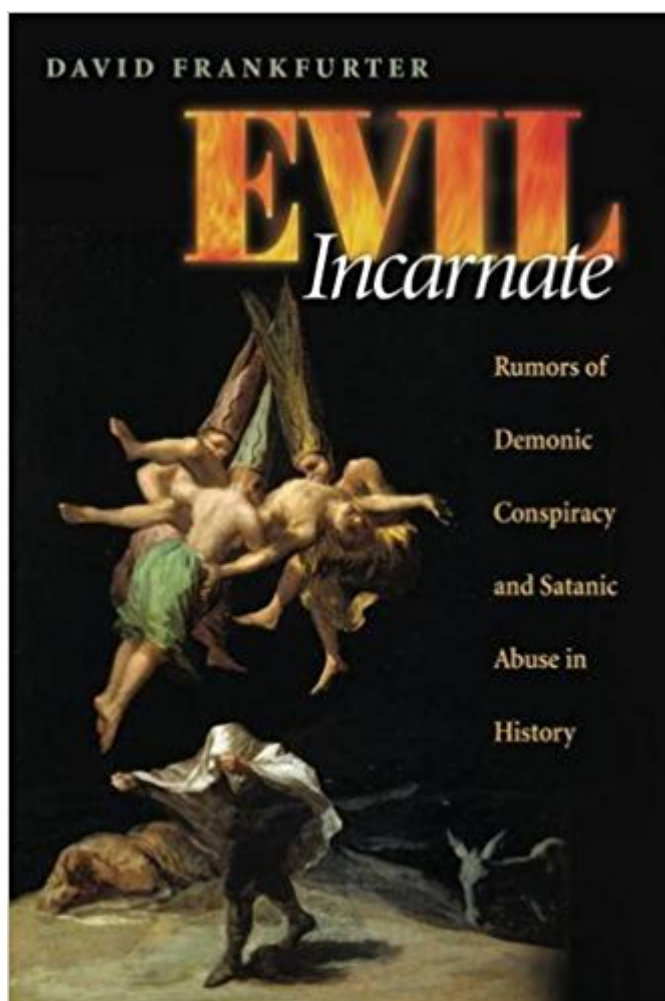


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# Evil Incarnate: Rumors Of Demonic Conspiracy And Satanic Abuse In History



## Synopsis

In the 1980s, America was gripped by widespread panics about Satanic cults. Conspiracy theories abounded about groups who were allegedly abusing children in day-care centers, impregnating girls for infant sacrifice, brainwashing adults, and even controlling the highest levels of government. As historian of religions David Frankfurter listened to these sinister theories, it occurred to him how strikingly similar they were to those that swept parts of the early Christian world, early modern Europe, and postcolonial Africa. He began to investigate the social and psychological patterns that give rise to these myths. Thus was born *Evil Incarnate*, a riveting analysis of the mythology of evil conspiracy. The first work to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic, the book uses anthropology, the history of religion, sociology, and psychoanalytic theory, to answer the questions "What causes people collectively to envision evil and seek to exterminate it?" and "Why does the representation of evil recur in such typical patterns?" Frankfurter guides the reader through such diverse subjects as witch-hunting, the origins of demonology, cannibalism, and the rumors of Jewish ritual murder, demonstrating how societies have long expanded upon their fears of such atrocities to address a collective anxiety. Thus, he maintains, panics over modern-day infant sacrifice are really not so different from rumors about early Christians engaging in infant feasts during the second and third centuries in Rome. In *Evil Incarnate*, Frankfurter deepens historical awareness that stories of Satanic atrocities are both inventions of the mind and perennial phenomena, not authentic criminal events. True evil, as he so artfully demonstrates, is not something organized and corrupting, but rather a social construction that inspires people to brutal acts in the name of moral order.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From the Salem witch trials in 1692 to the alleged satanic ritual abuse of children in day care centers in California in the 1980s, individuals have sought to restore moral order by rooting out what they regard as evil conspiracies. In a thought-provoking if sometimes pedantic study, University of New Hampshire historian Frankfurter draws on religion, sociology and anthropology to uncover the reasons that societies publicly raise cries of demonic conspiracies to explain various social evils. During the Salem witch trials, for example, the fascination with and the terror of the mysterious Witches' Sabbat gave rise to a cadre of so-called experts who claimed to judge accurately the behavior of a witch. Both the experts and the defendants performed their roles in the social ritual of identifying and persecuting the accused. Frankfurter convincingly demonstrates that demonic conspiracies and satanic ritual abuse are simply myths of evil conspiracies that provide societies an excuse for bullying those who are already considered suspect. He observes trenchantly that those seeking to purge demonic conspiracies have done more violence than the devotees of those so-called evil groups. Frankfurter's conclusions will likely be hotly contested, especially among those who claim to have been ritually abused, but his judicious insights about the nature of evil in our world provide thoughtful glimpses at the ways societies demonize the Other. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Winner of the 2007 Award of Excellence in the Study of Religion, Analytical-Descriptive Studies category, American Academy of Religion"Mr. Frankfurter . . . shows just how similar stories about evil have been. . . . [E]vil recurs in predictably familiar form. . . . Mr. Frankfurter outlines these repeated elements with illuminating clarity and wide-ranging learning. . . . Using the term evil, he argues, prevents us from understanding context and cause; it places something beyond the human and that's when trouble starts. . . . But when the word is applied to an act, we know just precisely what it means: There is no human excuse."--Edward Rothstein, *The New York Times*"In a thought-provoking . . . study . . . Frankfurter draws on religion, sociology and anthropology to uncover the reasons that societies publicly raise cries of demonic conspiracies to explain various social evils. . . . Frankfurter convincingly demonstrates that demonic conspiracies and satanic ritual abuse are simply myths of evil conspiracies that provide societies an excuse for bullying those who are already considered suspect. He observes trenchantly that those seeking to purge demonic

conspiracies have done more violence than the devotees of those so-called evil groups. . . . [H]is judicious insights about the nature of evil in our world provide thoughtful glimpses at the ways societies demonize the Other."--Publishers Weekly"[A] fascinating, even gripping, study. . . . [It] merits widespread attention and careful study."--Dale B. Martin, Church History"[A] brilliant, if terrifying, study."--Dennis P. Quinn, Religious Studies Review"Frankfurter explores the social phenomenon of belief in evil conspiracy throughout Western history from the second century C.E. to the very recent past. . . . Evil Incarnate quite successfully does what it claims to do, namely explore a social phenomenon, the way in which a certain kind of myth has functioned in different historical circumstances to produce social cohesion and to provide a medium for thinking about danger, inversion and otherness. . . . Evil Incarnate also provides scholars with a wide range of interesting avenues for further study."--Heidi Marx-Wolf, Bryn Mawr Classical Review"Interpreting and explaining stories and activities, Frankfurter takes us far away and long ago. He also takes the reader through a lot of different ground with regard to the subjects of analysis, and thus he produces and uses many theoretical perspectives.... It does, however, make for fascinating reading.... In addition to his chapter on 'rites of evil,' I was particularly taken with his ritual analysis of the performance of evil."--Asbjorn Dyrendal, Numen"This meticulously researched and clearly argued book questions the reality of evil and will be welcomed by those, including myself, who join David Frankfurter in casting doubt upon the meaning of this dangerous and destructive idea."--Phillip Cole, Journal of Religion"Frankfurter has written an excellent account of how panics about Satanism have periodically erupted in Europe, North America, and postcolonial Africa. He pulls no punches in concluding that 'no evidence has ever been found to verify the atrocities as historical events.' The terrible irony that emerges from Frankfurter's work is that 'the real atrocities of history seem to take place not in the perverse ceremonies of some evil cult but rather in the course of purging such cults from the world.'"--Richard J. McNally, PhycCRITIQUES"Frankfurter's book, Evil Incarnate, is a scholarly, interdisciplinary work grounded in meticulous research. . . . What is riveting, here, is the way the myth of evil incarnate takes on new shapes with the arrival of new cultural collisions. What is exciting is his non-reductive causal approach, and the fluid, multi-layered perspectives from which he engages his topic."--Sue Grand, Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society"This is indeed a thought-provoking study and is strongly recommended for students of religion, culture and society. The discourses of evil are real in all our lives and understanding the dynamics that propagate them and turn them into unspeakable violence can liberate people and assist humanity in the journey towards peace and integration."--Dr. Rodney Moss, Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae"This book raises many questions and provides some answers in attempting to elucidate the process of

demonisation."--Michaela Valente, *Journal of the Ecclesiastical History*

Most human societies imagine there are enemies "out there" whose behavior embodies the very opposite of what is right and proper. When these ideas become institutionalized, it can lead to persecutions that target real people, with tragic consequences. David Frankfurter has written a brilliant, chilling history of how evil has been constructed in Western societies, from early medieval times to the present day. The book is organized thematically, taking the reader through the process of the formalization and institutionalization of these cultural projections, using historical examples as illustrations. Frankfurter shows how folk ideas about evil others become systematized through texts, creating a group of experts whose role is to recognize and root out evil. The evil others are imagined as participating in horrific, perverse rites that invert the norms and values (and often the religious rituals) of mainstream society. As this collective fantasy grows and spreads, entire societies can mobilize against evil -- as happened in the European witch persecutions of the period 1350-1750. The tragedy is that there ARE no evil others -- the whole thing is a collective fantasy, and the persecutors themselves end up engaging in the very behavior they find so horrifying and objectionable in imagined others. The examples in this book are primarily drawn from European and North American history -- the witch trials, conspiracy theories of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Satanic panics of the 1980s. The underlying principles, however, are applicable cross-culturally, wherever/ whenever folk ideas about evil others are systematized and institutionalized. I used this as a textbook in an upper-division seminar on witchcraft in anthropological perspective. The students really understood the mechanics of how these extreme othering processes work, and were able to apply them to a number of other socio-cultural contexts in their final papers and analyses. More importantly, this book should be required reading for leaders and politicians of all stripes, as well as for any educated person. If we were more aware of the perniciousness of the discourse of evil, perhaps we would be less quick to impute it to others, and less likely to repeat cycles of violence and persecution.

A great book for anyone interested in evil or religious violence.

Thank you. Good book.

I have this particular fear that always makes itself known to me when I'm reading (and reviewing) a scholarly book; especially when the book in question is an informative quality work with analyses

that could have prevented immense amounts of human pain and suffering had they only been available to more people. I simply fear that the book is too complicated, written in a much too complex academic language for the common reader to understand. I'm not saying I myself understand everything I read - sometimes I don't even understand half of it - but if the book is about anthropology, then obviously I have a better chance of understanding it than someone lacking a degree in this particular subject. *Evil Incarnate* is one of these books that has a much-needed dose of reason and common sense to offer but unfortunately is written in a way that'll probably result in not nearly enough people actually reading it. David Frankenfurter, Professor of Religious Studies and History at the University of New Hampshire, has written an equally complicated as disturbing book about man's view of evil and evil conspiracies. During the 1980s America, as well as Britain and certain other parts of Europe, became haunted by different "satanic panics

This has the distinct, but not unpleasant, aroma of a doctoral dissertation reworked as popular nonfiction book. Given the 'sexiness' of the subject, the restraint of the author as he describes the social construction of archetypes is nothing short of remarkable. For those of you with agendas, he maintains throughout that demonic conspiracies and satanic abuse are, as the title indicates, rumors, albeit persistent and highly detailed ones. In 200 C.E., Romans were reading about how Christians murdered children in their detestable cult activities; in 1200, Christians read about Jews doing the same things, and we're still reading essentially the same accounts with different proper nouns. His detailed analysis and reliance on a panoply of scholarly references may induce glazed eyes in a general readership, but anyone with a strong interest in the subject will find it quite absorbing. Just make sure you're well rested and haven't eaten recently.

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