

Saving The Children by Killing Them: Redemptive Sacrifice in the Ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan

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It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it.
*U.S. Army officer,
after the destruction of Ben Tre, Vietnam, 1968*

I'd rather see them lay like that than to see them have to
die like the Jews did.

Resident of Jonestown, Guyana

I would rather see my little girls die now, still believing in
God, than have them grow up under communism and one
day die no longer believing in God.

Resident of California, USA

We win when we go down.

Jim Jones

Win one for the Gipper.

Ronald Reagan

On November 18, 1978, over 900 Americans living in the cooperative agricultural community known as Jonestown entered into a collective mass murder-suicide. Many, perhaps most, of the adult participants understood the Jonestown mass suicide as a redemptive act. This act, they thought, would redeem a fully human identity from the dehumanizing pull of an evil capitalist world through a single superhuman act of self-sacrifice. However, even the killing of infants and children was interpreted as a redemptive act. Jim Jones insisted that truly loving people would kill their children before allowing them to be taken back to America to be tortured, brainwashed, or even killed by a society he regarded as fascist. That sentiment was echoed by a member of the community as he was surrounded by the bodies of the children who were in fact sacrificed: "I'd rather see them lay like that

than to see them have to die like the Jews did." Death in Jonestown promised to redeem those children from a dehumanized life and death in America. If the children were captured by the Americans, this particular speaker concluded, "they're gonna just let them grow up and be dummies, just like they want them to be, and not grow up to be a *person* like the one and only Jim Jones." Sacrificial death, therefore, promised the redemption of an authentic human identity.¹

Most Americans found the deaths at Jonestown unthinkable. If thought about at all, the mass murder-suicide registered as something so obviously outside the mainstream of American cultural life that it stood as a boundary against which central American values could be defined. Yet, from 1980 to 1988 the symbolic center of the American public order was occupied by a religiopolitical figure who, on numerous occasions, idealized the ideology of redemptive sacrifice. To cite only one striking example, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, on March 8, 1983, Ronald Reagan related the following anecdote. A certain prominent young man in Hollywood stood up in a public gathering and said that there was nothing in the world that he loved more than his daughters. Reagan recalled how he had worried at that moment that this man did not have his priorities straight. "Oh, no, don't," Reagan recalled his reaction. "You can't—don't say that." Then, however, the father set Reagan's mind at ease by concluding that it was precisely because he loved his daughters that he was willing to sacrifice them in the interest of a higher good. According to Reagan, the father declared, "I would rather see my little girls die now, still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God."²

Here, of course, is an irony: Jones wanted children to die to save them from capitalism, while Ronald Reagan wanted children to die to save them from communism. Yet, this irony should not obscure our recognition that both leaders—one on the periphery, the other at the center of American public life—employed the powerful ideology of redemptive sacrifice in order to justify mass death. Furthermore, beyond irony, both Reagan and Jones fashioned potent ideologies of sacrifice out of the same political and symbolic economy of Cold War conflict between capitalism and communism. Those ideologies call for comparative analysis to reveal the contrasting, yet strangely similar, strategies for negotiating redemption through sacrifice that were represented by Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan.

When news of the Jonestown mass murder-suicide broke, Ronald Reagan was in Bonn on a tour of European capitals. Reporters asked for his reaction to the event. "I'll try not to be happy in saying this," Reagan remarked. "[Jones] supported a number of political figures but seemed to be more involved with the Democratic party. I

haven't seen anyone in the Republican party having been helped by him or seeking his help."³ Yet, Reagan did seem to derive some pleasure from associating Jonestown with the Democrats and distancing himself and his political party. Such distancing was characteristic of the general trend in reactions to Jonestown that enveloped the movement and its sudden demise in layers of denial. Strategic distancing, however, obscured the fact that the ideology of redemptive sacrifice enacted by a movement on the periphery of American society was latent at the very center of the American public order. In an important sense, Reagan's presidency was dedicated to revitalizing the sacrificial center of American society.

Jones's ideology of redemptive sacrifice had been intentionally decentering: he argued that the Jonestown deaths would have a performative impact on America that would shake America's faith in its own centered order, an order that Jones characterized as oppressive, capitalist, fascist, and racist. On the last night of Jonestown, Jones declared, "We win when we go down." What did Jones think they would win? Here I can only summarize my findings. First, he thought he and his followers would win their ongoing battle against outside enemies—the U.S. government, the media, and traitors who called themselves Concerned Relatives—through an act of suicide for which those enemies would bear the guilt. Second, he thought they would win glory for their sacred cause through an act that would simultaneously demonstrate the purity of their commitment to socialism—Divine Socialism, God, Almighty Socialism—and demonstrate the ultimate seriousness of their protest against a world dominated, defiled, and dehumanized by capitalism. Third, and this is what distinguished what Jones called revolutionary suicide from self-destructive suicide, he thought they would win by redeeming a fully human identity from a dehumanized life and death in America by means of a single superhuman act.

Ronald Reagan also spoke of winning through sacrifice. America had won and would continue to win in the struggle for freedom (under the rule of law) only because America's sons and daughters paid the highest price, gave the greatest gift, made the supreme sacrifice. Although this patriotic rhetorical formula must seem familiar, I think Reagan's revitalization of the sacrificial center of America bears further examination in terms of three overlapping symbolic codes: a metaphysical code, a kinship code, and an economic code. Furthermore, by juxtaposing Reagan's overlapping and often slipping symbolic codes of redemptive sacrifice with the sacrificial ideology of Jim Jones, new significance to the phrase "Win one for the Gipper" will become apparent. Since I have already reconstructed the worldview of

Jim Jones elsewhere, I will devote the first part of the present discussion to a recollection of the sacrificial metaphysics of Ronald Reagan.

The Profound Sacrificial Truth

Many attempts have been made to explain the power of Reagan's presidential rhetoric. Reagan used compelling metaphorical tropes, such as "path" metaphors and "disease/healing" metaphors.⁴ He made frequent anecdotal use of synecdoche to reduce a complex whole to some (often mistaken or fictitious) part.⁵ He used the imagery and illusion of the movies, made more powerful because, as Michael Rogin has noted, "during Reagan's lifetime the locus of sacred value shifted from church not to the state but to Hollywood."⁶ Reagan used familiar domestic imagery drawn from home, family, and neighborhood in symbolic substitution for situations of public or global scope. He consistently collapsed lateral, binary oppositions—"neither east nor west," "neither left nor right"—and substituted vertical and centering images. Finally, and most importantly, Reagan penetrated, appropriated, and exploited American civic ceremonial rhetoric of death. Rhetorical analysis of the speeches of the "Great Communicator" could endlessly explore the strategies through which he turned speech into "symbolic capital" for the implementation of public policy programs.⁷ Yet, no strategy was more potent than the ideological rhetoric of death, martyrdom, and redemptive sacrifice. I want to isolate that complex of rhetorical imagery and strategy through which Reagan revitalized the ideology of redemptive sacrifice. Consistently, throughout his political career, Reagan reiterated a metaphysical code that reinforced what he claimed as the profound sacrificial truth at the heart of America.⁸

An examination of Reagan's speeches from 1964 to 1989 reveals a recurring metaphysical claim: human beings have souls because they are capable of sacrificing their bodies. Sometimes Reagan seemed to imply that only Americans had such souls to be revealed through sacrifice. Yet, at other times, he seemed to intend a more epistemological shading to this claim by suggesting that human beings demonstrated that they *knew* they had souls whenever they were willing to sacrifice their bodies. But, in any event, the sacrifice of the body, the physical, or the material was defined by Ronald Reagan as redemptive because it alone disclosed what he referred to as the "profound truth" of the soul. In his March 1983 address to the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan concluded his anecdote about the young father who was willing to sacrifice his daughters to save them from communism by recording the response of the "tremendous gathering" that had heard those words in California during the Cold War 1950's. "There were thousands of young people in that audience," Reagan

recalled. "They came to their feet with shouts of joy. They had instantly recognized the profound truth in what he had said, *with regard to the physical and the soul and what was truly important.*"⁹ (The emphasis is added.) In other words, the joyous revelation beheld by that shouting audience was the profound truth that Americans had souls, and knew they had souls, because they were willing and able to sacrifice the physical. Sacrifice not only demonstrated the American soul, however; it also promised to redeem that soul from the communist fate, which was worse than death. Redemptive sacrifice, therefore, was the "profound truth" at the heart of America.

This profound truth was not merely cooked up for Reagan's evangelical audience. It was part of a sacrificial ideology that ran throughout his speeches. In his commencement address at Notre Dame on May 17, 1981, for example, Reagan meditated on the theme of redemptive sacrifice that was embodied in his movie role as George Gipp in *The Knute Rockne Story*, "a sports legend so national in scope, it was almost mystical." The sacrificial implications of this movie for Reagan's presidential rhetoric and his presidential persona have been insightfully illuminated by Michael Rogin.¹⁰ George Gipp stood as the central cinematic *figura* of redemptive sacrifice in the worldview of Ronald Reagan. Immediately following his invocation of the sacrificial power of the Gipper, however, Reagan used a citation from William Faulkner to reinforce his central metaphysical claim that humans have souls that are revealed in the act of sacrifice. "He is immortal," Reagan quoted Faulkner, "because he alone among creatures . . . has a soul, capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance." In conclusion, Reagan drew out the mystical, national implications of this sacrificial ideology by describing America as that "giant country prepared to make so many sacrifices."¹¹

Reagan employed the Faulkner quotation on numerous occasions. For example, in his address to the Irish Parliament on June 4, 1984, Reagan led up to Faulkner by first citing a statement apparently made by the leader of the Polish Solidarity movement. "As Lech Walesa said: 'Our souls contain exactly the contrary of what [the Soviet leadership] wanted. They wanted us not to believe in God, and our churches are full. They wanted us to be materialistic and incapable of sacrifice.' " Walesa's equation of soul and sacrifice was too direct for Reagan to resist invoking Faulkner's formulation of the profound sacrificial truth. "He is immortal because, alone among creatures, he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."¹² Apparently, Reagan's profound sacrificial truth allowed for the possibility of American souls and some Polish souls but not for communist souls. The communists did not know the difference

between the spiritual and the physical, lost as they were in the Marxist faith of materialism.

Clearly, an ideology of redemptive sacrifice was integral to Ronald Reagan's presidential worldview. Yet, such an ideology was already present at the beginning of his career in electoral politics. In Reagan's October 27, 1964, television address on behalf of Barry Goldwater, the basic elements of this sacrificial ideology were already firmly in place. Reagan used domestic imagery to describe differences between Democrats and Republicans as a "family fight" that should be resolved so that Americans could unite against a common enemy, "the most dangerous enemy ever known to man." He collapsed binary oppositions, dissolving them into vertical, centering imagery, by declaring that "there is no left or right, only up or down, up to the maximum of individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism." Finally, he intensified his rhetoric, raising the stakes to the highest degree possible, by insisting that America was in danger of being faced with "the final ultimatum." Confronted with that ultimatum—the ultimate concern that Reagan repeatedly formulated as "surrender or die"—Americans had the civil-religious obligation to merge with a redemptive history of martyrdom. They must sacrifice all in order to win everything by following the example of Moses, Jesus, American revolutionary patriots, and all the martyrs of history into sacrificial death. As Reagan told his television audience:

The English commentator Kenneth Tynan has put it that he would rather live on his knees than die on his feet. Some of our own have said, "Better Red than dead." If we are to believe that nothing is worth the dying, when did this begin? Should Moses have told the children of Israel to live in slavery rather than dare the wilderness? Should Christ have refused the cross? Should the patriots at Concord Bridge have refused to fire the shot heard round the world? Are we to believe that all the martyrs of history died in vain?

Reagan closed this speech, as he often would his presidential speeches, by invoking children and even the unborn: "Let our children and our children's children say of us we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done."¹³ Justification would come from doing all that could be done—giving all, risking all, sacrificing all—like those martyrs who set the sacrificial example for America, martyrs who were also children: the children of Israel, the son of God, and the original patriotic sons of the fatherland.

As president, Reagan seemed to derive his greatest power from presiding over civic rituals of sacrificial death, not only through patriotic speechmaking, but also through rituals at monuments, ceme-

teries, funerals, and memorials for America's sacrificed dead. His inaugural and state of the union addresses were ceremonial tributes to martial sacrifice, most obviously evoked in his 1981 inaugural citation of the sacrificial dedication of Martin Treptow, who was killed in World War I. Treptow wrote in his diary, "I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice."¹⁴ Reagan consistently rendered the significance of civil-religious monuments as symbols of sacrificial death. In 1982, he described his emotions at seeing the statue commemorating American deaths during the Normandy landing in World War II—"The Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves"—by saying that its symbolic significance transcended words. "Its image of sacrifice," Reagan told the United Nations General Assembly, "is almost too powerful to describe."¹⁵ Even the Statue of Liberty was a monument to sacrificial death in Reagan's ideology of redemptive sacrifice. With French President Mitterand by his side on July 3, 1986, Reagan explained that the Statue of Liberty stood as "a reminder since the days of Lafayette of our mutual struggles and sacrifices for freedom." "Call it mysticism if you will," Reagan continued, but it was sacrificial death that provided "the common thread that binds us to those Quakers [*sic*] on the tiny deck of the *Arbella*, those sacrificial founders who risked all and sacrificed all for the shining American city on a hill."¹⁶ Obviously, cemeteries provided Reagan ample opportunity to meditate on sacrificial death, from his first inaugural meditations on Arlington National Cemetery, where the white markers "add up to only a tiny fraction of the price that has been paid for our freedom," to his 1985 visit to Bergen-Belsen. There he explained that "everywhere here are memories . . . [that] take us where God intended His children to go—toward learning, toward healing, and, above all, toward redemption."¹⁷

Reagan's sacrificial ideology was so pervasive, in fact, that it even transformed accidental deaths into redemptive sacrifices. Speaking at a memorial service for the seven Challenger Astronauts on January 31, 1986, Reagan explained that their "brave sacrifice" had once again revealed the "profound truth" of the uniquely American soul that can only be disclosed through sacrificial death. From their sacrifice, the souls of the living derived both revitalizing energy and valuable instruction in profound sacrificial truth. "The sacrifice of your loved ones," Reagan told the mourners, "has stirred the soul of our nation and through the pain our hearts have opened to a profound truth: . . . We learned again that this America, which Abraham Lincoln called the last, best hope of man on Earth, was built on heroism and noble sacrifice."¹⁸ When 37 sailors aboard the *U.S.S. Stark* were accidentally killed by a misguided Iraqi missile in May 1987, Ronald Reagan once again presided over the civic ritual that revealed the profound

sacrificial truth. "These men made themselves immortal," Reagan declared, "by dying for something immortal."¹⁹

Further examples of Reagan's sacrificial ideology could certainly be multiplied. All suggest that Ronald Reagan served not merely as president but also as psychopomp—as guide for the soul—presiding over American ceremonies of sacrificial death. In a frequently cited 1985 interview with François Mitterand, Marguerite Duras suggested that Reagan was "the incarnation of a kind of primal, almost archaic power." Mitterand agreed. But if Reagan did, in fact, incarnate any such primal power, it did not result from his ability to govern "less with his intellect than with common sense," as Duras concluded, but from his appropriation of the primal power of sacrificial death.²⁰ That primal, sacrificial power, however, was certainly displaced in modern social, political, and economic contexts, particularly when Reagan frequently enjambed the sacrificial heroism of America's martyred dead with the everyday heroism of factory workers, farmers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, and all others who made "voluntary gifts" of their lives and labor as a sacrificial offering to America.²¹ As David Carrasco has observed in a different context, a modern society like America is "not a sacrifice society or a massacre society but a mass sacrifice society . . ."²² Correlations between sacrifice and warfare have often been drawn.²³ In Reagan's sacrificial ideology, however, sacrifice revealed the soul of Americans in every aspect of public and private life, not only on the battlefield. His was an ideology of redemptive sacrifice for a modern "mass sacrifice society."

But perhaps "modern" is not the correct adjective in this case. Ronald Reagan may have been the first postmodern president—artist of simulation, idol of consumption. In fact, one recent analyst of postmodernism could think of no better example of Baudrillard's notion of simulation than the Reagan presidency.²⁴ Clearly, Reagan drew much of his power from the theatrical simulation of film. In a revealing remark, Reagan disclosed the secret of the artful simulation that he embodied as president. "The only way to look natural on a stage," Reagan explained, "is to hold your hands and arms in a way that does not feel natural. . . . What you have to do is just let your arms hang by your side straight down. Then you curl your fingers so that they just cup your thumb. It feels uncomfortable, but you look relaxed and at ease."²⁵ Reagan's body language of simulation was both signal and symptom of a profound shift in the symbolism of the sacred in a postmodern world of imagery consumption, "from church to Hollywood," in Michael Rogin's phrase, but then, finally, to the state during the Reagan presidency.

In a sense, film acts as a ritualized medium, fulfilling most of the requirements of Jonathan Smith's elaboration of ritual as "the cre-

ation of a controlled environment where the variables (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced"—on the cutting-room floor, through the rehearsals and retakes, under the director's supervision, in the preservation and permanence of the image—"performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things."²⁶ When Ronald Reagan recollected the ritualized perfection he had achieved in film, he recalled perfect patterns of redemptive sacrifice. In the photographs that illustrate Reagan's 1965 autobiography, as Michael Rogin has noted, the "stills evoke redemptive suffering."²⁷ Rogin has argued that Reagan simulated the sacrificial victim, from his film roles to his presidential office, from the redemptive sacrifice of George Gipp to his symbolic death and rebirth from the 1981 assassination attempt, ironically perpetrated by a man acting out a part in the simulated world of film from which Reagan derived so much of his power. In the simulations of film and political office, Reagan embodied a primal power—like the shaman, like the martyr, like the sacred king—to derive life, healing, and redemption from entry into sacrificial suffering and death.

However, Reagan also simulated the sacrificer, the ceremonial officiant of American sacrificial death. As civil theologian of redemptive sacrifice, Reagan over and over again reinforced the "profound truth" of the American soul that could only be disclosed through sacrificial death. On Memorial Day, 1982, Reagan laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As he was leaving, walking out through the honor guard, Reagan was overheard muttering to himself, "My God, why would anyone want to send these kids off to die?"²⁸ He should not have had to ask. The year before, he had provided ample justification in his commencement address at Notre Dame, spelling out the "profound truth" of redemptive sacrifice: humans are immortal because they have souls capable of sacrificial death and redemption. In such death, as Reagan quoted Winston Churchill to his audience, "we learn we are spirits, not animals, and that something is going on in space and time, and beyond space and time, which, whether we like it or not, spells duty."²⁹ Spirits and animals, space and time, transcendence and duty—these elements hinted at processes of classification and orientation that operated in Ronald Reagan's civil-religious worldview.

Reagan's rhetoric empowered that worldview by claiming and revitalizing its sacrificial center. At that center—neither east nor west, neither left nor right, neither Republican nor Democrat—was the American family. In his final state of the union address, Reagan announced, "there are no Republicans, no Democrats, just Americans." As he did in his 1964 speech for Goldwater, Reagan collapsed lateral, binary oppositions into a single center. In his last state of the union

address, that single center was the American family. At that single center, Reagan called for a revitalization of "civic ritual." Addressing the children of America, Reagan insisted that civic ritual must begin around the family dinner table. Collapsing public and private space, Reagan left America with the suggestion that civic sacrificial ritual must begin at home and that it must begin with the children of every American family.

The Sacrificial Family

To summarize, Reagan and Jones both recommended a similar profound sacrificial truth: the human spirit was disclosed, liberated, or redeemed in sacrificial death. In the rhetoric of Reagan and Jones, sacrifice was a highly charged figure of speech that intensely manipulated the diverse and complex elements of their respective worldviews. Jim Jones manipulated the ideology of redemptive sacrifice to create a meaningful context at Jonestown in which the only way to recover a human identity in a dehumanizing world was through the self-sacrifice of revolutionary suicide. Redemptive sacrifice, therefore, marked the line of classification that distinguished human from subhuman. "Dying comes to all," Jones told the residents of Jonestown. "Why not make it for a revolutionary purpose, [a] beautiful goal, something that makes us above the animals?"³⁰ Dying for America, on Reagan's terms, also marked a classification of persons: spiritual and material, humans and animals. Not all sacrifice, however, demonstrated a human spirit. Self-sacrificing terrorists, like the truck bomber who killed 241 Marines in Beirut, might have sacrificed their lives for a cause, but Reagan reported to the United Nations General Assembly that such a sacrifice was "a despicable act of barbarism by some who are unfit to associate with humankind . . ."³¹ More than simply an instance of that truism of modern political violence—one person's freedom fighter is another's terrorist—Reagan's ideology of redemptive sacrifice was a strategic device for the manipulation of elements of his worldview. In this case, that strategy involved transposing a classification of persons that distinguished between human and animal onto a global distinction between us and them.

At the center of the sacrificial discourse of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan stood the *figura* of the child. There was an odd fictive doubling, a self-absorbed mirroring process in relation to children that seemed to preoccupy both of them. Jones symbolized the integrated, nonracial character of his community in and through the figure of his adopted "rainbow family." In sermons, Jones often warned enemies of the community, "No one messes with the Jones family." To the end, Jones fought child custody battles because, he argued, if one child were

taken, the community would be destroyed. The child who played the central role in the demise of that community—John Victor Stoen—was the focus of an ongoing child custody dispute. Arguably not Jones's biological offspring, John Victor Stoen was generally acknowledged by the Jonestown community as Jones's son. When questioned on this point, Jones would insist that the child was his because they looked alike. For whatever other reasons Jones may have had, that child played a special role in the life and death of Jonestown because he mirrored Jim Jones. The child who looked like Jones, who embodied the present and the promise of the community as a whole, was sacrificed on the last night of Jonestown in order to save that child and to save the entire community from a capitalist fate worse than death. If John Victor Stoen was the center point around which Jonestown's sacrificial death turned, the central child in Ronald Reagan's symbolic universe was young Ronald Reagan himself. The ironies of Reagan's personal domestic life have often been noted: not only was Reagan the first divorced president in American history, but he also was a father who seemed to have ambivalent and somewhat strained relations with his own children. Yet, when asked how he felt watching his old movies, Reagan consistently quipped, "It's like seeing the son I never had." Immortalized through the medium of film, that son—particularly the young George Gipp who appeared for all of fifteen minutes in *Knute Rockne*—was an emblem of redemptive sacrifice, the young Reagan sacrificed, yet immortalized on film, so that the old Reagan could live.

Most of Reagan's major political speeches began and ended with references to children. Reagan invoked American children—"our children and our children's children"—as the ultimate source of support for his public policy programs. Children also played a crucial role in the discourse of Jim Jones, a role most dramatically played out on the last night of Jonestown as the children of the community were the first to be "redeemed" in that final mass sacrifice. How do we account for the significance of children in these ideologies of redemptive sacrifice? Recent work in biopolitics has suggested that patriotic rhetoric and sentiment, particularly the disposition toward self-sacrifice on behalf of a collectivity, might be sustained by socialized perceptions of kinship.³² In the ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan, however, kinship symbolism placed children in two more specific, yet often overlapping, symbolic roles: (1) the child represented a reciprocal relation between part and whole in a symbolic kinship code; and (2) the child represented the highest price that could possibly be paid in a symbolic economic code. In both symbolic roles, the child provided a key to the sacrificial ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan.

Jones and Reagan both used kinship terminology, particularly the terms "children" and "family," to establish and reinforce a reciproc-

cal relationship between part and whole. All kinship terminology in the rhetoric of Reagan and Jones symbolized an integrated relationship between part and whole in which the whole was embodied in each part and each part represented the whole. The kinship code in which redemptive sacrifice was formulated, therefore, was a totalizing strategy, a symbolic vocabulary that inscribed a reciprocal interpenetration of part and whole into the social order. The sacrificial character of this part-to-whole relationship was probably best revealed in the way Jones consistently described the sacrificial construction of the Jonestown community: each part was ready to die on behalf of the whole; the whole was ready to die on behalf of any one part. The result of this reciprocal relation between part and whole was a community definition that drew a highly charged boundary around a group that revealed its integration in its dedication to die for the socialist cause—one for all and all for one.³³ Likewise, Ronald Reagan's ideology of redemptive sacrifice depended on a similar relation of part to whole in his recurring symbolism of kinship that bound all Americans. When Reagan referred to civic rituals practiced around the family dinner table, therefore, he was not talking about kinship but about the intersection of public and private domains, the reciprocal interpenetration of part and whole on which his ideology of redemptive sacrifice was based.

It is important at this point to remember that an ideology of redemptive sacrifice is not necessarily equivalent to sacrificial ritual, however much residual, perhaps even archaic, elements of ritual might persist in the symbolic construction of that ideology. In the ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan, redemptive sacrifice was ritual only by analogy, by extension, by application. Nevertheless, reflection on ritual sacrifice clarifies something important about their ideologies of redemptive sacrifice that might otherwise not be apparent. Recent analysis of sacrificial ritual as symbolic action in the interest of what might be called *sacrificial totalization* is helpful in understanding the strategic invocation of redemptive sacrifice by Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan. By "sacrificial totalization" I mean the perfect, controlled pattern of action that factors out all the accidental variables of ordinary life. However, I also am thinking of Valerio Valeri's characterization of sacrifice as a ritual process that accomplishes "a passage from incompleteness to completeness," drawing ritual closure around sacrificers, participants, recipients, and victims, with the sacrificial act standing like a period in a sentence, giving closure to some coherent, unified, meaningful whole.³⁴ In the ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan, sacrifice was that act that totalized all the elements of a worldview into a meaningful and powerful whole. All of their descriptions of redemptive sacrifice evoked this sacrificial totalization. Sacrificial death was the highest, the greatest, the supreme, the last, the final, the ultimate act; it

was the full measure, the complete devotion, the totalizing act that absorbed the sacrificed part into the organic whole of the community. The discourse of redemptive sacrifice revealed a "passage from incompleteness to completeness" that could only be actualized in death. Although not ritual as such, the ideologies of redemptive sacrifice instantiated a ritualized perfection that brought the integration of parts and whole—a reciprocal identification of parts and whole that both Jones and Reagan symbolized in the kinship terminology of family—into their supreme, ultimate totalization. In fact, sacrifice and sacrifice alone instantiated the whole—whether Jonestown or America—as a whole, as a sacrificial totalization in which the family was dedicated to sacrificial death on behalf of the children and the children on behalf of the family.

In both cases, however, this symbolism of kinship reciprocity disguised asymmetrical relations of power. First, the family implied not only a pattern of reciprocity, but also a pattern of inclusion and exclusion, a pattern best revealed in Jones's and Reagan's reflections on nuclear war. Jones and Reagan saw the largest arena of sacrificial totalization in the prospect of nuclear destruction. The nuclear family dominated their imaginations when they pictured the ultimate redemptive sacrifice, a nuclear apocalypse out of which each saw his own family emerging as the redeemed remnant. Jones welcomed nuclear war as a sacrificial purification, a cataclysmic cleansing that would rid the world of capitalists. "I'd be glad to be blown away," Jones declared in one sermon, "just to see them blown away." Such a war would achieve victory for socialist nations that loved and protected their people by providing them underground shelters, radiation shields, and radiation counteractive medications. In most of his speeches and sermons on the topic, however, Jones assured his audience that they would be perfectly protected in the event of a nuclear war. Particularly at Jonestown, which Jones described as a nuclear-free "zone of protection," the "Jones family" was safe from nuclear war.³⁵

Reagan seemed to share something of this anxiety about providing his family a "zone of protection" from nuclear war. Whatever its practical implications, Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative was symbolized and promoted in domestic symbols of protection: the roof, the umbrella, the child safe from danger through the clever initiative of the "smart daddy."³⁶ In the event of a nuclear war, Reagan's SDI promised that the American family would be the surviving, redeemed remnant of a nuclear holocaust. Survival, not death, was the goal of these nuclear fantasies, whether attributed to the paranormal power of divine socialism or the technological magic of SDI. To survive, however, a person had to be in the "zone of protection" that would save a redeemed remnant from the sacrificial totalization of the world in

nuclear war. The symbolism of family, therefore, not only represented an integrated pattern of reciprocity, but also an asymmetrical pattern of inclusion and exclusion.

In addition to exclusion, however, the symbolism of family also contained an asymmetrical pattern of domination and subordination. In other words, kinship reciprocity disguised asymmetrical relations of power in the symbolic construction of sacrificial totalization. I think it is safe to say that there is no such thing as a "whole" outside of its symbolic, ideological, or sacrificial construction. Throughout American history, "America" has been constructed by means of strategic totalizations in which special, local, regional, often privileged, exclusive interests have made some claim on America as a whole. Often, local interests have tied themselves to totalizing strategies by reference to the primordial, the transcendent, the ultimate, or what Reagan called the mystical, in order to endow those interests with national place and power. By symbolizing the whole of America in its totality as a single entity in time (from primordial origin to eschatological rendezvous with destiny) and space (located in a land, as Reagan often claimed, hidden by God between two oceans to be discovered by "a people of a special kind"), American interpretive strategies have underwritten more fundamental claims to privileged ownership of America.

As I have proposed elsewhere, religion might be regarded as the cultural process of stealing back and forth sacred symbols.³⁷ This suggestion that religion is a cultural struggle over the always contested ownership of symbols might seem to be a notion only appropriate to social relations organized around capitalist modes of production. However, claims to ownership of sacred symbols—often privileged, exclusive claims—seem to belong to a perennial process in the history of religions. As Jonathan Smith once noted in passing, "Where we have good ethnography, it's always clear that myth and ritual are owned by certain subsets within the collective."³⁸ In negotiations over the ownership of sacred symbols, sacrifice has often represented the greatest gift, the highest price, the final offer, the last move, the total strategy designed to bring a complete closure to the process of negotiation. In their negotiations over sacred symbols, Jones and Reagan used the child to symbolize not only a relationship between part and whole, but also the highest price that could possibly be paid to close the negotiations.

Ironically, negotiations inevitably are reopened after every act of sacrificial closure. As Reagan noted when invoking America's sacrificial dead, they represented only a small part of the price that had been paid; others had paid in the past, and more would continue to pay in the future. In Reagan's sacrificial ideology, Americans had to continue paying because they lived in a state of indebtedness that no

payment could cancel. Even when Americans made the supreme sacrifice, no price paid could finally close the sacrificial account. On the last night of Jonestown, Jim Jones tried to transfer the sacrificial debt to the enemies of Jonestown, particularly the Concerned Relatives that Jones and his community regarded as traitors. "They will pay for this," Jones declared. Those enemies would have to carry the debt; the people of Jonestown had made their final payment by giving the greatest gift. Nevertheless, in the aftermath, negotiations over the meaning of Jonestown were immediately reopened in the media, government, and popular reactions to the event. Among other things, those reactions tried to renegotiate the meaning of Jonestown by transferring the debt of guilt for its demise back to Jim Jones and his community. If the people of Jonestown carried that debt, then Americans owed them nothing.

All of this suggests that the kinship code of redemptive sacrifice by which Jones and Reagan inscribed a reciprocal relationship between part and whole into the social order was also an economic code in which expenditure—the price, the gift, the offering—represented a negotiated claim on the ownership of sacred symbols. Therefore, a basic contradiction resided at the heart of the ideology of redemptive sacrifice: the contradiction between kinship reciprocity and economic competition. Kinship reciprocity represented the completeness of an integrated whole—a totalization, a closure—that was constructed in the sacrificial ideology and demonstrated in the sacrificial act. But, at the same time, the ideology of redemptive sacrifice defined a site of competition over symbolic resources that might appear to have been totalized in the sacrificial act but that, by their very nature as fluid, mobile, and contested symbols, nevertheless resisted every act of totalization. Although inscribed in a symbolic discourse of kinship reciprocity, the ideology of redemptive sacrifice was also embedded in a symbolic economy that permeated the religious worldviews of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan.

The Sacrificial Expenditure

The worldviews of Reagan and Jones were both embedded in an economic code that grew out of the Cold War 1950's. For both, religion was aligned with a particular economic system, but each constructed his worldview on different sides of the geopolitical line that divided capitalism from communism in the international arena. According to François Mitterand, Reagan had "two religions: free enterprise and God."³⁹ Jones went further, although not much further, in building his religious worldview around the apotheosis of an economic system. His theological formula might be rendered: no transcendent, personal god existed—a god Jones often ridiculed as the Sky God,

Unknown God, Mythological God, Spook, or Buzzard—but a genuine god did exist that was love, that was “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” that was the practical and paranormal power of Divine Socialism. In his creative biblical remythologizations, Jones traced the origin of the worldview of the Peoples Temple back to the primordium of the Garden of Eden. The Garden was not, however, a primordial paradise but a primordial prison from which Lucifer, the first revolutionary socialist, rescued Adam and Eve by revealing to them the liberating truth that “ye shall be as gods” in a socialist freedom from capitalist oppression.⁴⁰

On this mythological point regarding the primordial origin of Marxism, Jones and Reagan were in general agreement. In his 1983 address to the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan referred approvingly to the definition of Marxism-Leninism as the world’s second oldest faith—a definition provided by that notorious authority on communism, Whittaker Chambers—that was “first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden with the words of temptation, ‘Ye shall be as gods.’”⁴¹ If communism was the second oldest faith, presumably Reagan’s religious mixture of free enterprise and God laid claim to being the oldest. When Reagan concluded that speech, as he often did, by misusing Thomas Paine’s revolutionary call to “begin the world over again,” one rendering of that new beginning might have been a mythic return to the primordial garden before the introduction of the communist evil into the world. Obviously, both Jones and Reagan defined the conflict between capitalism and communism as a religious war, a contest between two religions or two faiths—rather than between two socioeconomic systems—that represented the opposite poles of good and evil in the world. In addition to those obvious Manichean oppositions, however, both worldviews were constructed in such a way as to advance the apotheosis of productive economic activity, although one divinized a capitalist while the other divinized a communist organization of the modes of production.

These symbolic relations of production in the worldviews of Jones and Reagan were ironic, however. Jones built a financial base for his movement largely by exploiting the American system of welfare capitalism.⁴² Reagan, as Michael Rogin has pointed out, was not the hero of economic production that he idealized in his political rhetoric but an idol of consumption, a figure suited to a postmodern society of simulation, one of Baudrillard’s *simulacra* in a political economy based on the circulation of signs.⁴³ To invoke another French social theorist, Georges Bataille provided a simple, but useful, distinction between two basic kinds of economic action that might help to clarify the economic code that organized redemptive sacrifice in the ideologies of Jones and Reagan. First, productive activity represents “the minimum necessary

for the continuation of life." In contrast to productive activity, however, Bataille identified a second type of economic action that "is represented by so-called unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, spectacles, arts . . . all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves." As a type of economic action, expenditure does not provide anything necessary for the production and reproduction of human life. Rather, its emphasis is not on productive gain but on dramatic loss. In such expenditure, as Bataille argued, "the accent is placed on a *loss* that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning."⁴⁴

In the ideologies of Jones and Reagan, Jonestown and America, for each ideologue, respectively, were premised precisely on such foundations of expenditure. Reagan's America and Jones's Peoples Temple Cooperative Agricultural Project were defined in the idiom of expenditure, in terms of a sacrificial loss that must be as great as possible in order for persons and places to assume their true meaning. Bataille described expenditure as disinterested economic action, as an end in itself. In their ideologies of redemptive sacrifice, however, Jones and Reagan saw sacrificial expenditure as a supremely interested action. Sacrifice redeemed—literally "bought back"—something. Here is a fundamental difference in their strategies of redemptive sacrifice, a difference derived from their respective locations in the same symbolic and political economy. To state this difference simply: while Reagan tried to negotiate a sacrificial redemption *of* America, Jones struggled to negotiate a sacrificial redemption *from* America.

Reagan advocated sacrificial expenditure in order to "buy back" America. As supreme sacrificer, Reagan claimed symbolic ownership of a nation—its people, land, origin, and destiny—by officiating over the sacrificial ceremonies of its greatest expenditure. Reagan's was an ideology of "supply side" sacrifice. As one commentator has recently noted, "the nation-state, including our own, rests on mounds of bodies."⁴⁵ Reagan claimed ownership of the almost unlimited supply of bodies upon which America had been built as his symbolic capital. Since it takes symbolic capital to make symbolic capital, Reagan found ways to accrue interest on America's sacrificial dead by insisting that those sacrifices, each representing the greatest gift, the highest price, the supreme sacrifice, placed all Americans in a perpetual state of indebtedness. Americans could only be redeemed from debt by making further voluntary sacrifices.

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 1984, Reagan invoked the "favorite expression of another great spiritualist," Ignatius Loyola: "All is gift."⁴⁶ Like Georges Gusdorf's theory of perpetual sacrificial indebtedness, however, Reagan's theory

of the gift required ongoing sacrifices in order to make payments on the debt incurred by the gift.⁴⁷ Each payment expanded the symbolic capital base, but, ironically, that expansion was deemed necessary in order to maintain, preserve, protect, and keep America in its divinely ordained place in the world. In a word, Reagan's ideology of redemptive sacrifice was locative; it required sacrificial expenditure in the interest of maintaining, reinforcing, and renewing the present social order. Perceiving that order as threatened, Reagan presided over ceremonies of sacrificial expenditure in order to negotiate a redemption of America.

Jim Jones, however, negotiated a sacrificial redemption from America. Lacking the millions of living bodies and the countless souls of America's sacrificial dead that Ronald Reagan claimed as his symbolic capital, Jones had less than a thousand bodies with which to negotiate redemption. These were "bodies of power and action," as Jones defined them, that were worth something in the revolutionary struggle against American capitalist and racist oppression.⁴⁸ The supreme worth of those bodies was put on the line in one final act to close the negotiations, the act of revolutionary suicide. In the worldview of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown, all was not gift; all was theft. They experienced themselves as dispossessed in America, and that dispossession configured a perceived subclassification—based on social class, race, gender, age, or poverty—that deprived them of their fundamental humanity. Sacrificial expenditure, therefore, was not enacted to maintain the social order but to escape it and, in the process, shake, subvert, or even invert the prevailing order that dominated America. In a word, then, Jones's ideology of redemptive sacrifice was utopian, a sacrificial expenditure that would buy human beings out of a dehumanizing American social order.⁴⁹

What did it mean to "win" such negotiations? At Notre Dame in 1981, Reagan warned that the phrase "Win one for the Gipper" should not be "spoken in a humorous vein." If the Gipper's name was not to be taken in vain, under what conditions might it be invoked? Reagan invoked the Gipper's name to mark significant occasions of ceremonial expenditure in three areas of American public life: sports, electoral politics, and military sacrifice. "Do it for the Gipper," Reagan instructed the U.S. Olympic athletes in 1984. "Win those races for the Gipper," was how Reagan exhorted the American electorate to vote Republican. At Notre Dame in 1981, Reagan revealed the mystical secret behind "Win one for the Gipper" in the power of martial sacrifice to unify Americans in common cause against a common enemy, just as the sacrificial death of George Gipp enabled a team torn by dissension and factionalism to join together in a common cause and attain the unattainable.⁵⁰ In this last context, the sacrificial totalization of

America in the name of the Gipper was a strategy for winning a unified American society to be owned and operated as a whole by Ronald Reagan through the power invested in him by all of America's sacrificial dead. Or, perhaps, Ronald Reagan was not in fact the owner and operator of that sacrificial totalization, but only a *simulacrum* for those who did "buy back" America under his administration. Reagan served as an image for those who did not want to redeem America all the way back to the primordium, but only to the 1950's, that golden age when Americans were willing to "pay the price in blood" to fight communism. This "golden age" was imagined to be a time of unified, total American consensus on "the moral and political dimension for the sake of which sacrifices could be intelligently demanded by the government and willingly made by the people."⁵¹

Unlike the nation-state, however, Jonestown did not rest upon mounds of bodies; it was buried under them. "We win when we go down," Jones had declared on the last sacrificial night of Jonestown. Yet, revolutionary suicide did not bring closure to the negotiations over the meaning and power of American society in the interest of which those sacrificial deaths were enacted. Instead, the bodies of Jonestown were turned into different kinds of symbolic capital by public exorcism, strategic distancing, ritual exclusion, and even, I suppose, by a historian of religion like myself who has tried to use the analytic resources of my discipline to recover the terms and conditions of a shared worldview within which the people of Jonestown negotiated a human identity, a humanity that was ultimately and completely negotiated in the supreme expenditure of sacrificial death.

I wrote a book about Jonestown while I was living and working in South Africa. Although its putative subject was an American religious movement, the subtext of the book was South Africa, or, to put this another way, the real subject matter of the book was about what America would look like if it looked like South Africa. Being in South Africa was a fortuitous accident of professional circumstance, but I think it allowed me to notice, in ways that I might not otherwise have noticed, that, in fact, from the vantage point of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown, America looked exactly like South Africa. America was perceived as an oppressive domain: capitalist, fascist, and racist. This last point would certainly have surprised Ronald Reagan, who, in a 1980 debate with Carter, expressed his nostalgia for the time of his childhood when "this country didn't even know it had a racial problem."⁵² Clearly, however, Ronald Reagan constructed his worldview on one side of the highly charged geopolitical and racial lines that constituted the framework of American civil religion, at least since the 1950's.⁵³ The Peoples Temple of Jim Jones stood on the other side of those lines, a self-proclaimed black, communist, revolutionary move-

ment dedicated to a sacrificial liberation from the very America that Reagan tried to reinforce by revitalizing its symbolic, ceremonial, sacrificial center. In the end, Ronald Reagan looked a lot like Jim Jones; inverted mirror images, perhaps, one at the center, the other at the periphery of American society, but both reflecting an ideology that negotiated redemption through the supreme expenditure.

More generally, for the interests of a historian of religion, America, like South Africa, was a powerful political economy generating classifications of persons and orientations in space and time that comprised symbolic elements to be combined and recombined, appropriated, rejected, or inverted, in the formation of religious worldviews. Classification and orientation—person and place—are the basic dimensions of any religious worldview; but both classification and orientation are negotiated. The highest stakes in religiopolitical negotiations over person and place are signified by blood. Classifications and orientations that comprise religious worldviews are ultimately paid for in blood: in the blood demanded, blood taken, and blood spilled out on the altar of the land by the state; as well as in the blood willingly expended in protest—perhaps futile, symbolic protest—against dehumanization and displacement by the social, economic, and political order of the state.

In this essay, I have outlined the symbolic configuration of redemptive sacrifice in the ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan in terms of three codes: (1) a metaphysical code in which a soul, spirit, or superhuman power was disclosed through sacrificial death; (2) a kinship code in which a reciprocity of part to whole was inscribed through sacrifice in a totalized social order; and (3) an economic code in which symbolic interests were negotiated through expenditure, through dramatic loss that had to be as great as possible in order to render those interests meaningful and powerful. In this last code, the sacrificial interests of Jones and Reagan were located in a political economy in which power relations—the relations of center to periphery, part to whole, public to private, human to subhuman, inclusion to exclusion, domination to subordination, and so on—could be negotiated through sacrificial acts of expenditure. Although engaged in different strategic projects, the sacrificial negotiations conducted by Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan were enacted in the same American political economy, an economy that at the same time was a symbolic configuration in which person, place, and power could be negotiated through inherently violent acts of human expenditure.

In the 1930's, political scientist Harold Lasswell observed, "For better or worse we are embedded in historical configurations which are characterized by the existence of a large number of comprehensive symbols in the name of which people die or kill."⁵⁴ One of the tasks of

the academic study of religion must certainly be the analysis, but perhaps also the deconstruction, of those potent historical configurations of violent symbols. In the American historical record, Jim Jones has represented a bizarre, aberrant intersection of religion, politics, and violence, often compared to Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—"The horror." One can conclude from this discussion of redemptive sacrifice in the ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan, however, that it was Reagan, not Jones, who most successfully captured the heart of darkness at the heart of America by reclaiming and revitalizing its ceremonial, sacrificial center. At the very least, this article has shown that what seemed to be only out on the periphery was also at the center, that the sacrificial symbols in and through which people die and kill were not only running wild through the jungles, but were also securely established in the nation's capital.

Notes

1. David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 129-59.
2. Strobe Talbott, *The Russians and Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1984), 115-16; Ronald Reagan, *The Quest for Peace, the Cause of Freedom: Selected Speeches on the United States and the World* (Washington, D.C.: United States Information Agency, 1988), 55-56.
3. *Contra Costa Times*, November 30, 1978.
4. Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Dan F. Hahn, *Presidential Communication: Description and Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 68-70.
5. Jack Beatty, "The President's Mind," *The New Republic* (April 7, 1982): 12.
6. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 5.
7. Lynn Ragsdale, "Presidential Speechmaking and the Public Audience: Individual Presidents and Group Attitudes," *The Journal of Politics* 49 (1987): 733.
8. In his foundational article on civil religion, Robert Bellah noted that "sacrificial death and rebirth" was a biblical archetype that became "indelibly written into the civil religion" with the Civil War. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *American Civil Religion*, ed. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 40, 31-32. This theme of sacrificial death and redemption has been usefully developed in Edward Tabor Linenthal's works, *Changing Images of the Warrior Hero in America: A History of Popular Symbolism* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1982); "Ritual Drama at the Little Big Horn: The Persistence and Transformation of a National Symbol," *Journal of the American Acad-*

emy of Religion 51 (1983): 267-81; and " 'A Reservoir of Spiritual Power': Patriotic Faith at the Alamo in the Twentieth Century," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 91 (1988): 509-31. With respect to Reagan, the importance of sacrificial death was ignored in the only attempt to analyze "Reagan's Civil Religion" while he was in office; see David S. Adams, "Ronald Reagan's 'Revival': Voluntarism as a Theme in Reagan's Civil Religion," *Sociological Analysis* 48 (1987): 17-29.

9. Talbott, *The Russians and Reagan*, 115-16; Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 55-56. The emphasized passage was omitted in the latter reference, the U.S. Information Agency collection of Reagan speeches, but it reappeared in Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speeches* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 178.

10. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 15-16.

11. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 41-44.

12. *Ibid.*, 217.

13. *Ibid.*, 14-24.

14. *Ibid.*, 38-39.

15. *Ibid.*, 173.

16. Congressional Quarterly, *Historic Documents of 1986* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1987), 701-2. See Mike Wallace, "Hijacking History: Ronald Reagan and the Statue of Liberty," *Radical History Review* 37 (1987): 119-30.

17. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 228.

18. *Ibid.*, 71.

19. Russell Watson et al., "A Tragedy in the Gulf," *Newsweek* (June 1, 1987): 16.

20. *New York Times*, November 15, 1985; Martin Anderson, *Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), 19-21; William A. Niskanen, *Reaganomics: An Insider's Account of the Politics and the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 283-84.

21. For example, see Reagan's first inaugural address in Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 35-37.

22. David Carrasco, "The Hermeneutics of Conquest," *History of Religions* 28 (1988): 160.

23. For important discussions of sacrifice and war, see Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 47; and René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 280.

24. Douglas Kellner, "Baudrillard, Semiurgy and Death," *Theory, Culture and Society* 4 (1987): 126.

25. Anderson, *Revolution*, 54.

26. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 124-25; *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63.

27. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 39; Ronald Reagan and Richard G. Hubler, *Where's the Rest of Me?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1965).

28. Laurence I. Barrett, *Gambling with History: Ronald Reagan in the White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 42.

29. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 41.

30. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 126-27.

31. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 121.

32. Gary R. Johnson, "Kin Selection, Socialization, and Patriotism: An Integrating Theory," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 4 (1986): 127-54; Gary R. Johnson, "In the Name of the Fatherland: An Analysis of Kin Term Usage in Patriotic Speech and Literature," *International Political Science Review* 8 (1987): 165-74; G. R. Johnson, S. H. Ratwik, and T. R. Sawyer, "The Evocative Significance of Kin Terms in Patriotic Speech," in *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism*, ed. V. Reynolds, V. Falger, and I. Vine (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 157-74.

33. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 127-28.

34. Valerio Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 84. This analysis can be applied here, I think, without entering into the controversy over the analysis of sacrificial ritual: whether sacrifice is about "having" (the sacrificial gift of some valued possession), about "being" (the sacrificial substitution of animal for human), about "eating" (the sacrificial communal meal shared by humans and superhuman beings), or about "dividing" (the systematic distribution of the sacrificial animal as a symbolic reconstruction of social relations).

35. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 109-15.

36. Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense: The Strategic Defense Initiative in American Popular Culture* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1989).

37. David Chidester, "Religious Studies as Political Practice in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 58 (1987): 4-17; "Stealing the Sacred Symbols: Biblical Interpretation in the Peoples Temple and the Unification Church," *Religion* 18 (1988): 137-62; and "Worldview Analysis of African Indigenous Churches," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 2 (1989): 15-29. I "stole" this notion of religion from Kenneth Burke—by way of Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)—by modifying Burke's characterization of culture as "the stealing back and forth of symbols" in his *Attitudes Toward History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 328. The act of appropriation is an important, dynamic factor in the semiology of symbolic forms, as Roland Barthes noted in his 1956 work "Myth as Stolen Language": "What is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is a language robbery. I rob the Negro who is saluting, the white and brown chalet,

the seasonal fall in fruit prices, not to make them into examples or symbols, but to naturalize through them the Empire, my taste for Basque things, the Government. . . . One could say that a language offers to myth an open-work meaning. Myth can easily insinuate itself into it, and swell there: it is a robbery by colonization . . ." *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 118-120. However, I think that this notion of appropriation is even more important for our understanding of what might be called the politics of symbolic forms. In this respect, T. O. Beidelman has pointed to "the deep ambiguity and hence negotiability of symbols. . . . This negotiability is rooted in the 'politics' of social life, especially in areas of contested power and authority. Negotiability rests in the ambiguity of symbols, which allows for continued struggle by groups seeking to define what they mean." See Beidelman, "Sacrifice and Sacred Rule in Africa," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 546. Beidelman developed this theme of the negotiability of symbols in a little more detail in his work on Kaguru moral imagination, where he observed that, "No patterns of relations are set. Instead, each congeries of people and situations poses a field for negotiation and struggle over which symbolic qualities come to center stage and which remain in the background or even in the wings." Beidelman, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 207. Beidelman has suggested that symbols are negotiated because they are ambiguous; perhaps he would also agree that symbols are ambiguous because they are always already negotiated, contested, and stolen back and forth in the very process of their production and reproduction as symbols. For other discussions of the "essential negotiability" of "essentially contested" symbols, see W. S. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 157-91; and Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 185-86.

38. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 188.

39. *New York Times*, November 15, 1985; Anderson, *Revolution*, 19; Niskanen, *Reaganomics*, 283.

40. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 51-57; "Stealing the Sacred Symbols," 146-48.

41. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 57.

42. John Hall, "Collective Welfare as Resource Mobilization in Peoples Temple: A Case Study of a Poor People's Religious Social Movement," *Sociological Analysis* 49 (1988 Supplement): 64-77.

43. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 8-9.

44. Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl; trans. Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 118. On Bataille, see Michèle H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). Certainly, we need not be committed to French theorists in developing this notion of sacrificial expendi-

ture. We could refer back to Dutch theorist of religion Van der Leeuw on the power of sacrifice: "For the broad stream of life, the eternal flux of power is assured by the greatest possible 'expenditure.'" Geerardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 356. In addition, Van der Leeuw had certain ideas about the mystical properties of "property" (e.g., "a 'mystical' relation between owner and owned" [50]), which he variously described as sacred, inalienable, and powerful (210, 249). These ideas not only fit into his reflections on sacrifice—the interchangeability of "having" and "being" in the sacrificial offering, the ways in which "giver and gift can interchange their roles" (356)—but might also be extended to an analysis of negotiated claims on the ownership of symbols as claims to their power.

45. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Citizenship and Armed Civic Virtue: Some Critical Questions on the Commitment to Public Life," in *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart*, ed. Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph V. Norman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 51.

46. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 125.

47. Georges Gusdorf, *L'expérience humaine du sacrifice* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), 72.

48. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 127-28.

49. My distinction between "locative" and "utopian" sacrificial expenditure has been adapted from Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 101.

50. Reagan, *The Quest for Peace*, 41-42; Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 15.

51. Norman Podhoretz, "The Future Danger," *Commentary* 71 (1981): 29, 38. See Edward Tabor Linenthal, "Restoring America: Political Revivalism in the Nuclear Age," in *Religion and the Life of the Nation: American Recoveries*, ed. Rowland A. Sherrill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 23-45.

52. C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 3.

53. Chidester, "Stealing the Sacred Symbols," 153-55; "Rituals of Exclusion and the Jonestown Dead," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1988): 698-700.

54. Harold Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (New York: Whittlesy House, 1935), 33-34.