

Synanon - The Devil and John Walker

Synanon - The Devil and John Walker by Paul Morantz

Sympathy for the Disciple? Youth is not absolution for treachery, and personal self-discovery is not an excuse to take up arms against one's country. Attorney General John Ashcroft. Make him (John Walker) leave his hair the way it is and his face as dirty as it is, and let him go wandering around this country and see what kind of sympathy he would get. President George W. Bush In a famous story by Stephen Vincent Benet, a naïve young man is lured into a pact with the devil, only to regret it later. It is left to the great lawyer, Daniel Webster, to deliver a stirring speech that wins sympathy from a jury of spirits, thus saving the young man's soul and freeing him from Beelzebub's clutches. In the last half century, however, there has been little sympathy won for the many naïve youths who, in seeking a sense of spirituality and purpose, have succumbed to the manipulative processes of modern-day devils who likewise seek to claim their souls. In several high-profile cases, juries and judges have come down hard on those who have been hoodwinked by sociopaths seeking to manipulate them in order to fulfill their wrath. And now we are faced with the image of a young American, John Walker Lindh, willingly collaborating with the hated Taliban in Pakistan, espousing beliefs alien to American culture and ideals. Are we to condemn this young man, or extend him our sympathy? Is he demon or victim? In Lindh's case, all the facts aren't in yet even though he now stands charged with conspiracy. But what we do know indicates that Lindh, like many youths since the tremulous 60's, lacked sufficient identity and was searching for a spiritual direction. Raised in Marin County, once the capital of hot tubs and the Me Decade, he thought he found the answer when, at age 16, he read the Autobiography of Malcolm X. Not even the fact the central character was ultimately murdered most likely by the sect from which he arose deterred the boy's new direction. He donned Islamic clothes, learned the language and studied. But he wanted more. Like so many youths who traveled to distant training retreats in search of gurus or hyped self-help leaders, Walker, only 19, took off, in the aftermath of his parents divorce, to find a better world. Unfortunately for him, the path led to Pakistan. The Muslims surely were delighted to see an American so immersed in their religion and customs. He was undoubtedly treated as special, something most likely experienced for the first time in his life, and made to feel a welcome member of a new and caring family. And in this family, each member was dedicated, through common beliefs, to building a purer world. By adhering to the stricter form of Islam favored by the Taliban, he could prove to his new family the sincerity of his commitment. This conversion, to the idea that the world must be saved by any means, parallels familiar domestic tales of youths who joined communes and sects seeking to take their spiritual quest to the next level and were similarly victimized. These aren't the power-hungry or bloodthirsty people often drawn to terrorist groups,

but young idealists who truly believe they are following the path of righteousness to a better world. But history has shown that, through the power of environment and intentional manipulations, innocents can be turned into crusading terrorists. That was precisely the environment created by Osama bin Laden. As a young man, he became a folklore hero, someone who unselfishly gave his wealth and services to defeat the Russians in Afghanistan. The adulation appealed to his budding megalomania. He couldn't accept a return to obscurity, so he began preaching of a needed holy war against a hated enemy, a country whose power and active role in the Middle East stood as an obstacle to his plans. He promised would-be followers that if they sacrificed their souls to him, they would reap Allah's reward in the next life. As with all sociopaths, and so clear from his tapes, the lives of his followers were nothing more than expendable tools. Bin Laden recruited not just the poor and desperate, but the middle class searching for something more. He established camps that not only trained, but indoctrinated. It was into this world that Lindh innocently walked. And when he met up with bin Laden personally and was asked to fight with the Taliban one can only imagine Osama smiling at the sight of the converted American, stroking his beard and saying, Pleased to meet you—can you guess my name? Certainly, anyone succumbing to such an evil manipulator, we assume, must be weak, evil, addled, or all three. This lack of sympathy is rooted in the belief, still held by many, that we cannot be brainwashed unless we want to be brainwashed. Nobody wants to see himself or herself as that weak or vulnerable. To support this delusion, we have conjured up fictional pictures of the process of brainwashing as some irresistible hypnotic state, capable of producing zombie-like assassins, à la The Manchurian Candidate. But such total mind control has never been achieved. The term brainwashing was invented by American journalist Edward Hunter after a Chinese informant during the Korean War called the process hsi nao (cleansing the mind). It was called by the Chinese Szu Hsing Kai Tsao thought reform or ideological remolding. People subjected to it function on their own and make their own choices. But choices are based on beliefs. Change beliefs and you change choices. I define the process as the art of forcing one to accept a new belief along with the belief that one has done so voluntarily. The victims are not saddened, but enthusiastic over their new enlightenment. Americans got their first shocking glimpse of the process in 1953, when military prisoners returning from the Korean War spouted Communist doctrine; some twenty-one of them tried to avoid repatriation. They appeared on television, praising their captors and confessing to war crimes. They expressed fear of returning to the Imperialistic world and hoped that the Communist Party in the U.S. would care for them. Some spoke of a great harmony they didn't want to exchange for the pain of freedom. How could some of the country's finest reject our culture and way of life? Something inexplicable had happened. What did it all mean in terms of human psychology and institutions? While different labels were used thought reform, coercive persuasion the findings of U.S. researchers were consistent. The process didn't depend on drugs, imprisonment or torture. The reality was that we

are all not only vulnerable to such ideological conversions, but in various degrees, our own beliefs had been shaped in a similar fashion. What the experts found was an approach the Chinese had developed, through trial and error, to purify all segments of China. They used it in prisons to reform enemies by immersing them in small groups of other prisoners who were already well on their way to reform. These prisoners had already gone through the process and could testify persuasively to the great benefits of the transformation. By building a high level of trust, the prisoners were ripe to accept a new truth and to then dedicate themselves to the higher purpose of their captors. Once each began to confess and criticize others, it became easier for others to instill conflict and achieve submission. Each was encouraged to attack their former self with a goal of death and rebirth. Thus was created the struggle group an encounter-type group whose indoctrination sessions were similar to those of many self-help programs that emerged in the U.S. in the 1970s, such as est. The Chinese adapted the process for use with groups of university students, businesspeople and workers in an attempt to reform the entire population between 1945 and 1949. The aim was to create a new man who would recognize the greatest good personally is that which is the greatest good for the group and be enthusiastically active in the movement. He should choose the simple collective life over materialism. All communications were to be public. Any private conversation was suspect, suggesting a need not to be overheard. Dr. Robert Lifton, one of a team of U.S. researchers who studied the dynamics of brainwashing, concluded that thought reform was a religious, excessive emotional experience demanding total self surrender. And where totalism exists, he cautioned, a religion, a political movement, or even a scientific organization becomes little more than an exclusive cult. And prophetically, he stated such a system of polarization results in holy wars. In more poignant terms, he cited an elderly bishop on a hospital bed crying that the system that had converted him was in alliance with the demons. Those who already had a negative self-image or identity confusion, plus inclinations toward all-or-nothing emotional alignments, were most susceptible. And the most vulnerable, often, were teens and young adults whose identities were still taking shape, who were still idealistic and emotionally polarized, and who were dissatisfied with large societies. All of which describe John Walker Lindh. Interestingly, Lifton also found the system a long-term failure. It only worked as long as its victims remained subject to the environmental influence. Once removed a person usually self-deprogrammed by 90 days (I observed a similar phenomena in encountering American ex-cult members). Another expert, Dr. Edgar Schein, set forth the psychological profile of the devils willing to use such a program. Traits included fanaticism, intolerance, extremism, megalomania, idealism, authoritarianism, excessive self-righteousness, vanity, paranoia, asceticism, excessive commitment, ruthlessness, psychopathy, opportunism, frustrated ambition, non-conformism and cynicism. Often they are old society failures seeking achievement of former ambitions characterized by mystical dedication to a perceived imminent social law. They have a preoccupation with security and power-seeking, lack

flexibility in thinking and a need to be judged favorably by history. Schein wrote: "one could predict that the leader would initiate programs to liquidate those who are useless and uneducatable, to re-educate those who are needed in the society and who are considered re-educatable, and to purge members of the faithful as a way of purifying and reaffirming the faith as well as consolidating his own power position. The leader's fanatical devotion leads to a disregard for human suffering and expansive human sacrifice. Truth may be twisted if it serves the ultimate truth. Followers have no choice but to submit to the regime's paranoia and join in the hunting out of enemies. If this was Lindh's fate he was hardly the first to suffer it. History is full of examples of various kinds of brainwashing, from the Inquisitions, to the Salem witch-hunts, to McCarthyism and all of Richard Nixon's men. But despite the knowledge gained from the studies of Chinese thought reform, we continue to punish without sympathy the victims of this process, instead of trying to understand what led them down that path.

MANSON FAMILY

Charles Manson, born in 1934 in Ohio, the illegitimate son of a 16-year-old mother who was sent to prison for robbery, was raised in foster homes and eventually found his way to a life of crime. In prison, he added to his street-wise sensibilities by studying Dale Carnegie, Buddhism, Scientology and a group that worshipped both Christ and Satan, the Process. Some suspect in exploring the latter two he learned methods of bonding and control. Released in 1967, after his request to stay in prison home for half his life was denied, Manson found his way to the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco, then the nation's hippie capital filled with flower children, free love. Drugs and plenty of confused, vulnerable young people. He recruited girls for his family who in turn were bait for young men. He set up communes at several locations, including the Spahn ranch in Chatsworth, where he could indoctrinate his recruits in an environment akin to an Al Qaeda training camp. Through his programming, he taught followers to bond and love each other. He used LSD and sex orgies to break inhibitions. He once initiated a 13-year-old by sodomizing her in front of the group. All the time he talked of his philosophies, exploited weaknesses and instilled fear, at times applying physical punishments for breaking his rules. Role-playing games were called magical mystery tours in honor of Manson's favorite singing group, the Beatles. He urged denunciation of parents, surrender of egos and past identity and the taking of new names. Susan Atkins became Sadie Mae Glutz. He hinted at deity status. He was Man-son. They were to be free and learn that there is no right or wrong, only love and to follow love. But while preaching independence, he made them dependent. Whatever you want to do is your karma, he said. It was not even wrong to kill as there was no death, only a change. Death was an illusion. Manson's lifetime frustration at the establishment that had abandoned him boiled over when record producers he met through a friendship with members of the Beach Boys rejected his music. Then, twisting the meanings of Beatle lyrics, claiming their White Album conveyed special messages for him Happiness is a warm gun; Blackbird singing in the dead of night; you were waiting for this moment to arise; you say you want a revolution Manson

preached he was the instrument to ignite a social and racial war. It was all for the good of the Family and mankind. His true motives, however, were far more self-serving. You people have done everything in the world to me, he said of society during a parole hearing years later. Doesn't that give me equal rights? I can do it to you people because that's what you have done to me. Manson soon led his new recruits, as those of us old enough vividly remember, into an epic bloodbath. Over two nights in August 1969, Manson and his followers invaded two homes and slaughtered six people, including actress Sharon Tate, the pregnant wife of director Roman Polanski, coffee heiress Abigail Folger and hair-styling king Jay Sebring. Why them? In his twisted mind, they represented the wealth and fame that had always eluded him. Tex Watson shot Sebring, saying, I am the devil and I am here to do the devil's business. Susan Atkins dipped a towel in Tate's blood and wrote the word pig on the wall. Ultimately 12 murders were linked to the family and Manson bragged of 35. While it certainly can't be compared with the Twin Towers, it was, at the time, the crime of the century and the world was horrified when the culprits showed no remorse or shame after their capture. You have to have a real love in your heart to do this for people, Susan Atkins said with pride. While his family members denied he had any control over their minds, during Manson's trial, they slavishly copied him in court when he struck a crucified pose. When he carved an X on his forehead, they did likewise, with heated bobby pins. When Charlie shaved his head, so did they. Vincent Bugliosi who prosecuted the case, told the jury all were responsible for the hideous crimes because they had murder in their hearts. But how did it get there? The girls were from middle-class families, one had even been a high school princess, and none had a history of violence. Bugliosi pointed to their alienation to support his argument, but their anti-social history was nothing more than many middle-class youths had experienced in the 60s, dropping out for a while before turning into BMW-driving yuppies. This wasn't the type of background that typically led to violence. But juries and the world accepted Bugliosi's argument. They wanted to believe this was an aberration, a unique blend of sociopaths uniting in the desert. It just wasn't so. In time, evidence surfaced suggesting that Manson family members were also victims victims of a ruthless thought-reform regime. In jail, away from the total control of Manson, all ultimately recanted their allegiance and expressed remorse. Other family members went off and lived normal and good lives. Watson (from prison) and Paul Watkins wrote books on how Manson programmed them and the family. Watkins had been No. 2 in the family, but, after being deprogrammed, went on to become a mayor and president of the chamber of commerce in a small Death Valley town. Had he not been deprogrammed, he wrote in his book, it would have been him, not Watson, involved in the murders. But society has shown little sympathy for those who weren't snatched from Manson's influence in time. After winning a new trial when her attorney mysteriously died in mid-trial, Leslie Van Houten, now older and apologetic, claimed she was brainwashed. She was convicted and sent back to prison, where she remains after 14 parole denials. Tex Watson became a

Minister, married and has children. He has been denied parole 13 times. Atkins and Patricia Krenwinkel have been denied parole 11 times. Sharon Tate's mother once produced 350,000 signatures demanding Van Houten not be released. When Tate's mother died in 1992, President Bush (senior) praised her for her vigil. To this date, Bugliosi, perhaps because of the relationships he developed with the victims' relatives, won't advocate parole for family members. Even though he claims Manson murdered through control and power over his followers, he cannot see that the followers, too, may have been his victims. Bugliosi argues against comparing Manson to cult leaders such as Jim Jones and David Koresh. They ordered mass suicides, he contends, and that is different than getting people to commit murder for you. Actually, it is harder to get people to kill themselves rather than others. Still, Bugliosi's argument forgets the murders at the Jonestown airport before the suicides and that many followers who tried to run from the poison distribution were shot in the back. And the bullets fired by Koresh's followers at the ATF agents were not blanks. Someone poured the kool-aid and someone lit the match. Osama bin Laden got his followers to do both for the good of mankind: kill and die. PEOPLE'S TEMPLE While there has long been sympathy for those followers of James (Jim) Warren Jones who joined him in suicide, there has been none for those who were convinced by the same methods to kill for their family. Jones, born in 1931, started his own church, The Wings of Deliverance in 1955 in Indianapolis, later changing the name to the more descriptive People's Temple. There he preached a combination of theology, socialism and communism. In 1965, convinced a thermonuclear war was inevitable, Jones brought his racially mixed flock of the poor and working class by bus to Ukiah, California, believing it to be safe from fallout. Once on the west coast, where new religions flourished, he was able to recruit more affluent professionals as followers. Rich and poor alike, they all called him Father. A master manipulator, he raised an average of \$250,000 a month, including \$60,000 from social security checks and members' cashed-in estates, using a variety of means to tap people's emotions and their pocketbooks. After being robbed and assaulted, a blind woman was taken by ambulance to a hospital, where her alleged broken arm was set. When she came to the Temple for the first time later that night, Jones, amazingly, recounted these events from a vision he had, then removed her cast and healed her arm as parishioners shouted praise and the woman sobbed in gratitude. None of these people knew that Jones had rigged the entire thing, from the robbery, to the attendants, to the makeshift clinic. But soon, under the weight of press and IRS investigations accusing him of bilking followers, Jones led his followers to a remote, 27,000-acre commune in Guyana, where outsiders were barred. While they worked non-stop from early morning to late night to build a self-supporting community, former member Debbie Blakely was testifying in a court case that Jones had a rehearsed Doomsday plan wherein they would all die, children included, for the Cause. Here, the thought-reform process was relentless. Subsisting on rice and beans, commune members, many over the age of 50, slaved away in the fields while Jones harangued them with

lectures and sermons over a public address system. Public beatings and humiliations were standard punishments for any breach of loyalty. In November of 1978 Congressman Leo Ryan, 53, and a 12-member entourage, including journalists, flew into a small airfield near the Commune in November of 1978 to investigate. After a night at the commune, they set out to return after 16 followers asked to leave with them. Ryan made the mistake of telling Jones of the defections. Fearful of the tales they would tell the journalists, he mounted an assault on the departing plane, killing Ryan and three newsmen and wounding six others. That night, Jones urged his flock to die with dignity, as they had practiced, rather than be herded into prison camps by the government forces that would surely follow. He taped the grisly mass suicide that followed, convinced, as are all cult leaders, that history would look back on him favorably. On one tape, a father pleads for his daughter's life. But when it is recounted the terrible things the enemy would do to her, the man acquiesces, as the flock applauds. Mothers, you must keep your children under control, Jones later shouts, amid a tumult of shrieks and gunshots, as the unwilling die with the willing. They must die with dignity. Jones often spoke of translation, the process by which he and his followers would die together and move to another planet for a life of bliss. The truth was simpler. Jones would rather die than face prison and humiliation, and like other cult leaders, he wanted his followers to validate his choice by joining him. All told, 914 died, including 276 children. In 1980 Larry Layton a onetime Quaker and pacifist who joined the People's Temple as a young boy in 1968 with his sister, Debbie, and their mother, was tried for conspiracy in the Jonestown murders. He had fired the first shot at Ryan's group. Surprisingly 11 jurors were sympathetic to the brainwashing claim and voted for acquittal. Only an alone holdout forced a hung jury and retrial six years later. This time there was no sympathy. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. SYMBONESE LIBERATION ARMY Donald DeFreeze, the founder of the SLA, was a black man who spent most of his life in and out of jails, all the while developing a hatred for society. He was doing five years-to-life for armed robbery when, at age 31, he escaped from San Quentin in 1973, founded the SLA and was reborn Cinque Mtune after the leader of the mutiny aboard the slave ship Amistad. He recruited a middle-class white army off the UC Berkeley campus including a former Goldwater campaign worker, teachers, dramatists and an African missionary and predictably, gave them new names to go with their new lives, much as Manson did with his family and the Taliban with John Walker. To his followers, Cinque preached that he wanted to teach and help them. To the public, however, he warned similar to Manson, I am that nigger you have killed hundreds of timesâ€¦ I m that nigger that is no longer hunted, robbed and murdered. I m the nigger that hunts you now. Like Manson, Cinque boasted of being a prophet God had sent to start a revolution for blacks and the oppressed. He kept his followers isolated and, like Manson, often quoted what he believed were special messages in songs alluding to the revolution. Political power, he said, grows out of the barrel of a gun and he put cyanide in their bullets. In 1974 just 15 days before her 20th

birthday, Patty Hearst, daughter of media giant Randolph Hearst, was taken blindfolded a Prisoner of War from her Berkeley apartment. She was kept in a closet, used for sex and lectured on SLA politics. They told her the FBI would not help her and interpreted the news as proof the establishment did not care to negotiate for her release. The SLA denounced her prior life as nothing more than potted plants and nail polish. Like the prisoners in Korea, she was told that they all had once lived like her, but had come to see the exploitation of such an existence. They were ready now to fight and die to show their love for the people. Freed from the closet, Patty said she chose to join, initially out of fear, but later, after a barrage of personal criticism in struggle groups and reeducation classes, out of conviction. She studied SLA literature, participated in parties and adopted their rhetoric, grateful for learning the truth about Amerikka. Her shoulder-length blond hair was cut, she lost 15 pounds and was renamed Tania, after a guerilla fighter who fought with Che Guevara. Reading from a script, she was taped condemning speculation she had been brainwashed and denouncing her ex-boyfriend, her father and the corporate ruling class. Like many cults leaders, including bin Laden, Cinque stated he would rather die than go back to prison. And like all cult leaders, he wanted his followers to join him. So he taught continually that freedom fighters must never surrender. He rehearsed, ala Jim Jones, shoot-outs with law enforcement that would make them martyrs. He stated in the future the world would have parks with monuments and statues dedicated to their memory, much as Al Qaeda fighters are told. On May 17, 1974, DeFreeze got his martyr s wish. As more than 100 Los Angeles police officers surrounded the SLA home, he died in a hail of gunfire and tear gas. There would be no prisoners. As the house burned, SLA members chose to remain, and burned to death; only Defreeze shot himself in the head. In September of 1975, Patty Hearst was arrested by the FBI., defiantly giving a clenched-fist salute to the media and describing herself on the booking report as an urban guerrilla. As with Walker recently, 68% of those surveyed about Hearst believed she should be sent to prison; two-thirds thought she joined the SLA voluntarily and half thought the kidnapping was a fake. Three experts who worked with the Korean prisoners and a psychiatrist who helped the army develop brainwash resistance training examined her and concluded she had been brainwashed. Dr. Lifton labeled her a classic case. But the jury at her first bank robbery trial didn t buy it and she was sentenced to seven years in prison. One problem was that her attorney F. Lee Baily put her on the stand to tell of her conversion but then would not allow her to testify as to the full extent of her involvement in other crimes making it look like the defense was really smoke and mirrors. Later, however, the public view of Hearst began to change. A congressional petition on her behalf, led ironically by Rep. Leo Ryan, got 58 signatures. Ryan s subsequent death at Jonestown spread public awareness of cults and their pervasive influence over their followers. If the public can accept that one man brainwashed nine hundred people to kill themselves in Jonestown, said staunchly conservative movie star John Wayne, then it should be able to accept that the SLA could

brainwash one little girl. Finally, on Jan 30, 1979, President Jimmy Carter commuted Patty's sentence and turned her free. But Sarah Olson, a long-time SLA fugitive recently brought to justice and accused of similar crimes, did not receive the same treatment as the glamorous and wealthy heiress. She has lived as exemplary a life, if not more so, as Patty but still got 20 to life. While a precedent cannot be set giving a criminal gets credit for the quality of life maintained successfully as a fugitive, that life can tell us about that human being once removed from the influence of a totalist environment. Patty did not volunteer her involvement, but it is even easier to turn a true believer into a crusading terrorist. As Mao Tse-tung once said the secret is simply to convince the patient he was sick and that they had the cure. Olson's recent, unsuccessful attempt to withdraw her guilty plea may, like Patty's trial testimony, may be viewed as inconsistent with thought reform, but her ambiguity is consistent with Lifton's findings that thought reform victims in later years tend to reconstruct their memories in a far more favorable light filled with denial of their past victimization. She might have fared better had she not tried to recant but truthfully address what must be some very painful memories. Her chances for sympathy and a lesser sentence may have served her better by going to trial and presenting hers and expert evidence of how she was converted.

SYNANON Another case in which a cult soldier received sympathy occurred when the victim me spoke of the process to the court and asked for sympathy. Born in 1913, Charles Dederich's alcoholism took him through failed marriages and lost jobs to the doorsteps of AA, where he became a fanatical believer. The insights he believed he gained during a 1956 UCLA experiment on the effects of LSD on alcoholics transformed his AA sermons into intricate psychological and philosophical analyses. He developed his own following and started a storefront club in seedy Ocean Park. When drug users started joining the ex-drinkers departed and Synanon the first self-help drug rehab was born in 1958. Through rough and tough group sessions ultimately called the game past behavior was attacked and modified. Newcomers were taught to Act as If everything demanded of them was right and cruel punishments were dished out for negative behavior. Early books made comparisons to Lifton's work on thought reform and Dederich did not deny the accusation, instead proclaiming that addicts' minds were dirty and needed washing. Early on, the process fascinated the media and politicians. One congressman called Synanon the Miracle on the Beach. By selling goods by pleading with the public to buy from us and save a life and gaining large donations from Fortune 500 companies, Synanon grew in wealth and political influence. Believing dope fiends would revert if they left, Dederich in 1967 purchased land in Marin County to build a utopia he called Synanon City; he later developed a second one in the Badger Mountains outside of Visalia. He recruited non-addicts middle class, professional squares by convincing them they could participate in man's evolution and be the first to reach the 21st Century. He developed the Synanon Trip, the predecessor to modern self-help training sessions, a 48-hour experience designed to make the participants break emotionally and see Synanon and Dederich as their

savior. Versions of the game grew to 72 hours and longer to override resistance and squeeze members to his will. Synanon practiced containment allowing members as few contacts with the outside world as possible. Meanwhile, they were continually blasted with Dederich's tape-recorded speeches via the wire, an enclosed broadcasting system that reached into every nook of the complex. Members shaved their heads and wore overalls men, women and children. Predictably, the organization's practices turned increasingly bizarre. After banning sugar and smoking, in 1976 Dederich decided that children interfered with Synanon goals and all pregnancies were aborted and all adult males himself excluded had vasectomies. Resisters were put into long games and harangued until they broke. After his wife died of cancer in 1977, he interviewed women for the position of his fourth wife and ordered all Synanon couples to dissolve and take new mates for three years to share in his experience. As the group grew more insular, it grew more violent. In 1974 Dederich allowed members to strike disobedient, non-member juveniles sent by probation officers. Soon, perceived enemies were attacked. A rancher and his family, who helped Synanon runaways, were attacked by a mob of Dederich loyalists. Neighboring teenagers who offended the group were likewise beaten by mobs, as were visitors accused of being spies or thieves and a man who wouldn't apologize for a traffic incident. Dederich converted his best men into Imperial Marines at an Al Qaeda-like training camp, eventually dispatching them on coast-to-coast missions against perceived enemies. Dederich soon declared an official holy war against enemies wherein followers were encouraged to make violent attacks for which Synanon would deny responsibility while warning the public its uncontrollable residents might escalate to throwing bombs into the homes of those who criticize the organization. A man trying to get his child out was beaten with mallets in front of his home and almost died. That war eventually came to my doorstep. After I had instituted litigation against Synanon, which resulted in a money verdict and the removal of several children from the compound, in October of 1978 two of Dederich's Imperial Marines placed a rattlesnake sans rattles in my mailbox. Only 11 vials of antivenom saved my life. A police raid of the commune uncovered a tape entitled New Religious Posture Don't Fuck with Synanon of a jovial Dederich, rejoicing over past beatings and declaring that he wanted people to know that if they messed with Synanon in any way, they could end up physically dead. Those around him mimicked for approval, reminiscent of a recent video found in Afghanistan. Did the Marines who put the snake in my mailbox deserve any sympathy? One, just a 20-year old boy, had been placed in Synanon at age 11 by his famous, band-touring father. At 18 he was first to volunteer for a vasectomy and the youngest of the Marines. I had no doubt this boy would never have been convicted of a crime if he hadn't been placed there and would live a good life if removed. At my urging, he was sentenced to just one year in jail, as long as he didn't associate with anyone from Synanon after he was released. He went on to live a normal life. Synanon eventually mutated back into a non-violent society, removing Dederich from power, but unpaid back taxes assessed retroactively for

doing violence ultimately ended the community. Dederich lived his last years alone with his wife, dying in 1997. There are, of course, many similar stories. Followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh spiked salad bars at 10 restaurants in Oregon with Salmonella Typhimurium in 1984. David Koresh's followers chose to perish by fire, along with their children, rather than surrender during the Waco shoot-out in 1993. Heaven's Gate's founder Marshall Applewhite, an ex-mental patient who renounced sex, convinced males to submit to castration; 39 members were cajoled into drinking phenobarbital-and-vodka cocktails per a sales pitch to shed their containers and rendezvous with a UFO. The Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan in 1995 released sarin nerve gas in Tokyo's subway pursuant to a Manson-like con of bringing on a needed Armageddon. They succeeded in killing 12 and injuring thousands. When it comes to death toll numbers no one can match Hitler or Stalin who, like those above, hooked the downtrodden and the lonely middle class with promises of greatness. We are all, to some degree, vulnerable to committed horrible acts if convinced of a justification, as proved by a 1974 experiment by researcher Stanley Milgram in which duped volunteers were induced to deliver increasingly heavy electric shocks to others as punishment for poor recall (it was faked) by being convinced by scientist the experiment was for the betterment of mankind. Two-thirds of those tested were categorized as obedient, and, when placed with others willing to administer lethal dosages, 92% went along. And these subjects weren't feeble or addled; they were drawn from typical working, managerial, and professional classes. In a 1988 case in which I was appellate counsel, *Molko vs. Unification Church (Moonies)*, the California Supreme Court recognized that this process, whether it was labeled thought reform, brainwashing or coercive persuasion, constituted outrageous conduct that should be recognizable by a jury even without expert guidance. Victims of this process, the court ruled, could sue for both compensatory and punitive damages. So, should we show sympathy for young Mr. Walker? While it is certain he aligned himself with bin Laden's sales pitch there is no evidence as yet that he has attacked an American, although, in his then state of mind, he may have done so in defense of his new Taliban family. But it is also likely that, like the lost victims of other demagogues, he would never have gotten in harm's way had he not gotten involved with evil people and their relentless manipulations. Do not be quick to condemn poor young John Walker Lindh. Remember the tape of Bin Laden suggesting the humor he saw in his follower's misguided deaths. His victim list may require a recount. Copyright Paul Morantz 2002