

# The Practice of Ritual Defamation

*How Values, Opinions, and Beliefs Are Controlled in Democratic Societies*

BY LAIRD WILCOX

**D**efamation is the destruction or attempted destruction of the reputation, status, character, or standing in the community of a person or group of persons by unfair, wrongful, or malicious speech or publication. For the purposes of this essay, the central element is defamation in retaliation for the real or imagined attitudes, opinions, or beliefs of the victim, with the intention of silencing or neutralizing his or her influence, and/or making an example of them so as to discourage similar independence and “insensitivity” or non-observance of taboos. It is different in nature and degree from simple criticism or disagreement in that it is aggressive, organized, and skillfully applied, often by an organization or representative of a special interest group, and in that it consists of several characteristic elements.

Ritual Defamation is not ritualistic because it follows any prescribed religious or mystical doctrine, nor is it embraced in any particular document or scripture. Rather, it is ritualistic because it follows a predictable, stereotyped pattern which embraces a number of elements, as in a ritual.

The elements of Ritual Defamation are these:

- In a ritual defamation the victim must have violated a particular taboo in some way, usually by expressing or identifying with a forbidden attitude, opinion, or belief. It is not necessary that he “do” anything about it or undertake any particular course of action, only that he engage in some form of communication or expression.

- The method of attack in a ritual defamation is to assail the character of the victim, and never to offer more than a perfunctory challenge to the particular attitudes, opinions, or beliefs expressed or implied. Character assassination is its primary tool.

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- An important rule in ritual defamation is to avoid engaging in any kind of debate over the truthfulness or reasonableness of what has been expressed, only condemn it. To debate opens the issue up for examination and discussion of its merits, and consideration of the evidence that may support it, which is just what the ritual defamer is trying to avoid. The primary goal of a ritual defamation is censorship and repression.

- The victim is often somebody in the public eye—someone who is vulnerable to public opinion—although perhaps in a very modest way. It could be a school-teacher, writer, businessman, minor official, or merely an outspoken citizen. Visibility enhances vulnerability to ritual defamation.

**The Only Thing We  
Have to Fear is  
FEARMONGERING**

- An attempt, often successful, is made to involve others in the defamation. In the case of a public official, other public officials will be urged to denounce the offender. In the case of a student, other students will be called upon, and so on.

- In order for a ritual defamation to be effective, the victim must be dehumanized to the extent that he becomes identical with the offending attitude, opinion, or belief, and in a manner which distorts it to the point where it appears at its most extreme. For example, a victim who is defamed as a “subversive” will be identified with the worst images of subversion, such as espionage, terrorism, or treason. A victim defamed as a “pervert” will be identified with the worst images of perversion, including child molestation and rape. A victim defamed as a “racist” or “anti-Semitic” will be identified with the worst images of racism or anti-Semitism, such as lynchings or gas chambers.

- Also to be successful, a ritual defamation must bring pressure and humiliation on the victim from every

quarter, including family and friends. If the victim has school-aged children, he may be taunted and ridiculed as a consequence of adverse publicity. If employed, the victim may be fired from his job. If the victim belongs to clubs or associations, other members may be urged to expel him.

• Any explanation the victim may offer, including the claim of being misunderstood, is considered irrelevant. To claim truth as a defense for a politically incorrect value, opinion, or belief is interpreted as defiance and only compounds the problem. Ritual defamation is often not necessarily an issue of being wrong or incorrect, but rather of “insensitivity” and failing to observe social taboos.

An interesting aspect of ritual defamation as a practice is its universality. It is not specific to any value, opinion, or belief or to any group or subculture. It may be used for or against any political, ethnic, national, or religious group. It may, for example, be used by anti-Semites against Jews or Jews against anti-Semites, by rightists against leftists or leftists against rightists, and so on.

The power of ritual defamation lies entirely in its capacity to intimidate and terrorize. It embraces some elements of primitive superstitious belief, as in a “curse” or “hex.” It plays into the subconscious fear most people have of being abandoned or rejected by the tribe or by society and being cut off from social and psychological support systems.

The weakness of ritual defamation lies in its tendency toward overkill and in its obvious maliciousness. Occasionally a ritual defamation will fail because of poor planning and failure to correctly judge the vulnerability of the victim or because its viciousness inadvertently generates sympathy.

It is important to recognize and identify the patterns of a ritual defamation. Like all propaganda and disinformation campaigns, it is accomplished primarily through the manipulation of words and symbols.

It is not used to persuade, but to punish. Although it may have cognitive elements, its thrust is primarily emotional. Ritual defamation is used to hurt, to intimidate, to destroy, and to persecute, and to avoid the dialogue, debate, and discussion upon which a free society depends. On those grounds it must be opposed no matter who tries to justify its use. ■

## Rising Tide of ‘Hate’

*SPLC’s Vast Conspiracy of ‘Extremists’*

Over the years, the Southern Poverty Law Center—having successfully bankrupted Klansmen, Neo-Nazis, and Skinheads—has expanded its crosshairs (and fundraising prospects) to encompass a range of law-abiding citizens (liberals and conservatives alike), civic groups, and patriotic and religious organizations. This expanding list of targets includes:



- Focus on the Family’s James Dobson
- U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX)
- The Family Research Council
- The Boy Scouts of America
- Vanderbilt University Professor Carol Swain
- Syndicated Columnist Pat Buchanan
- Former Justice Department Attorney Leah Durant
- World Net Daily CEO Joseph Farah
- Accuracy in Media’s Cliff Kincaid
- Pastor and 2008 Constitutional Party Presidential Nominee Chuck Baldwin
- Fox News TV Host Glenn Beck
- U.S. Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN)
- U.S. Rep. Steve King (R-IOWA)
- Fox News Legal Analyst Andrew Napolitano
- Former CNN TV Host Lou Dobbs
- Eagle Forum Founder Phyllis Schlafly
- Conservative Philanthropist Richard Mellon Scaife
- The American Enterprise Institute
- Ludwig von Mises Institute
- Free Congress Foundation Founder Paul Weyrich
- Author David Horowitz
- The Bradley Foundation
- Nationally Syndicated Radio Show Hosts Rush Limbaugh, Terry Anderson, Bill O’Reilly, and Michael Savage
- AEI Scholar Charles Murray
- Traditionalist Roman Catholics
- Catholic Family News ■