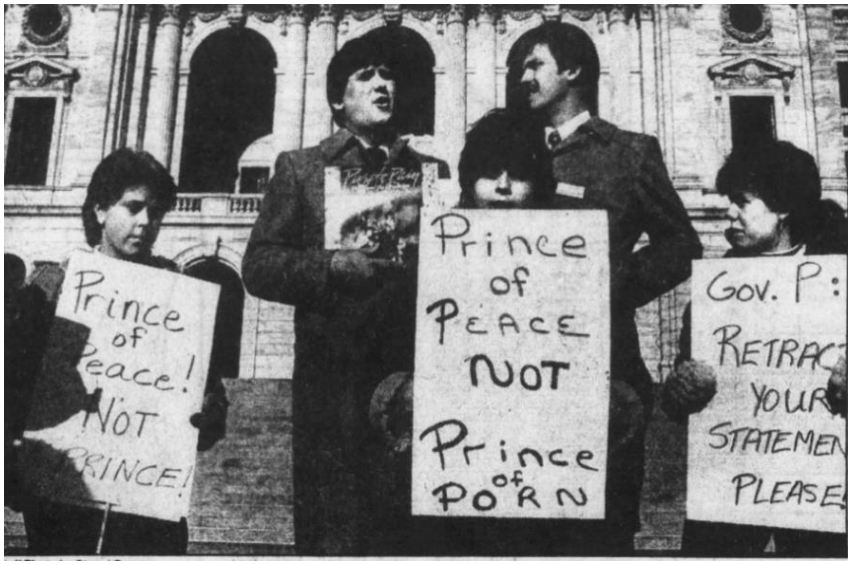
[190] Ann Rodgers-Melnick, "Lyrical Lessons: Rating Moral, Social Content of Records Already Burning Issue with Church Groups," *News-Press* (Fort Myers, Florida), October 5, 1985; *Eldon Advertiser*. "Rock Songs Examined by Sunday School Class," October 31, 1985, 4.
[191] Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content."
[192] Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content"; Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) leader reverend Jesse Jackson was one other conservative activist making this claim, according to Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*; see also Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*.
[193] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock,* 08:30; see also Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[194] See May, *Homeward Bound*; Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism*.
[195] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock,* 29:28.

that AIDS is a judgement of God on our nation."[196] Mark R. Kowalewski, Doug Rossinow, and Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer show that many prominent conservatives – from Falwell to Reagan – shared this view.[197] These numerous concerns with sexuality strongly linked the Peters brothers to social and evangelical conservative values in the late 1970s and 1980s.

To counter the idea of sexuality portrayed in secular rock and popular music, the Peters brothers offered a different, conservative take on what it meant to be sexy. Dan plainly stated that he was "really excited about sex," so long as it was within the premises of marriage.[198] In the later stages of their ministry, they questioned and discussed what it meant to be a "sex symbol" in a Christian sense. In *What About Christian Rock?* they held up Amy Grant as an example of this. The brothers wrote that "Amy (…) seems to understand that 'a Christian young woman in the eighties' is very aware of her sexuality, which – biblically speaking – includes not only her body, but her entire personality."[199] They argued that a woman with a good personality that a man wanted to marry (and subsequently have as the mother of his children and caretaker of his family) could be sexy in a very positive way. Once again, the Peters brothers proved to be finely tuned to conservative ideas and ideals of family and home.[200]

According to the brothers, secular rock music promoted a hedonistic view of sexuality. In the Peters brothers' publications, Prince served as a prime example of this. When the Minnesota-born artist had the St. Paul Civic Center as one of the venues of his 1984 tour, the crusaders reacted strongly against it. The week after Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich announced the upcoming "Prince Days" on December 14, newspapers reported on the Peters brothers' mobilization against the concerts.[201] The protests initiated by the Peters brothers took many forms. The brothers and members of their church held prayer sessions, handed out leaflets, protested with picket signs outside the Capitol, wrote letters, telephoned the governor's office a hundred times daily, and attended meetings.[202] The main objective of their protests was to get the concerts cancelled altogether. Such local demands for censorship were hardly unusual, as many thought public institutions

[196] Metsch, "Minister Throwing Stones at Rock Giants."
[197] Mark R. Kowalewski, "Religious Constructions of the AIDS Crisis," *SA. Sociological Analysis* 51, 1 (1990); Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*; Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*; see also Jerry Falwell, "AIDS: the judgement of God," *Liberty Report* (April 1987).
[198] Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed: Live Interview with the Peters Brothers*, 1985, 19:02.
[199] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 159.
[200] See for instance May, *Homeward Bound*; Balmer, *Blessed Assurance.*
[201] "Glimpses." *The Sentinel* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania), December 14, 1984.
[202] United Press International, "Pastors Protest Prince Performance," *Kenosha News*, December 21, 1984.



2: *The contrast between innocent children and the "Prince of Porn" was a striking feature in the protest against the Prince concerts.*

represented and were responsible for public morality.[203] When these attempts did not succeed, the crusaders urged the City Council to draw a clear line between the artist and the morally superior inhabitants of St. Paul by publicly announcing the following disclaimer: "Lyrics and actions expressed by Prince in the publicly owned Civil Center are not necessarily those of the council, the Civic Center Authority or the citizens of St. Paul."[204] As a preventive measure, they also asked the council "to set up a rating board for future rock concerts" – a common request from evangelical anti-rock activists concerned with protecting their children from sin.[205] The Peters brothers were unsuccessful in persuading the governor and City Council to make any of the proposed changes, and consequently continued to protest Prince's performances. One hundred and twenty-five activists kneeled and shouted hallelujah in response to a prayer session led by the Peters brothers on the night of the concert. The Peters brothers lashed out at Prince, who they labelled the "Prince of porn," "one of the most sexually illicit rock 'n' rollers to prance and dance," and "the filthiest singer in America today."[206] The controversy secured the Truth About Rock ministry notes and articles in newspapers across at least 14 states in the course of three days.[207] As such, Prince's tour gave the Peters brothers an opportunity to make a major media event and further promote their agenda.

[203] Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*
[204] United Press International, "Pastors Protest Prince Performance."
[205] United Press International, "Pastors Protest Prince Performance"; calls for cancellation or censoring of rock concert has not been uncommon in the history or anti-rock, see Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-Rock.*
[206] United Press International, "Prince Prompts Protests, Prayers," *Daily Press* (Newport Virginia), December 24, 1984; United Press International, "Pastors Protest Prince Performance.
[207] California, Connecticut, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin.

The concert also provided the Peters brothers with fresh material for their rock research. As they themselves and other evangelical anti-rock activists had done before, the brothers attended the concert.[208] In the film *Youth Suicide Fantasy,* they describe what they witnessed during Prince's provocative stage show. They were "shocked and appalled" to see how opening act Sheila E. "gets down on her hands and knees, she puts her head between [a volunteer fan's] legs, and she feigns oral sex with this fella in front of all these twenty thousand screaming fans." Then, Dan explained, the "first thing Prince did was to lay this beautiful blonde out on the floor and laid down on top of her and go through all of the motions of intercourse in front of all these fans." The two Peters brothers disclosed these details with wide eyes, and especially Steve had the habit of turning to his brother with a slight, disbelieving shake of the head when he shared a particularly disturbing point.[209] Their first-hand experience with the concert seemed to give their research and analysis an additional layer of credibility and sensationalism.

The Peters brothers' distaste for the sexuality present in lyrics, on album covers, in music videos, and on stage was grounded in family, religious and nationalist convictions common in a conservative evangelical milieu. The innocence of children that needed to be protected was central. "We just don't believe sexually explicit lyrics need to be pushed on the children of America," Dan explained to a reporter.[210] As Steve put it the following year: "We are proud to do battle for the lives of these children."[211] Similarly, Dan was also appalled by the objectification of women, especially as seen on MTV. The images of sexualized and even abused women "begins to destroy some of the moral fiber of America," he said.[212] Going against the norm of fundamentalist conservative grassroots characterized by a strong anti-feminist sentiment, the Peters brothers even claimed allyship with feminists who protested the degrading sexual portrayal of women in rock and popular culture.[213] Whether this nod to feminism was sincere, however, is debatable. Considering their ability to adjust their own stances to serve the purpose of any given situation, this seems more like an attempt to strengthen their appeal to a wider public.

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[208] See Larson, *Satanism.*
[209] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*, 09:31-10:38.
[210] Associated Press, "Prince Comes Home with 'Purple Rain,'" *The La Crosse Tribune*, December 23, 1984, 16.
[211] Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content."
[212] *KSTP Twin Cities Live*, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom," 24:46.
[213] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*

Occultism and Satanism

The American heavy metal group KISS also received a lot of scrutiny from the Peters brothers. As with Prince, the preachers criticized KISS for the band's explicit sexuality. What further alarmed them about KISS's lyrics, imagery, lifestyles, and goals, however, were the satanic and occult tendencies. They frequently discussed the band in books and video lectures. In 1983 Dan and Steve got in touch with them directly, which they claimed was a God-given opportunity to spread their anti-rock gospel.[214] The audio and video material they gathered through phone calls, interviews and a face-to-face meeting at a concert gave them valuable material to use in their crusade. They included video footage in the *Truth About Rock* film and in the audio tape *KISS Exposed*.[215] Much like when dealing with Prince, the Peters brothers took advantage of these occasions to put their cause forward. The ministers had a large catalogue of artists that they questioned and condemned, though the bigger artists were discussed most thoroughly. This was probably in part because there was more information available on the famous musicians, but attacking the nationally acclaimed stars also made it easier to grab people's attention.

While the crusaders frequently expressed strong faith in the power of prayer and repeatedly urged people to ask God to help wayward musicians, KISS seemed a lost cause. Dan said they "wanna be known as the brothers who pray for [KISS] on a daily basis," but the metalheads were hopeless to convert, "[using] that 'F' word" when Dan and Steve told bassist Gene Simmons that they would pray for him.[216] In a clip recorded on location during a KISS concert, with the noise of the band and the crowd in the background, the shock and disgust is clear in their voices as they observe that "[e]verybody's giving the Satan sign."[217] Such comments demonized the band and its members. This was also done by more creative means such as dramatization and audio editing. On their *KISS Exposed* cassette, the brothers referred to a conversation Dan had with Gene Simmons by telephone. Rather conveniently, "we were unable to record it with a good enough quality for you to hear it," so Steve assisted Dan in reenacting the phone call. To emphasize the supposedly diabolical attitude of the bass player, they added reverb to Steve-as-Simmons' voice making it sound distant and alien – and possibly possessed.[218]

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[214] Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed.*
[215] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*; Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed.*
[216] Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed*; Smith, "Christian Rock: Going Crazy for your Faith."
[217] Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed,* 51:01.
[218] Truth About Rock Ministries, *KISS Exposed.*

As metal in its many forms became mainstream in the 1980s, artists of the decade increasingly embraced satanic imagery and a corresponding image that often left the Peters brothers' interpretative intervention superfluous. The theme of satanism is not exclusive to heavy metal artists, but musicians of this genre were the most explicitly occult.[219] Ozzy Osbourne of Black Sabbath, for instance, had plenty of quotes, album covers, and stage stunts that were unsettling to already scared suburban parents.[220] One of the incidents the brothers referred to the most was when Osbourne bit the head off a living bat during a performance in 1982.[221] With Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page's open fascination with the occult, seen for instance by his bookshop for occult literature, it was also easy for the Peters brothers to find choice quotes and examples that would help put him and his group in a bad light. The preachers dedicated several pages of *Rock's Hidden Persuader* to Page, Led Zeppelin, and their song "Stairway to Heaven," arguing that the devil spoke openly through the group and their music.[222]

In addition to the clear references to the occult, the Peters brothers also uncovered – or constructed – less obvious satanic influences in rock music. Being very much in touch with current anti-rock trends, they repeatedly brought up backmasked lyrics in media appearances and in their own publications. Brackett writes that backmasking was a real concern to conservatives, so much so that one Assemblyman introduced a bill demanding warning on the cover of records that featured backwards lyrics. [223] Some worried that the subliminal messages were part of a marketing scheme to make people buy certain products, while some thought the messages were politically manipulative. However, the most dominant concern during the Satanic Panic was that backmasking was a tool of the devil. To evangelicals who believed in and feared demons, this was especially plausible and frightening.[224] In the resource section of some of their books, the Peters brothers included books and articles by Noebel, Aranza, and Larson – all of whom were famous for their (conspiracy) theories on hidden agendas in rock music. The Peters brothers were not particular in stating when they were repeating the backmasked

[219] See Hjelm, Harris and LeVine, "Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture"; Walser, *Running with the Devil*; Gross, "Heavy Metal Music: A New Subculture in American Society"; Bivins, "The Weight of the World."
[220] Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; see also Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."
[221] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*
[222] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 50-54. Though "Stairway to Heaven" and numerous other songs might use symbols or imagery that could be interpreted in secular, Christian, as well as other spiritual ways, the Peters brothers would understand the lyrics literally. As fundamentalists with a theology of literalism, their reading of rock lyrics corresponded with their reading of the Bible.
[223] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."
[224] See for instance Bivins, *Religion of Fear*.

messages found by others and when they presented their own discoveries, but the examples served to support the claim that "[b]ackwards masking is another evidence that the general trend of rock music is in a direction away from the Lord Jesus Christ"[225] In *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, they wrote that "the title cut played forward says '. . . this could be heaven or hell. . . .' However, when played in reverse the message revealed is: 'Yes, Satan, he organized his own religion . . . it was delicious . . . he puts it in a vat and fixes it for his sons and gives it away. . . .'"[226]

Backmasking was a recurring theme in the Peters brothers' publications. On the Styx album *Paradise Theatre* they pointed to the message "Oh Satan, move in our voices," while on the Rolling Stones album *Tattoo You* they heard the words "I love you, said the devil."[227] Even in cases where the backmasked lyrics did not directly refer to the devil, the Peters brothers traced them to Satanic intervention because "the messages are always negative, and seem to fit into rock's six categories of error, defined earlier."[228] In a study from 1990, Gross observes that heavy metal "cult members will identify the [occult] symbol with heavy metal, as opposed to its original or actual meaning."[229] Young listeners of metal and rock might see these occult references as a joke, not be aware of the meanings of the symbols, or simply focus on the style rather than the substance of the songs. However, the Peters brothers warned that this was exactly Satan's intention: to lure them away from God unknowingly.[230] Again, the idea that Satan would send demons to influence people through infested music was very feasible according to a fundamentalist worldview. They shared this belief with Pentecostals and Charismatics.[231] Fortunately for Christians, though, the Peters brothers cited sources that suggested that "people with a strong moral base, such as the Ten Commandments, would not be as susceptible to negative substimuli" of demonic forces.[232]

The issue of backmasking reveals a dissonance in the Peters brothers' ministry. Even though they wrote extensively spoke frequently about backmasking and subliminals – which fit well into the conspiratorial thinking of the far right – they claimed that it "is

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[225] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock;* Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[226] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 48. Note the inaccurate quotation of the lyrics "This could be Heaven or *this could be* Hell."
[227] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 171; Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*
[228] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 174.
[229] Gross, "Heavy Metal Music: A New Subculture in American Society," 125.
[230] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader.*
[231] Poole, *Satan in America.*
[232] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 32.

not our big thing."[233] Judging by their approach to the topic in *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, they did seem to harbor a certain skepticism of the issue – or at least the way it was treated. As exemplified by their analysis of Led Zeppelin, they thought the constant discussions about backmasking distracted from the dangers that were already present in the normal lyrics, and in plain sight on the album covers and music videos. Furthermore, their writing suggests a lack of trust in science and other critics of subliminals in rock music, and especially attempts at legal intervention to fight the dangerous phenomenon. This reflects the attitudes of many of their fellow evangelicals. As scientific, political and legal efforts seemed to lead nowhere in a country threatened by crumbling morals, the brothers sought to "look into the subject from the Christian point of view."[234]

Suicide

One of the more severe – and possibly Satan-induced – results of rock music was suicide, according to the Peters brothers. Like Christian and non-Christian contemporaries alike, they thought both subliminal and explicit stimuli in rock songs could lead a young person to self-harm.[235] If combined with the use of drugs, the risk of suicide became higher, they argued. As drugs left the listener in a "suggestible frame of mind" open to subliminal stimuli, "drugs and rock music are often accomplices in the suicide conspiracy," the Peters brothers explained.[236] They also thought rock music lured young people to commit suicide by providing them with extreme escapism. During a panel on KSTP's *Twin Cities Live* (a local television live broadcast) in 1986, for instance, they claimed that the imagery in music videos and on album covers disrupted youth's perception of reality. Responding to a clip from the music video for Bananarama's "Venus," where a woman rises from a coffin, they argued that such imagery could lead disoriented youth into believing that they could be resurrected if they died. "Is there any doubt to anyone's mind why a half a million teenagers in America will try to attempt suicide this year?" Steve asked the reporter and the audience.[237] As Brackett, as well as Riismandel, discuss, heavy metal was widely scrutinized and accused of encouraging destructive behaviors resulting in suicide.[238] In 1985, Ozzy Osbourne was called to court because his track "Suicide Solution" was supposed to have caused at least two suicides.[239] The Peters brothers used

[233] KSTP, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom," *Twin Cities Live* (August, 1986), 47:36.
[234] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 74.
[235] See for instance Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide"; Hughes, "American Monsters."
[236] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 161.
[237] KSTP, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom," 22:32.
[238] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide"; Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear.*
[239] Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

this to validate their claims.[240] From 1970 to mid-1980s, suicide rates among teens and young adults increased by 40 percent, which alarmed Americans in general.[241] Latching onto contemporary concerns about the issue, the Peters brothers focused on the link between suicide and rock. Dan claimed rock music gave suicidal teens "permission to die."[242] In a quest for relevance, the brothers added to the growing scapegoating of the music during the Satanic Panic.

Even though the Peters brothers saw rock music as a "deciding factor that pushes someone over the brink to choose suicide," they did not place all the blame on rock itself.[243] While "the unlimited access a lone child has to rock music, via radio, his own stereo, and, more recently, MTV" posed a substantial threat to young people, the crusaders claimed much of the negative influences could be countered if the parents got more involved in the lives of their children.[244] According to evangelical ideas of parenting, as described by Neumann, parents were supposed to function as moral guides and safeguard their Christian homes.[245] The Peters brothers were also of this conviction. Therefore, they encouraged parents to be more concerned with their children and what they watched and listened to in order to steer them away from dangerous impulses. This was particularly imperative with the perceived risk and increased fear of suicide in the 1980s. Using 14-year-old Steve Boucher, who was a fan of Ozzy Osbourne and shot himself in 1981, as an example, the Peters brothers claimed that the suicide could have been avoided if the parents had only paid more attention and been more inquisitive about their son's thoughts and his condition. The teenager's father "usually reacted by telling the boy to turn it down and shut the door," they wrote. His mother "thought it was just a gimmick that would run its course and die out."[246] If the parents had been more curious and investigated the music thoroughly, the Peters argued, they could have prevented the death of their son. With the marketing mindset typical of suburban evangelicals, the crusaders offered their own publication and subscription service as effective tools to avoid teen suicide tragedies.[247]

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[240] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*
[241] Associated Press. "Youth Suicide is Rising." New York Times, February 22, 1987.
[242] Morstad and Morstad, "Teen Suicide Fantasy," 09:28.
[243] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 155.
[244] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 154; Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.
[245] Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[246] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 157; Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*; See also
[247] See for instance Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated.*

In accordance with the Peters brothers' traditionalist view of a hierarchical family structure, the strict, loving, and scriptural guidance of the parents would allow the children to thrive.[248] The brothers also emphasized that parents should seek to understand the music their children listened to in order to "bridge the generation gap."[249] If parents then found they did not approve of the message of a song or the lifestyle of a group, they should offer a Christian alternative that matched the sound and/or image that their youngsters could relate to. In this way, they would avoid creating a frustrating and destructive "vacuum" in their children's life.[250] Stephens, Nekola, and Martin and Segrave show that anti-rock traditionally had emphasized the divide between generations, but the Peters brothers were among the anti-rock activists seeking to unite them. [251] Even so, they thought the parents must still be in charge.

While parental guidance was important, the most effective way to avoid suicide was to become a Christian. Among the Peters brothers' work *Youth Suicide Fantasy*, and *Why Knock Rock* deal the most with the theme of suicide and how to prevent it. After lengthy discussions about rock music's bad influences, they offered "cures," which involved "[asking] Him into your life and begin to obey Him."[252] They seemed to guarantee that conversion or rebirth to (their fundamentalist) Christianity, would remove all darkness and secure peace in the reader's or listener's life. This reflects the optimism of suburban Christian culture in the 1980s.[253] In the vibrant, religious middle class communities, like the one the Peters brothers themselves belonged to, the joyous message and lifestyle would effectively prevent believers from committing suicide.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Even in the idyllic suburbs, however, the Peters brothers witnessed the problem of drug abuse in the youths of their own community. This encouraged them to further explore the dangers of rock music.[254] And, like many of their anti-rock contemporaries, both religious and secular, the Peters brothers saw a strong link between substance abuse and rock music and culture. Scholars too, like Paul Friedlander and David Brackett, agree that drugs and

[248] Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[249] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 33.
[250] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 29; see also Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.
[251] Stephens, *The Devil's Music;* Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*
[252] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 165.
[253] See for instance McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia.*
[254] *The Minneapolis Star*, "Youths of Burning Faith put the Torch to Albums."

alcohol were often an integral part of rock culture.[255] So, throughout their ministry, the Peters brothers made sure to point out any rock artist, concert, or death connected to drugs. Sometimes the link was very direct. During the KSTP broadcast, for instance, Steve said they had "talked to a lot of young people who like to get high to ["Another One Bites the Dust" by Queen], you talk to a drug addict, that's what they listen to when they're fired up on drugs."[256] Furthermore, *Why Knock Rock?* contains twenty pages of "Rock and Roll Obituaries" where overdose, injuries, and accidents caused by alcohol and drugs appear as causes of death.[257] In many cases, the Peters brothers' links between rock and drugs were both obvious and accurate. The band name of the Doobie Brothers was indeed inspired by a slang term for marijuana, the Beatles did experiment with various drugs and made songs about it, and the deaths of Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, and Jimi Hendrix were in fact results of extensive alcohol and drug consumption.[258]

At times, though, the connections they made between rock and drugs were less convincing. As with the themes of satanism and suicide, they claimed that subliminal messages were embedded into rock recordings to encourage listeners to use drugs. In *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, the Peters brothers claimed that the aforementioned Queen song contains the backwards message "[d]ecide to smoke marijuana, it's fun to smoke marijuana, decide to smoke marijuana."[259] This was also one of the central pieces of evidence that they presented to the KSTP audience. As a portion of the song was played backwards, the cameras showed Steve mouthing the hidden message that was otherwise indiscernible. To ensure that the audience got the point, he easily retorted to a semi-subliminal act himself. This issue serves as an example of the evangelical paranoia that was present in 1980s America, where panicked conservatives saw liberal, satanic, and/or commercial conspiracies everywhere.[260]

Rebellion and Violence

One of the possible effects of drug use combined with listening to rock music was violence. Ever since the earliest days of rock, Martin and Segrave write, violence and youth delinquency were among the main critiques of the genre.[261] In the Truth About

[255] Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*.
[256] KSTP, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom," 47:36.
[257] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[258] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock*; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*; see also Friedlander, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*.
[259] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 46.
[260] See Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*; Nuzum, *Parental Advisory.*
[261] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*

Rock ministry of the 1980s, the music was still tied to violent and destructive behavior. The brothers' complaints could just a well have been from the 1950s. "Robberies, rapes, car thefts, stabbings, gang fights, rioting – and even assaults upon fans by rock stars themselves – all occur with frequency at rock concerts," they declared, "almost always (…) at secular concerts."[262] At a Twisted Sister concert, for instance, teenagers allegedly "began to actually beat up the camera crew" that was there to interview members of the audience. The brothers also told of spitting, beer bottle fights, cherry bombs, and more.[263] As the subgenres emerging in the 1980s were more extreme in terms of lyrics, appearances, and stage shows, however, the Peters brothers also described more extreme cases than those presented by their anti-rock predecessors. While hard rock group The Who had destroyed instruments and gear after gigs in the 1960s and 1970s, heavy metal singer Ozzy Osbourne threw animals' organs at the audience during concerts. Punkers encouraged violent and anarchistic behavior that was harmful to others as well as to themselves. The Peters brothers listed and warned against these and all other bands, episodes, and subgenres they could link to violent behaviors.[264]

But more than acts of violence in themselves, the "root problem" of the troubled youth was rebellion, according to the anti-rock crusaders.[265] Fundamentally, they believed, rock caused young people to rebel against their parents and God and challenge the God-given authority of parents and the church.[266] Dan warned that the goal of many rock musicians "was to drive a wedge between you and your parents."[267] To prove their point, the brothers quoted David Cosby who said he intended "to steal their kids [by] changing young people's value systems which removes them from their parents' world very effectively."[268] Even "rebellious Dan and Jim" had been temporarily led astray by rock records, defying their mother's rock music ban.[269] Teenager rebellion against parents was a recurring concern throughout the Peters brothers' ministry, and it reflected contemporary conservative evangelical family values and fears. In the traditional

[262] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 177; Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 176.
[263] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*, 10:58-11:00; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*.
[264] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom*; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[265] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*, 26:32.
[266] See for instance Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life."
[267] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock* 28:36.
[268] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 96.
[269] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 45; see also Metsch, "Minister Throwing Stones at Rock Giants," 1B.

evangelical family, parents were at the top of the hierarchy. Though there have been shifts in which of the parents had the highest spiritual status, as can be seen in Anneke Stasson's and Balmer's work, both were responsible for mentoring their children in religious and moral matters.[270] When youngsters disregarded their parents, they also disobeyed God. Therefore, maintaining the traditional family structure and values was imperative to secure the children's – as well as the nation's – future wellbeing. This was also central to Reagan's policies.[271] While the Peters brothers encouraged the readers of their books to make up their own mind about what rock music was good or bad, "parents do have the last word."[272] Even if the record was by a Christian artist, young people had to ask themselves whether they "listen in rebellion." Steve elaborated: "Maybe your folks hate this particular Christian group (…) are you listening to help the family come together?"[273] If the music could not bring something positive to the family, one should not listen it. Furthermore, "[i]f your (…) pastor [is] convinced your rock music is harming you – even if it is Christian rock – do your best to live by their rules."[274]

"There is, however a legitimate, biblical rebellion," the brothers wrote in *What About Christian Rock?*[275] Labeling themselves as "controversial crusaders," the Peters brothers asked their audience not to "worry about being a little militant for Jesus Christ."[276] To counter the secular and supposedly satanic forces that seemed to be taking over American society, a Christian rebellion was in fact imperative. Like many of their fellow contemporary evangelicals – such as Graham, Falwell, Schaeffer, and Larson – the Peters brothers extensively relied on the biblical imagery of war in their ministry and quoted generously from the scriptures – especially Ephesians.[277] Ardent culture warriors of the traditionalist right, they warned fellow believers not to be fooled and seduced by the modernized and affluent world. Satan, according to the brothers, knew perfectly well how to navigate and use new technologies and music to his advantage. In one of their

[270] Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life"; Balmer, *Blessed Assurance*; see also Margaret Bendroth, "Last Gasp Patriarchy: Women And Men In Conservative American Protestantism," *The Muslim World* 91 (spring 2001).
[271] Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*.
[272] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 190.
[273] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.* 52:40.
[274] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 50.
[275] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 67.
[276] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock,* 5:09-5:16; Richards, "There's no 'Rock and Roll Heaven' for Steve Peters."
[277] Neumann, "Domestic Security"; Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); See for instance Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 82.

1984 publications, the brothers explained that "[w]e need ammunition to resist the kind of thinking that comes from media-promoted, latter-day false prophets such as John Lennon."[278] At the St Paul Prince concert the Peters brothers boasted that they went through the enemy lines "loaded up with prayer, armed with tracks [such as their self-composed song "I Love the Rock"]."[279] In this way, their approach to evangelization was similar to that of Christian rock acts – particularly white metal artists and groups, as Luhr shows.[280] Throughout their anti-rock ministry, the Peters brothers' ammunition also included "documented evidence" and "leaflets and flyers."[281] Moreover, their infamous "disco infernos" were one of their most aggressive means of protest.[282] The Peters brothers and their followers did not shy away from acts of rebellion and violence, although they condemned any trace of rebellion and violence that they found in secular rock music and culture. After all, the goals of their "legion of prayer warriors" were righteous and their actions served God, unlike those of secular rock artists.[283]

The Peters brothers considered "the general trend of rock music" to be pointing "away from Jesus Christ."[284] That is not to say they were against rock music in and of itself. On the contrary, they very much enjoyed the beat and the musicality of the genre. Their love of the music was apparent in their rebellious hiding of records, their study of rock in school, and their involvement with musical activities in their congregation. They also openly confirmed that they appreciated the beat.[285] Initially, the Peters brothers leaned more on traditional anti-rock arguments, as early newspaper reports about the brothers focused on how they were at war with the devilish music. By

3: Portland youths smashing records at a Peters brothers seminar in 1985.

[278] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 95.
[279] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*, 09:31-09:47, 22:59.
[280] Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; Luhr, "Metal Missionaries to the Nation."
[281] Richards, "There's no 'Rock and Roll Heaven' for Steve Peters," 14; United Press International. "Prince Prompts Protests, Prayers."
[282] Buursme, "Pastors Hold 'Disco Infernos.'"
[283] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, dedication; SEE SECONDARY!
[284] George, "'Un-Christian' Recordings Dumped."
[285] See for instance Metsch, "Minister Throwing Stones at Rock Giants."

the end of their ministry, however, they aimed their militant rhetoric on the devil himself, rather than the music genre. "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil out of Rock and Roll," one 1986 newspaper headline stated.[286] Their book *What About Christian Rock?* of the same year was in essence an attempt "to provide an open forum for those involved in the music to speak for themselves" – no matter the musical or artistic style.[287] In their "Ten Commandments of Music" the brothers write that music should have "lasting value" and "be sung in the name of the Lord," rather than "disagree with the Word of God" or "destroy hope in your heart."[288] Every listener (or parent or pastor) must decide for themselves which songs and artists would have a positive influence on their lives and faith.

Though they in theory aimed for a genre-neutral stance, the Peters brothers scrutinized some music styles more than others. They acknowledged that Christian heavy metal was a possibility, but seemed to personally agree more with those who opposed it. In 1987, they released a cassette tape about Stryper. Similar to their previous tape on KISS, they questioned the band based on their four-flaw system before sharing an interview with one of the band members. The crusaders thought "the Stryper boys seemed pretty nice," but they did not reach a clear conclusion as to whether the white metal musicians were good or bad in a religious sense.[289] As was the case with other genres of music, their approach to metal was pragmatic. As American anti-rock discourse grew into a discussion of message and effects on the listener, rather than a condemnation of rhythm and sound in and of themselves, the Peters brothers, too, realized that white metal could serve an evangelical purpose – even if it did not fit their personal tastes in music.[290] As Luhr points out, metal in an evangelical context is often seen as a "tool."[291] Even if white metal and other genres did not suit the Peters brothers' musical taste, they were willing to accept that these genres could be a means of worship and witnessing for Christians other than themselves.

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[286] Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil out of Rock and Roll."
[287] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 11.
[288] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 57, 61, 53, 56.
[289] Peters, quoted in Keith Abt, "'The Peters Brothers Interview Stryper: Whose Side Are They On?' Review," *Spinditty* Music website, The Arena Group, September 15, 2021.
[290] See Bivins, "The Weight of the World"; Luhr, "Metal Missionaries to the Nation"; Moberg, "The 'Double Controversy' of Christian Metal."
[291] Luhr, "Metal Missionaries to the Nation," 121. She also notes, though, that Christians disagreed about how metal fit in with their religion. More established tools for evangelizing were radio and TV, see Phillips, *Invisible Hands*; Balmer, *Religion in Twentieth Century America;* Lawrence R. Moore, *Selling God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Commercialism

Even the most well-meaning Christian artists, however, and perhaps especially white metal artists who were at the periphery of what was deemed compatible with Christian values, were at risk of being tempted by the commercialism of the secular rock industry. Commercialism as an expression of secular humanism was the remaining theme in the Peters brothers' system of the flaws of rock. Their main critique on this point was that rock celebrated money and glamour above all else. At a time when gospel of wealth Pentecostalism thrived and suburban evangelicals basked in material goods – as Colleen McDannell, Lawrence R. Moore, and others show – the Peters brothers condemned the secular materialism of the 1980s.[292] In their search of worldly wealth, the brothers argued, rock musicians left their integrity, morals, and faith behind. "[T]he worse it is, it seems like, the better it sells," be it occult album covers, videos with sexual themes, or extravagant stage shows and outfits.[293] Jim declared that "People today only see the glory, the money – the appealing parts of these rock star lives."[294] "Perhaps the greatest sin," however, "is that they masquerade behind a glamorous, seductive image when many of their lives are filled with loneliness, drugs, emptiness – even premature death."[295] The brothers particularly lamented the Beatles' carefree image that concealed their destructive drug abuse and involvement with eastern spirituality.[296]

As most rock artists and groups were driven by non-Christian values and motives, according to the anti-rock crusaders, even charitable work became suspicious. When pop and rock acts partook in initiatives like "anti-Vietnam rock rallies" or music projects like "We Are the World," the Peters brothers claimed they used such activities to hide their commercial agenda and seduce young listeners into viewing them as heroes.[297] This would distract teenagers from the importance of spiritual well-being as grown through devoted attention to God and the scriptures. With conservative evangelical paranoia they saw threats everywhere. Their conspiracies were not quite as extreme as for instance Noebel's communist plot, but they still fell into line with their contemporary anti-rock ministers and evangelicals and the far right at large.

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[292] McDannell, *Material Christianity*; Moore, *Selling God*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.
[293] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*; see also Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*
[294] Gordon McKerral, "Teen-Agers Send Rock Music to Blazes," *Herald and Review* (Decatur, Illinois), February 8, 1981, A3.
[295] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 32.
[296] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 23-26.
[297] Peters, Peters and Merrill. *What about Christian Rock?*, 31-32.

This opposition to the economic aspects of the music industry might seem ironic, as the Peter Brothers' anti-rock ministry was a business that relied on believers' willingness to purchase the goods they put out onto the Christian marketplace. In 1980, the ministry reported an income of $118,279 and $150,000 in the two preceding years. In each respective year, only 16 and 23 per cent of the revenue was spent as payment for the brothers and a couple of assistants, but by 1986 the ministry was financially independent from the main church.[298] This economic growth was in part accomplished through industrious entrepreneurship and an already established market for Christian commodities. During the Truth About Rock seminars, "vendors displayed their merchandise, offering cassette tapes and books for sale," and they also sold buttons.[299] Just like the Jesus People had started doing over a decade earlier, attendees could purchase commodities to display their faith.[300] In print and on tape, the brothers promised that "your gift of $15" would be rewarded with the *Truth About Rock Report* and the *Kiss Exposed* tape.[301] Those who became "Truth About Rock Partners" by subscribing to their services would also gain access to various anti-rock material.[302] The in-person talks themselves were also an important source of income. Though Dan assured one reporter that "[i]t didn't cost you a nickel to get in here, it won't cost you a nickel to get out," a "donation of $2 per person" or "freewill offering" was the general rule.[303] For a price, believers could return home from the Peters brothers' seminars with a renewed sense of moral purpose. As Hilde Løvdal Stephens puts it, "*buying evangelical* is *being evangelical*."[304] The Truth About Rock ministry exemplifies how 1980s evangelicalism fused well with capitalism.[305]

Like their predecessors and contemporaries, the Peters brothers seamlessly blended their fundamentalism with modernity and consumer culture. This was apparent

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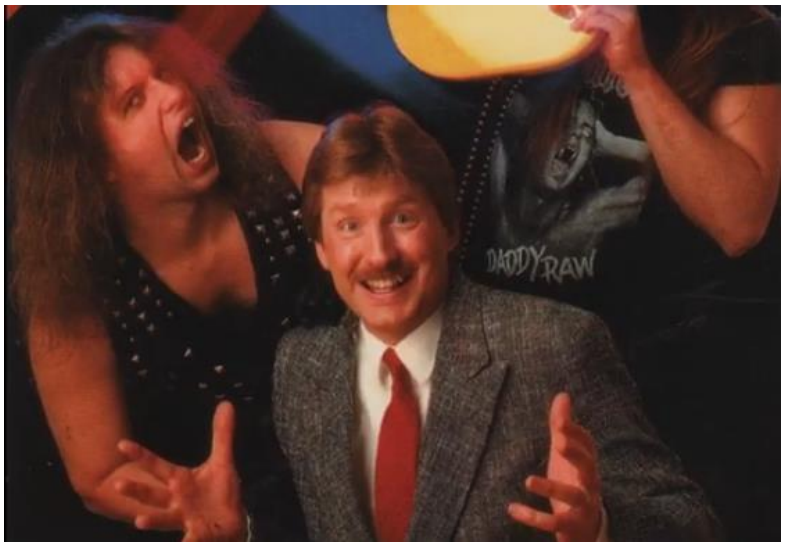
[298] Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock"; Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil Out of Rock and Roll."
[299] See for instance Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content"; Richards, "There's no 'Rock and Roll Heaven' for Steve Peters." Though the look and message of the goods were different from paraphernalia sold at rock concerts, the setup was the same.
[300] McDannell, *Material Christianity*; Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*; see also Stephens, *The Devil's Music*; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia.*
[301] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock,* 27:04.
[302] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom*, 117.
[303] Metsch, "Minister Throwing Stones at Rock Giants"; *The Dunn County News*, "Rock Music Seminar will be Presented at UW-Stout," February 18, 1981, 8; "Rock music's Effect on Youth to be Discussed," *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1981, 5.
[304] Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters," 105.
[305] See for instance Phillips, *Invisible Hands*; Moore, *Selling God*; Stephens, "Money Matters and Family Matters"; Kruse, *One Nation Under God*.

in their business models, but also in the design of their goods. The covers of their books were colorful with bold fonts, and their films included graphics, sound effects, and enthusiastic voiceovers that might just as well belong to the opening of a secular adventure film for youths.[306] Though their crusade dealt with heavy topics such as suicide, drug abuse, violence, and occultism, the packaging fit the optimistic affluence of the suburbs. Even though the brothers sought to instill fear, their writing was filled with puns and they often used humor when speaking to the camera or a live audience. Despite preaching of Satan's ominous presence in the world, the joy of leading a Christian life seemed to surpass it.[307]

The Peters brothers' accusations of rock's media exploitation may also seem contradictory to their own practices. Both the Truth About Rock ministry and the Peters brothers themselves were brands that they advertised internally in their own publications and seminars, as well as outwardly though their media appearances. Media exposure gave them free advertising, and they also advertised in the local newspapers whenever they had a seminar scheduled.[308] In their books, they referenced their own previous work and included advertisements for their goods and services. Their *Truth About Rock* film best exemplifies the extent of their self-promotion. In the film that is just short of one hour, they included three promotional intermissions, while also referring to their books, tapes, and seminars frequently in the main parts of the film.[309] One journalist attending a seminar reported that it "is frequently interrupted with appeals for participants to buy the materials to learn more about rock music."[310]

4: This billboard was put up at the Zion Christian Life Center shortly after their first record burning in 1979.

[306] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock*; Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.
[307] See for instance Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.
[308] At the KSTP live show, Dan and Steve complained that by being on the panel, Bill Lindsay of Impaler got a lot of free advertisement that they and other Christians like them never got. See KSTP, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom."
[309] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Youth Suicide Fantasy, Part 2*.
[310] Rodriguez, "'Truth About Rock' Raps Style, Content."



5: Steve displaying a gleeful sense of humor as members of Impaler seem to attack him.

With advertisements in newspapers and through their radio and television appearances, they reached out to a broader audience. Though the evangelicals welcomed the media attention as a blessing and denied accusations of any media strategy, they proved capable of arranging media stunts of their own. Recounting the preparations for the KSTP live show in 1986, Impaler vocalist Bill Lindsey said that the Peters brothers "were all talking about points and publishing and business aspects of what they were doing," explaining that they strategically placed anti-rock activists in the audience to engage in the question rounds throughout the show. A few years later, Lindsey recalled, Steve asked Impaler members to pose for a Truth About Rock poster.[311] The anti-rock activists seemed to be aware of the symbiotic relationship they had with a secular music industry that they blamed for the moral ailments of their nation. In their own words, they were "riding the coattails" of the rock industry hype.[312] The Peters brothers understood marketing and the media very well. At times, the spiritual evangelization and the media marketing of the Peters brothers could be difficult to distinguish from one another.[313] However, as they both served the same purpose, telling them apart seems unnecessary. The ministry sanctified the heavy focus on media exposure, commodities, and profits.

The Moral Politics Conservatism of the Truth About Rock Ministry

The Peters brothers worked as culture warriors, adjusting to modern means of communication to evangelize and spread their fundamentalist views. An analysis of their Truth About Rock ministry places the crusaders comfortably in the evangelical tradition.

[311] strad., "Impaler vs The Peters Brothers," YouTube video, February 4, 2020, 12:58.
[312] Dave Hage, "Sin in Song?: Lines in Rock Music Furrow some Christian Brows," *The Minneapolis Star*, November 26, 1980, 17.
[313] This was also the case for ministers like Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Jimmy Swaggart. See for instance Moore, *Selling God;* Stephens, *The Devil's Music.*

In terms of politics, they are also well-situated within conservative evangelicalism. Like many evangelicals prior to the rise of the Religious Right in the 1980s, though, the Peters brothers did not combine religious and moral issues with partisan politics. They kept out, or least they claimed to keep out, of secular politics even as the religious and secular spheres were increasingly intertwined throughout the decade.[314] The Peters brothers' ministry spread nationally and globally, but they largely targeted the grassroots and encouraged individuals and groups to make a change in their own communities – to "make the difference in the life of a young person."[315] But by so doing, they helped strengthen the evangelical voting bloc that the New Right depended on.

One of the Peters brothers' efforts, however, was directed at pushing the national government to act against rock music. In their 1984 books, they printed their "National Petition: To Stop Pornographic Music From Being Sold to or Played on the Public Airwaves in the Presence of Minors."[316] The petition listed three demands: "a record rating system" to make it easier for parents to keep their children away from the most damaging records, "[t]he banning of all obscene, indecent or profane records (…) via radio or television," and "[p]rohibition of sale [of such records] to any minor under the age of 17."[317] The Peters brothers encouraged readers to gather signatures for the petition and send them to the Truth About Rock ministry, so that they could pass them on to various government officials. While the Peters brothers' call for action did not lead to any changes directly, their petition and book on backmasking were, in fact, included in the resource list in the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) congressional hearing report.[318] In 1986, Steve made the claim that "the PMRC wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the Peters brothers," though their work was only a small fraction of the anti-rock sources cited in the report.[319]

Even though they did not endorse – or even mention – a political party or specific politicians, they were not apolitical.[320] On many points they took a clear political stance. While they explicitly distanced themselves from liberalism as well as libertarianism in *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom*, Steve declared in 1986 that "[w]e think we are a

[314] See Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines.*
[315] Truth About Rock Ministries, *Truth About Rock.*
[316] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 266.
[317] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom*, 115; Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, 266-267.
[318] Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, *Record Labeling.*
[319] Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil Out of Rock and Roll," 16; Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. *Record Labeling.*
[320] There might be mentions of parties and politicians in materials I have not yet researched.

little part of the conservative trend in America."[321] The brothers were not content with the way the United States was governed. "The Bible says if there is moral rot in government we should remove it," Dan explained, insinuating a desire for political change.[322] Much of this discontent had to do with private or family moral concerns that were key in the political shift to the right.[323] The crusaders were concerned with conservative moral issues such as "homosexuality, Eastern religion [and] birth control counseling for high school students," one 1980 news article explained.[324] These and other conservative traditionalist concerns were obvious throughout the Peters brothers' Truth About Rock ministry.

A less obvious link to the Religious Right was the crusaders' racism. In the 1960s, anti-rock activists with a white nationalist leaning recognized that protests against rock based on race were no longer acceptable in public discourse.[325] Most adjusted their anti-rock arguments accordingly, but the racist undertones prevailed as an aspect of white nationalism. This is also apparent in the Peters brothers' Truth About Rock ministry. In *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, in what seems to be an attempt to decry racism, the brothers reported that one Rolling Stones song "included a racist (…) line, 'black girls just wanna get [expletive deleted] all night.'"[326] At first glance the reader might be convinced by their anti-racist ploy. When removed from the framework of revised and printed books, however, the racism of the Peters brothers comes through more clearly. Their mother Josephine, who "continues to counsel them," expressed a liking for Adolf Hitler.[327] She said that "when I was in high school we thought Mr. Hitler had some pretty good ideas" that would have served the world well "if Hitler had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior."[328] Her sons never claimed to share this view, but several critics likened their

[321] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom.* Hage, "Sin in Song?: Lines in Rock Music Furrow some Christian Brows," 17; Ehlert, "The Peters Brothers Want to Beat the Devil Out of Rock and Roll," 16.
[322] Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock."
[323] See for instance Stasson, "The Politicization of Family Life"; Story and Laurie. *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000;* Phillips, *Invisible Hands;* Johnson, "God, Country, and Anita Bryant."
[324] Hage, "Sin in Song?"
[325] See *Martin and Segrave, Anti-Rock*.
[326] Peters and Peters with Cher Merrill, *Rock's Hidden Persuader*, 46
[327] Tom Zito, "Peters Brothers Burned Up About 'Satanic' Rock Music." *Lexington Herald-Leader*, February 21, 1981, B1; Note how the evangelical family hierarchy is kept into the children's adulthood. Though the brothers are grown up with wives and families of their own, their mother functions as a moral guide. See Neumann, "Domestic Security."
[328] Zito, "Peters Brothers Burned Up About 'Satanic' Rock Music."

record burnings to the book burnings arranged by the Nazis.[329] In 1981, one journalist claimed the Peters brothers' approach served "to create 'Hitler-ish' fear and hatred."[330] Jim and Steve repeatedly assured the press that "[t]he only thing we have in common with Hitler is that we both use fire."[331] As seen with their support of feminist critique of sexual objectification of women in rock music, the Peters brothers were sufficiently aware of political and societal currents to adjust their message somewhat to appeal to a broader audience. While their sincerity about the support of feminism is unclear at best, their anti-racist comments are even less convincing. On one occasion the brothers talked about the danger of demons, "[a]nd don't think we just mean a few demons hiding in a bongo drum over in Africa."[332] This is the same jungle music rhetoric that was prominent in 1950s and early 60s anti-rock discourse.[333] When a member of the television audience asked Dan and Steve why all rock musicians resembled "bush monkeys," the two burst out laughing.[334] With incidents like these, the anti-racist assurances of the brothers strongly resemble a gimmick to disguise a view of race that society at large deems unacceptable.[335]

In addition to the recurring racism, patriotic and nationalistic sentiments surface in their work now and then. On one occasion, Dan said their aim was to remind people of "the Christian principles that our country was founded on," while father Leroy opened a record burning with the following words: "Lord, we thank you for America, which lets us give witness to you in the way we do."[336] When explaining how questionable rock artists can also have redeeming qualities, Steve said of Bruce Springsteen that "[h]e's at least patriotic."[337] These might not be the most extreme displays of patriotism. Nonetheless, their ministry in total had a clear white nationalist orientation. It was also a Christian nationalism that linked Christian faith to American national identity and

[329] McKerral, "Teen-Agers Send Rock Music to Blazes"; 81.02.21; Parker, "Bookburners are Making a Comeback."
[330] Jeff Chew, "Sure, Everybody Enjoys a Good Fire but Really…," *The Odessa American*, October 4, 1981.
[331] Zito, "Witness of Fire"; McKerral, "Is John Lennon Burning?" C1.
[332] Zito, "Peters Brothers Burned Up About 'Satanic' Rock Music," B1.
[333] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-Rock*; Brackett, *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*; Stephens, *The Devil's Music*.
[334] KSTP, "Satan is in your Child's Bedroom."
[335] This is the same tendency found in the anti-rock activists in the 1960s, see Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock.*
[336] Adams, "They wage holy crusade against rock"; Zito, "Peters Brothers Burned Up About 'Satanic' Rock Music," B1.
[337] Sig Christenson, "'Truth About Rock': Evangelist brings music crusade to Taft," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times,* May 9, 1985, 1; a common misreading of "Born in the USA."

ideals.[338] Here too, the Peters brothers proved compatible with the politics of the Religious Right. In the Truth About Rock ministry there were strong links to the Moral Majority's God and country nationalism, as well as to the ardent nationalism of Reaganites.[339]

Both the publications and the media appearances of the Peters brothers suggest a political stance compatible with that of the Religious Right, especially the factions marked by white nationalism. Their connection to the conservative movement was explicitly, but not exclusively, through traditional, religious, and cultural issues. Implicitly, it was also compatible with the political and economic ideas of the conservative movement. Though their antipathy to monetization for non-religious purposes was strong, and even though they decried libertarianism, their ministry functioned as a business. As such, their practice did not really collide with the libertarian divisions of the conservative movement after all. The Truth About Rock ministry was not dependent on the large, nation-wide evangelical personas and organizations like Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Neither were they, from what my material shows, publicly affiliated with a political party. Yet, they undoubtedly belonged to the conservative movement with their religious and moral politics agenda.

[338] See for instance Joshua T. Davis and Samuel L. Perry, "White Christian Nationalism and Relative Political Tolerance for Racists," *Social Problems* 68 (2021).
[339] Falwell, *Listen, America!*; Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography;* Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The Peters Brothers' Truth About Rock

At first glance, the activism of the Peters brothers looks highly original – an impression they exuberantly upheld in their writing and media appearances. But while the concoction of ideas and practices might be unique to the Truth About Rock ministry, each element is connected to the wider context of their time. Their beliefs were typically fundamentalist. Their practices were evangelical. Their ministry was colored by its suburban environment and material Christianity. Their business was firmly capitalist. Their political convictions were similar to those on the far right. As such, the Peters brothers in their uniqueness present an image of a stereotypical religious conservative of the 1980s. They may have failed at providing a "definitive, comprehensive analysis" of rock music, but succeeded, to a large extent, in providing an illustrative, thorough example of what conservatism in the late 1970s and 1980s could look like.[340] Though the Peters brothers were not the most prominent figures of the Reagan era, it is important to take them, and others like them, seriously – especially when looking at a movement where the grassroots has been so vital. The Peters brothers were largely affected by the ideas of the Religious Right, but they in turn had a considerable impact on a conservative movement that consisted of a variety of smaller groups.

The Truth About Rock ministry was seemingly seeped in inconsistencies. The brothers warned teenagers about sex while celebrating sexuality; they condemned violent graphics while using a rhetoric of war; they both detested and celebrated rebellion; they accused rock acts of selling out when they themselves earned their wages by selling their ideas and commodities. But there was a perpetual logic to their arguments and the way they presented them: everything goes as long as it served to promote *the* truth, namely that all things, be it rock music, society or country, must be grounded in and uphold fundamentalist Christian principles. In short, social order in America depended on the traditionalist nuclear family unit. Through devotion to God and independence from the federal government, white Americans would thrive.

Areas for Further Study

As participants of the conservative movement and the Religious Right, the Peters brothers have surprisingly not been the object of scholarly analysis. As figures of the anti-rock

[340] Peters and Peters with Merrill, *Why Knock Rock?*, cover blurb.

movement, they were more prominent in the local communities and national media of their time, and they have consequently garnered a degree of interest in academic circles.[341] For this thesis, they have been the main object of study. To paraphrase the evangelical minister brothers, this thesis has not "hit the bottom" of the Peters brothers' anti-rock crusade.[342] For one, there is a considerable amount of primary source material that has been left out of this dissertation. Their newsletters, letters, Truth about Rock paraphernalia, the music they recorded, their many other media appearances, as well as interviews with those who witnessed their crusade, would all improve our understanding of their ministry. Furthermore, I have focused on the broad themes and issues in the Peters brothers' ministry, but there are still many nuances to explore further and more in-depth. A more thorough comparative study of the Peters brothers and their anti-rock contemporaries and other evangelicals could provide a deeper understanding of anti-rock campaigns as a cultural phenomenon. Likewise, it would be interesting to further investigate their impact on local organizations and communities. This dissection of a conservative evangelical truth about rock might facilitate further scholarly engagement with the material, as well as academic discussions about American anti-rock, conservatism, and the connection between the two.

The anti-rock activism of the Peters brothers was deeply rooted in conservative anti-rock traditions, with a continuation of core themes around "the devil's music," sexual promiscuity, and violence. Rebellion and drug abuse were as relevant as ever in the Truth About Rock ministry, and racist attitudes persisted along with these. At the same time, the Peters brothers were key in adapting anti-rock sentiments to a society that was characterized by suburban affluence, new media technologies, and innovative modes of Christian evangelization. The brothers were central in moving the anti-rock discourse away from complaining about the beat, sound, and noise level, which were some of the earlier objections to the music. As anti-rock activism became more innovative and youthful, the musical form became less important. Instead, the morality of the music became a focal point, if not the only one. The genre of rock & roll itself was no longer the issue of contention, as the Peters brothers eventually embraced most sanctified music without particular regard for musical style. With this anti-rock crusade and other conservative evangelical efforts of the decade – like those of LaHaye and Schaeffer – the

[341] See Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide"; Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia*.
[342] Peters and Peters, *The Peters Brothers Hit Rock's Bottom.*

anti-rock discourse, more than anything, became a discourse of anti-secularism.[343] Brackett contends that the decline of the anti-rock movement was due to external factors such as changes in the political landscape, the waning of the Satanic Panic, and the many scandals of evangelical leaders.[344] I argue that internal reimagining was just as crucial.

A scholarly analysis of the Truth About Rock ministry furthermore strengthens the idea that anti-rock was not ultimately about music. As Stephens and others have discussed, anti-rock protests were indeed a reaction against youth culture, liberal politics, new forms of spirituality, feminism, the civil rights movements, and gay rights.[345] In 2023, anti-rock sentiments might seem peculiar and old-fashioned, or even absurd, to most. When grandmothers sing along to punk rock songs and heavy metal stars share their family life on reality TV, the Peters brothers' objections sound positively alien.[346] While the anti-rock of the 1980s has dwindled, however, the moral and ideological foundation of the crusaders has survived.

In our age of conflict and polarization, white, traditionalist, Christian conservatives have found new ways to fight cultures and policies that challenge the heteronormative family structure and values that they favor. In the presidential campaign of 2016, conservative evangelicals overwhelmingly supported the thrice-married millionaire Donald J. Trump. On June 24, 2022, a conservative Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, thereby strengthening the anti-abortion movement. State laws ban schools from teaching critical race theory and providing sex education. Filmmakers face a massive backlash when they cast women in strong leading roles or when they recast non-whites as main characters. Right-wing politicians declare drag culture a threat to American children. Conservatives complain that "woke ideology" threatens freedom of speech and other constitutionally given rights. Moral panics and what Bivins calls a "religion of fear" are still prominent features of American society, and it affects pop culture, religion and politics.[347] Present-day culture warriors of the right are still battling the Satanic foes that the Peters brothers fought, and they share their black and white worldview. By unraveling the underlying ideology of the Peters brothers and their Truth About Rock ministry, we step closer to an understanding of current debates and events.

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[343] See Stephens, *The Devil's Music*.
[344] Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide."
[345] Stephens, *The Devil's Music*; Nekola, "'More Than Just a Music'"; Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Nuzum, *Parental Advisory*; Martin and Segrave, *Anti-Rock*.
[346] Klypchak, "'How You Gonna See Me Now.'"
[347] Bivins, *Religion of Fear*.

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