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Sympathy for the Devil: Charles Manson's Exploitation of California's 1960s Counter-Culture

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**Sympathy for the Devil: Charles Manson's Exploitation of
California's 1960s Counter-Culture**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Charles Manson rose to infamy in 1969 with his orchestration of seven grisly murders in Los Angeles, California.¹ Even more shocking than the murder scenes was the fact that Manson did not perpetrate any of the murders himself, but instead convinced others to commit the crimes: the murderers came from a Manson-led cult commonly known as the Manson Family. Manson's total control over his followers marked him as a manipulative and cunning psychopath, but the development of his cult was largely due to the 1960s counter-culture in which it began.

Manson's psychological development left clear markers for his psychopathy, which characterizes him as narcissistic, manipulative, parasitic, selfish, sadistic, and with no capacity for empathy. From early childhood Manson had a penchant for crime and manipulation, and once he reached California in the 1960s he found a scene that perfectly catered to his psychopathic whims.

The 1960s were a volatile era of social and political turbulence, much of which was centered in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The decade was characterized by emphases on psychedelic drug use, sexual exploration, racial equality, and activism through music, and Manson exploited these values in order to cultivate his following. While the counter-culture stressed drug use as a means to attain a higher consciousness, Manson used psychedelic drugs to control and influence his followers. Similarly, the counter-culture's ideal of sexual freedom was bastardized by Manson through his sexual exploitation of women in the Family. He and his cult survived on the generosity of hosts throughout California, and they were welcomed by most due to the counter-cultural practices of free love and communal living. The culminating murders were thus perpetrated due to Manson's strong ability to influence others, but the counter-culture provided for him an environment in which to cultivate and apply his psychopathy. Had he not been situated in the 1960s counter-culture, Manson would never have been able to exert control over and eventually commit murder through the members of the Manson Family.

¹ Manson was also convicted of the murders of Gary Hinman and Donald Shea, but this thesis will focus on the deaths at the Tate and LaBianca scenes.

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INTRODUCTION

From an early age, Charles Manson expressed his desire to become a superstar. As a music enthusiast, Manson felt sure that his fame would come from what he considered to be a superior musical talent that would shock the world. As an egotistical boy who grew into a narcissistic cult leader, though, Manson would realize his dream in a different manner than he had originally expected. He achieved infamy for organizing the murders of actress Sharon Tate, Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger, Voytek Frykowski, Steve Parent, and Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, in incidents colloquially referred to as the Tate-LaBianca killings. One of the most famous murderers in history, Manson has gained much of his celebrity from the lore of true crime novels, news editorials, and other informal vehicles of information. Because of the American tendency to sensationalize the more macabre details of our past, Manson's exposure has grown intensely and he has become one of the most well-known villains of the twentieth century. The speculation that surrounds Manson's persona is, however, astonishing. Media and popular opinion have shaped the public's picture of Manson but have failed to note some of the most important, and fascinating parts of his story. Examining Manson as only a troubled, sadistic, and deviant individual does nearly nothing for academia, so one must also explore the historical context in which the crimes were perpetrated. The counter-culture that emerged in the 1960s provided for Manson an environment that hid his true motives and made his crimes possible. Manson's unique psychology exploited the counter-culture in a manner that would have been impossible in any other time period. Counter-cultural values, ideals, and theologies, which will be detailed in this thesis, gave Manson the niche he needed to fatally implement his psychopathy. Because of this distinctive amalgamation, it is absolutely crucial to characterize the Manson murders as historical events that are necessary and relevant to any analyses of the 1960s

counter-culture. This thesis will examine both how Manson's psychopathy developed, and how he was able to manifest it in the context of the counter-culture. The existing literature on both Charles Manson and the counter-culture is thorough and substantial, but an imperative connection between psychology and history has been missing from an analysis of the two subjects. This thesis will serve to examine that link and to prove its importance for an understanding of how and why the Tate-LaBianca murders occurred.

As a decade of considerable cultural and political change, both domestically and globally, the 1960s have been subject to considerable historical scholarship. The wealth of both primary and secondary information is enormous, and the differences in research foci of the period make for countless studies, analyses, and anthologies. In an effort to focus my research, I chose to extract information from sources surrounding both the era as a whole and specific counter-cultural values. Theodore Roszak's *Making of a Counter-Culture* is an exceptional analysis of the beginning of the counter-culture and delves into both its intellectual and its international roots.² Manson and his followers were generally uninterested in the intellectual basis for and reasons behind the counter cultural ideals that typified the era, so Roszak's account, while highly informative, does not explain many of Manson's philosophies and actions. Much of the research in this thesis comes from sources centered on the California counter-cultural scene such as people with whom Manson interacted, events he may have witnessed, and palpable paradigm shifts associated with the era give a far more relevant and comprehensive perspective on the counter-culture as it relates to Manson. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines' anthology *Takin' it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader* is one such excellent resource that gathers together accounts from different facets of the 1960s, including the Civil Rights Movement, New Wave Feminism,

² Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture; Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969)

psychedelic drug use, the hippie movement, anti-war sentiment, and student activism.³ *A Nation of Outsiders* by Grace Elizabeth Hale and *American Culture in the 1960s* by Sharon Monteith also provide condensed examinations of the counter-culture in a broader U.S. context and proved invaluable to researching the subject.⁴ Sociologist Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, in addition to being masterfully informative about social causes and interactions in the 1960s, provides a crucial combination of academic perspective and personal recollection, as he was an active member of the counter-culture himself.⁵

Despite the outstanding scholarship on the 1960s, research on Charles Manson himself has been largely remiss in terms of examination in a historical context. True crime accounts dominate Manson's narrative, with prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*, a legal documentation of Manson's history, serving as the pre-eminent authority on Manson's criminal history.⁶ Other biographies follow similar threads as Bugliosi's, framing Manson as a psychopath who lured unsuspecting and vulnerable young people into what would become the Manson Family, his murderous cult. *Manson*, by Jeff Guinn, is a remarkably thorough exploration of Manson's life, detailing his life from birth to after his 1971 conviction.⁷ This account provided most of the background information I use about Manson's adolescence and was infinitely useful in tracking Manson's location throughout the 1960s. Guinn compiled an astonishing number of sources and ideas, and his book was an absolutely invaluable source.

Because the Manson case was so infamous, it has become a marketable topic for true-crime novels that describe both the murders and the experiences of the cult members. A few such

³ Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, *Takin' it to the Streets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴ Sharon Monteith *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

⁵ Todd Gitlin *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. (Bantam, 1993).

⁶ Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974).

⁷ Jeff Guinn, *Manson: The Life and Times of Charles Manson* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2013).

members have documented their experiences in memoirs, which provide ripe primary source material biographers have used to try to understand Manson's eccentric behavior. The accounts vary according to the author's role: many relatives of victims wrote memoirs about their family members' experience perishing in the violence, while others wrote about their family members' experience escaping, deprogramming, or participating in these cult activities. Some former Manson Family members wrote memoirs of their own, which have been especially illuminating. One of these is Susan Atkins' 1978 memoir *Child of Satan, Child of God*.⁸ In this account, Atkins details her life with Manson as part of the Family and as one of most devoted followers. Atkins' work is not generally considered a historically valid perspective, as it contradicts Vincent Bugliosi's watershed account of the Manson trial and story: Atkins' second book *The Shattered Myth of Helter Skelter* defies Bugliosi's details and theories methodically, but an objective reader will understand that it is unlikely that Atkins would write a document exaggerating her own guilt, or even admitting to those portions of her experience with Manson of which she was most ashamed.⁹ Some aspects of the manuscript parallel actual findings about Manson, but it largely represents a wealth of true-crime material that sensationalizes Manson and denies personal responsibility, and is a heavily one-sided perspective. For these reasons, Atkins' books and other true-crime novels were not used as reliable historical sources for this essay, though they provided some insights into Manson's character. They are intensely fascinating to read, and provide some explanation of personal thoughts, behavior, and reactions to Manson's actions and to the murders. Guinn's biography and Bugliosi's account of the murders remain, however, the principal authorities on which I base the vast majority of my Manson presentation.

⁸ Susan Atkins and Bob Slosser, *Child of Satan, Child of God* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977).

⁹ Susan Atkins, *The Shattered Myth of Helter Skelter*, (California: Menelorelin Dorenay's Publishing, 2012).

Manson's effect on the counter-culture movement of the 1960s has been largely overshadowed, but through no real fault of historians: the 1960s simply featured so many critical events and characters that Manson's legacy lives predominately in the field of psychology. However, my thesis aims to merge the fields of history and psychology, as the only way to understand Manson is by fully grasping key historical elements of the time period, and the only way to gain a thorough comprehension of the 1960s is by examining the influence the counter-culture had on different psychologies and pathologies.

Grasping the less sensational aspects of Manson's development is vital to understanding the 1969 murders for which he is infamous and to comprehend the behavior of the approximately thirty people he used to commit his heinous crimes. This paper will seek to shed some light on these details and will concern itself less with the public opinions of Manson that have formed in the years since his high-profile trial and sentencing. The first step in this direction is to debunk several myths that have circulated concerning Manson and his psychology.

These myths require negating for the purpose of understanding my analysis, and this requires critical distinctions and definitions. First and foremost, before undertaking any discussion of Manson's pathology, it is crucial to understand the exact nature of his crimes. Charles Manson is often labeled a serial killer or mass murderer, but the line between those two definitions is nebulous enough that an exact qualification is difficult to maintain. Contemporary definitions used by professionals in law enforcement and mental health categorize the two as follows: *serial murder* involves the "killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), in separate events" while *mass murder* is defined as "a number of murders (four or more) occurring

during the same incident, with no distinctive time period between the murders.”¹⁰ While elements of these definitions have been debated¹¹ in terms of semantics, Manson’s crimes are ambiguous because of their unique execution.

While he did kill more than two victims, and did so in separate events, the time period between Manson’s kills was not the traditional “cooling-off” period typical of a serial murderer. Furthermore, the two crime scenes could be considered part of the same spree, as the LaBianca killings were committed largely in order to draw police attention to the Tate murders from the previous night. Another issue is that while Manson orchestrated both murder scenes, the same individuals did not necessarily commit both sets of murders. Some players were consistent, but there were participants in the Tate murders who did not perpetrate the LaBianca killings and vice versa.¹² Thus, the pattern dictated by the FBI definition that the murders be committed by the same offender is in this case inapplicable. The Tate murders carried a death toll of five, which qualifies it as a mass murder, but these murders were also part of a larger (albeit ill-organized) pattern.

The nuances of these crimes render them nearly impossible to define, which is why it is crucial to understand that Manson’s classification as a murderer is his secondary diagnosis:

before all else, Manson was a psychopathic cult leader. Instead of focusing on these murders as

¹⁰ The FBI’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime hosted a Serial Murder Symposium in 2005, made up of experts ranging from law enforcement to professional researchers and academics in an effort to explain, categorize, and strategize for serial murder. The definitions I listed are from page 8 of the report produced by this Symposium: “Serial Murder: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators” and can be found on the FBI website (www.fbi.gov).

¹¹ While the FBI’s definition is referenced for law enforcement, classifications of serial murders do not *necessarily* require the death toll to be uniform. There is also a distinction between “serial murders” and “spree-killings” that is not relevant for law enforcement, but that can be a useful distinction to psychological experts. For the purposes of this essay, these details are not particularly salient.

¹² At the Tate scene were Family members Charles “Tex” Watson, Patricia Krenwinkel, Linda Kasabian, and Susan “Sadie” Atkins. The LaBianca perpetrators included the original quartet and added Steve “Clem” Grogan and Leslie Van Houten. Reliable accounts of the murders can be found in Jeff Guinn’s *Manson* and Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry’s *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders*.

the epitome of his criminal development, it is crucial to examine them as part of his pathology as a cult leader and to recognize them largely as further steps in his mounting control over his followers. Manson ordered his flock to commit the murders in order to incite a race war, after which he and his followers would emerge triumphant as the leaders of the new world. Manson did not derive pleasure solely from the act of murder as do other serial and mass murderers: instead, his gratification came in the knowledge that his control over his disciples was total.¹³ Because of this significant difference from other serial murderers and many mass murderers, Manson's classification as a murderer must come second to his diagnosis of psychopath. It is Manson's psychopathy that allowed him to infiltrate the counter-culture, and an exploration of his early psychopathic development is crucial to understanding exactly how he implemented his unique psychology in the 1960s.

¹³ It is important to note that motive does not factor in to definitions of serial and mass murder, as motives are generally too varied and too much based on personal experience to qualify as part of far-reaching categorization. However, personal gratification that comes from the crimes themselves is unequivocally an important part of a serial murderer's psyche, while broader causes or personal motives are often characteristic of mass murderers. Manson's odd combination of the two provides yet another reason for the difficulty in assigning his crimes a category.

CHAPTER I

UNDERSTANDING MANSON'S PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological Background:

Psychopathy, as the condition is known, describes an individual who feels neither empathy nor remorse. Clinically, the condition is categorized as one “defined by a constellation of affective, interpersonal, and behavioral characteristics, including egocentricity, manipulative, deceitfulness, lack of empathy, guilt or remorse, and a propensity to violate social and legal expectations and norms.”¹⁴ This condition is often used interchangeably with Anti-Social Personality Disorder, but the two diagnoses differ mainly in the extremity and intensity of the symptoms present in psychopathic individuals as opposed to those suffering from ASPD. Specifically, psychopaths present with elevated levels of three traits: disinhibition, boldness, and meanness. Another myth that it is important to negate is the notion that psychopaths feel absolutely no emotion. While they are incapable of most typical human responses and emotions, there is one emotion they feel above all else: pride. Psychopaths are egotistical and narcissistic, which will become a note of absolute importance when examining Manson’s motives for his murders.¹⁵

The prevailing literature on such individuals comes predominately from Hervey M. Cleckely and Robert Hare, two prominent psychologists whose research provides the gold standard for studies in psychopathy. In the early 1900s Cleckely completed immersive research in the prison and criminal psychiatric care systems and developed a list of clinical traits that he

¹⁴ Robert Hare, “Psychopathy, Affect and Behavior,” in DJ Cooke, et al., *Psychopathy: Theory, Research and Implications for Society* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998) p. 105.

¹⁵ NC Venables, JR Hall, CJ Patrick, “Differentiating Psychopathy from Antisocial Personality Disorder: A Triarchic Model Perspective,” *Journal of Psychological Medicine* Vol. 44, Issue 5 (2014): Abstract, p 1. Accessed via journals.cambridge.org.

asserted psychopaths possessed based on his observations of subjects convicted of violent crimes.¹⁶ Robert Hare interpreted this list of traits as the basis for his Psychopathy Checklist (PCL) and later for the revision of his earlier publication, known and used now as the PCL-R.¹⁷ Cleckely's original diagnosis of psychopathy had nothing to do with the antagonism and aggression now considered to be the hallmarks of the condition, and the chief schism between Hare's publication and Cleckely's research comes from the addition of aggression as a major factor in the diagnosis. Hare also takes into account the extensive research of other professionals, compiling their findings and his own into the PCL-R, making his list the unequivocal authority on psychopathy since its revision in 2003. This checklist identifies twenty traits possessed by psychopaths, clinically assessed through an interview process and an evaluation of their childhood and adult histories. The traits measured are as follows:

1. Glib and superficial charm
2. Grandiose sense of self worth
3. Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
4. Pathological deception
5. Conning/manipulativeness
6. Lack of remorse or guilt
7. Shallow affect (superficial emotional responsiveness)
8. Callousness and lack of empathy
9. Parasitic lifestyle
10. Poor behavioral controls
11. Sexual promiscuity

¹⁶ His research culminated in his landmark book, *The Mask of Sanity* (C.V. Mosby Company, 1941).

¹⁷ Robert Hare, "Manual for the Revised Psychopathy Checklist" (Toronto, ON, Canada: Multi-Health Systems, 2003).

12. Early behavior problems
13. Lack of realistic long-term goals
14. Impulsivity
15. Irresponsibility
16. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
17. Many short-term marital relationships
18. Juvenile delinquency
19. Revocation of conditional release
20. Criminal versatility¹⁸

Charles Manson, as this thesis will endeavor to make apparent, embodies all of these traits and can be accurately and unambiguously labeled a psychopath. However, there are some key clarifications to be made before my analysis: what sets Manson apart from other psychopaths is the way in which his pathology manifested itself. Manson's upbringing is indeed demonstrative of classic anti-social traits and markers for a criminally active adult life, many of which will be detailed in the biographical portion of this essay. Manson differs in some key ways, though, from his psychopathic peers. While he can theoretically be considered a violent offender, Manson never actually committed the crimes for which he is most infamous. He was convicted via the "Joint-Responsibility" clause of the California Penal Code which mandates that those who conspire to commit murder may be prosecuted on equal footing with the physical perpetrators of the violence. His manipulative capacity was so advanced that Manson was able to convince others to kill for him, which in most historical and geographical settings would be

¹⁸ Robert D. Hare and Craig S. Neumann, "Psychopathy as a Clinical and Empirical Construct," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* Vol. 4, Issue 2 (2008), pp. 217-246. Accessed online via www.hare.org

unrealistic. However, Manson reached his full development in a time and place that provided the perfect hunting ground for an unorganized but determined psychopath: California in the 1960s.

The counter-cultural revolution¹⁹ that flourished in California stressed several key ideals on which this essay will focus: a) a lack of personal responsibility in light of a larger goal, b) free love and drug use, c) weak ties and casual interpersonal relationships, and d) an innate rebellion against traditional societal norms. The important intersection between Manson and these ideals can be seen identified via the PCL-R: some traits that Hare lists as markers of psychopathy were exactly the same traits that were lauded by members of the counter-cultural movement, notably sexual promiscuity, lack of realistic long term goals, a parasitic lifestyle, and irresponsibility and impulsivity. The counter-culture constructed these traits that Manson possessed biologically, and in doing so masked his psychopathy under the guise of acceptability according to the counter-cultural creed.

Before any discussion about the counter-culture and Manson's relationship to it, it is crucial to be familiar with Manson's personal development and upbringing. Not only were the markers of psychopathy apparent in his adolescence, but a rudimentary understanding of Manson's family, geography, opportunities, and relationships is absolutely necessary to appreciate his mental, emotional, and geographical states upon his introduction to the counter-cultural movement itself. Note that this is not a comprehensive biography of Charles Manson, but contains some of the most critical components of his development that contributed to the adult manifestations of his psychopathy.

¹⁹ First called "counter-cultural revolution" by Theodore Roszack in his book *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969).

Manson's Early Life and Development:

Charles Milles Manson was born November 12th, 1934, the product of a teenage troublemaker looking for love and a con man looking for some quick action. Kathleen Maddox was raised in Ashland, Kentucky, a small town just across the river from Ohio. Kathleen suffered some significant loss early in her life: her father Charlie and her sister Aileene both died of consumption within two years of each other, leaving the family without an income and Nancy, Charlie's widow, to support her three surviving children alone. Nancy, already a devout Christian, coped with the losses by throwing herself even more enthusiastically into the Bible, raising her family in a strict religious home. This came at an inopportune moment for Kathleen, who was just hitting her teenage years and was interested in experiences typical of her peer group, most of which did not run parallel to her mother's religious priorities. The most dangerous of these activities, according to Nancy's beliefs, was dancing; it was natural, then, that this was the manifestation of teenage rebellion that a young Kathleen chose. She found her opportunity across the Ohio border in Ironton, her reasons for crossing the river being twofold: firstly, that Ashland's small size guaranteed that if she were seen dancing, Kathleen's actions would be reported back to her mother within days; and secondly, that Ironton's larger size and comparatively more cultured population would provide the exciting nightlife Kathleen craved.

Dancing in Ironton one night, Kathleen met Colonel Scott, a local married, twenty- three year old con artist who charmed Kathleen enough that she kept going back to Ironton to see him.²⁰ Eventually, these clandestine meetings produced a pregnancy, and when Kathleen disclosed her condition to Scott he feigned business abroad and left her flat. As a fifteen year old with a baby on the way, Kathleen began to panic that her child would grow up without a father

²⁰ Colonel was his given name, not an earned rank.

and desperately sought a replacement for her long-gone Scott. She found one in William Manson, and her son was born with his stepfather's last name.²¹ This marriage did not last long, however, due to Kathleen's desire to be both a mother and a teenager. Her desire for nightlife and excitement did not cease upon Charles' birth, and her husband began to resent her erratic behaviors and immature tendencies, such as leaving Charles at home while she went out on the town, occasionally for days at a time. Eventually, William became fed up with his child-bride and divorced her, leaving Kathleen and her now two year old son Charles homeless and staying intermittently with different family members. It is likely that Charles' first memories were of an erratic and unstable home life, and that he had the misfortune to begin life as a boy who had gone through two fathers and multiple residences by the time he was three. This uneasy environment just continued building, as Kathleen eventually graduated from dancing across the river to engaging in petty crime with her brother Luther. After an amateur armed robbery and car theft, Kathleen and Luther were both sentenced to prison time, five years and ten years respectively. Thus, Charles Manson began his adolescence with a jailed mother, an absent father, and few positive role models. This would constitute a difficult start for any child, but for Charlie it provided a fluid and a permissive environment in which to exercise his developing sociopathy.

After his mother's incarceration, Charles was placed with Kathleen's older sister Glenna and her family in McMechen, West Virginia, just miles away from his mother's federal prison in Moundsville. McMechen was an all-white, conservative, traditional town, and Charles Manson did not mix well. In an environment where children were supposed to be docile, uncomplaining, and hard-working, Charles' most prominent traits directly opposed those celebrated by the

²¹ It is unclear as to whether or not William knew the child was not his; the birth certificate lists him as Charles' father, but he was not required to pay child support after he and Kathleen divorced due to the lack of children from the union. Jeff Guinn, *Manson: The Life and Times of Charles Manson* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2013) pp. 17-18.

town's culture. Charles' first grade teacher, Mrs. Varner, was a particularly unpleasant woman who tolerated no nonsense in her classroom. Perhaps because his emotion was warranted, or perhaps because Charles' propensity to deny responsibility was already showing itself, Charles' ran home from his first day of school in tears because of his experience in Mrs. Varner's classroom. Charles' Uncle Bill was disappointed by his nephew's display of what he considered an exclusively female emotion, and to teach the child a lesson, forced him the next day to wear a dress to school. With this incident, any hope Glenna and Bill could have had a positive influence on their nephew was lost, as Charles' relationship with his aunt and uncle would never recover due to the shame he felt. His grades never recovered either, as Charles would remain a poor student well after Mrs. Varner's classroom and even into adulthood. Because of the lack of stable relationships in his adolescence, one would assume that Charles had nothing to lose if he acted out at school, since after the dress incident he had already lost the respect of his guardians and peers. However, when he caused problems at school or at home, Charles continued to blame his wrongdoings on others.²² In a typical child, this would be indicative of a desire to remain in the good graces of authority figures. But since Charles did not care about his relationship with authority figures, this can be interpreted as a personal desire to manipulate a situation and see others suffer directly through one's actions.

Glenna's daughter Jo Ann was eight when her cousin moved in, and she was a frequent witness to these episodes. When Jo Ann was ten and Charles six, she was once left at home to care for him and complete her household chores. Charles found a sickle and brandished it at Jo Ann, who locked him out of the room so that she could continue her chores without distraction. Upon being locked out, however, Charles became hysterical and started cutting the screen barrier

²² Guinn describes an incident in which Jo Ann tried to protect Charles from bullies in the schoolyard, but when confronted by a teacher Charles blamed all the violence on Jo Ann. (Guinn, *Manson*, p. 30).

with his blade. Luckily, Glenna and Bill returned home before Charles could reach Jo Ann, but this instance was one that stood out to Jo Ann years later.²³ Jo Ann noted that Charles was disciplined for his actions, but that no matter how much he was disciplined he would never change his ways. It was also an early demonstration of Charles' inability to control himself upon being wronged, and of his propensity for violence.

In a childhood otherwise dominated by violence, instability, and the beginnings of mistrust for authority, Charles developed a love and aptitude for music. One positive aspect of Charles' stint in his aunt's household came in the form of the piano that served as his introduction to music, and Charles would play piano and sing whenever he could. This affinity for music might not seem particularly relevant to Charles' pathology, but it largely guided his later course of action before, and in many ways resulting in, the 1969 murders. It is therefore particularly salient to note how this love developed into a consuming passion for most of Charles' life.

When Kathleen was released for good behavior in 1942, Charles moved back in with his mother and the two moved to Charleston, West Virginia. Kathleen began work at a local grocery store, and Charles was enrolled in elementary school. His school experience, however, did not go much better than did his time in McMechen. Charles became a regular truant, charming women into buying him candy at his mother's grocery store instead of going to school. This instance shows Charles' high social intelligence: instead of attending school to fulfill a long-term goal, he charmed and manipulated customers into buying him candy and thus satisfied immediate

²³ Recounted to Jeff Guinn, *Manson* p. 31.

objectives.²⁴ He did not have an opportunity to finely hone his skills there, however, as he and Kathleen did not settle in Charleston but rather found several temporary homes around the Indianapolis area while Kathleen worked menial jobs and attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. In August 1943, Kathleen once again married: this time to a man named Lewis whom she met through Alcoholics Anonymous. Lewis did not provide the positive male role model for Charles that Kathleen had hoped, especially since Charles had begun to try his hand at petty theft. Kathleen's self-reformation had not had the effect on Charles she had counted on, and even though she was now living life according to the law, she could not control her son as he continued to skip school and steal.

By 1947, Kathleen decided that she needed serious help raising her son. When Charles was twelve, Kathleen sent him to the Gibault School for Boys, a reform school outside of Indianapolis. Charles did not appreciate his new environment and ran away several times, most notably in 1948 when he fled to Indianapolis. Kathleen lived in Indianapolis at the time, but instead of reconnecting with her, Charles engaged in petty theft and was arrested attempting a break-in of a small store. Instead of being sent back to Gibault, the Judge sent the delinquent Charles to Boys Town in Omaha, Nebraska. A well-known facility at the time, Boys Town was a leading reform institution for troublemaking boys and focused on the social rehabilitation of its occupants. Perhaps if Charles had given Boys Town a chance, it would have had a positive effect on his troubled childhood; however, Charles was uninterested in becoming a functioning member of society, so Boys Town became another place he left behind, absconding with another student only four days after his arrival. On this particular venture into the criminal world, Charles sank a ring lower: he committed his first armed robberies at the age of thirteen. These

²⁴ This behavior can be clearly linked to traits assessed in the PCL-R, specifically "conning/manipulativeness" and "parasitic lifestyle," and can be an interpretation of "lack of realistic long-term goals."

incidents were essential to Charles' development: it was his first implementation of an early fascination with guns and violence within a real world scenario.

Charles' next reform school was the Indiana Boys School, a much harsher environment for more serious offenders than his two previous institutions. For the first time, Charles found himself among young men he could not intimidate and, of more pressing importance, who were decidedly more hardened criminals than he was. Charles had had the run of more lenient reform schools, but in the Indiana School he was nowhere near the biggest fish in the sea. It was at the Indiana Boys School that Charles developed what he would later call the "insane game," a defense mechanism likely developed to stave off sexual and physical abuse from the bigger boys at school. This "game" consisted of Charles using noises, erratic gestures, rapid movements, and any other means at his disposal to convince potential threats that he was crazy and not worth their time. Charles' social manipulation in this sense demonstrated the lengths to which he would go in order to maintain control of a situation, and also how desperately he needed to find himself in a position of power. For the rest of his life, and especially for the durations of his numerous incarcerations, Charles would continue using the "insane game" as a method for control and manipulation.

Another important escalation in Charles' pathology came when he was caught forcibly sodomizing a boy at school, holding a razor blade to his victim's throat. This assault was an isolated incident, and it is likely that Charles was more interested in the power he held over his victim than in any sexual gratification derived from the experience: he did not continue to engage in sexual encounters with men, but developed a lifelong fascination with pimps, prostitutes, and the dynamics of control in their relationships. This rape could be considered a turning point in Charles' criminal history: it was a personal, egregious crime that was an exercise

of physical power over another human being, a phenomenon that rarely occurred in the diminutive Charles' early life. Charles also learned the power of sex: This enjoyment of control shaped Charles' later power dynamic in his cult and social endeavors. Later in life, Charles would sexually exploit his female followers to curry favor and achieve desired social status.

Upon Charles' eventual release in May 1954, he had spent the better part of his adolescence institutionalized. He would no doubt have had trouble integrating into the social scene of McMechen (where he was released into the care of his grandmother Nancy) without this stigma, but with it, he found making friends in McMechen nearly impossible. The youth were not impressed with his stories from reform schools and shunned him, marking another social environment in which a young Charles had no control. No doubt this experience cemented Charles' desire to control his own social agenda and have the respect he felt he so deserved from his peers. His chance came soon after his return to McMechen, as one day in Jo Ann's home he interrupted her husband, a minister, in a therapy session with a young girl. Charles began complimenting the girl, emphasizing how special she was. Likely his first foray into the manipulation of females that later became his main platform for recruitment, this warm-up gave Charles a practice round before he turned his charm on Rosalie Willis, a pretty, well-liked, local teenager. The two began seeing each other, and in 1955 applied for a marriage license.

McMechen was shocked to learn of the union, as the unpopular Charles was an extremely unlikely match for the gregarious Rosalie. Perhaps the town was right to mistrust Charles, for when Rosalie realized that she was pregnant later that year Charles began stealing cars to make ends meet in preparation for the birth of their child. Engaging in an interstate racket, Charles stole cars from Ohio and unloaded them across state lines to avoid detection. It is possible that the reversion to his criminal habits empowered Charles to strike out on his own, and it is possible

that he tired of the judging eyes of McMechen; whatever the reason, Charles and his bride drove a stolen car to California, settling in Los Angeles.

Finally in the city that would provide the backdrop for his most famous ventures, Charles began his tenure in California arrested for driving a stolen car. Charles was sentenced to five years of probation largely because of his wife's pregnancy, but he panicked and fled with Rosalie to Indianapolis where she gave birth to their son, Charles Manson Jr. He was arrested in Indianapolis, sent back to Los Angeles, and in April 1956 was sentenced to three years in California's Terminal Island Penitentiary. The most important parts of Charles' federal internment were introductions: first to pimps, and second to Dale Carnegie.

While on Terminal Island, Charles studied pimps and their behavior, listening to their tales of controlling women and idolizing their manipulative methods and successes. He especially sought their expertise after he found out that his wife Rosalie had left him: she and her son moved in with another man when Rosalie tired of visiting her husband in prison after the promise of an exciting life in California. This development enraged Charles, spurring him to take the pimps' advice to heart when dealing with women once he was released from prison. Much of Charles' low opinion of women can likely be traced to this early betrayal by Rosalie, and while his exploitation of them was on one level a business decision, it was also based on elements of his abandonment by Rosalie and his child. This cannot, however, be confused for affection for Rosalie or his son: Charles was merely angry that he could not control his bride the way he wanted. He was not in love with her and only wanted her for her social status and normalizing presence. Later in Charles' life, when his Family was fully established, male disciples often

came and went. However, if a female follower attempted to leave the family, Charles would do absolutely everything in his considerable power to re-possess the girl.²⁵

In addition to the wisdom espoused by the prison pimps, Charles encountered a new influence in the form of Dale Carnegie, author of the 1936 sensation *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The methods for social manipulation that Carnegie's book suggested (to a mostly benign audience, though in hindsight, authorities must surely have regretted providing the book and corresponding course in a federal prison) appealed very much to Charles, and he made them his personal mantras.²⁶ Upon his release from prison in 1958, Charles decided to put his new knowledge to the test and settled in Los Angeles to begin what he considered a promising new career: pimping. Charles struggled to hone his skills for three years before landing back in prison, this time on charges of check-forgery and pimping across state lines. In another attempt to manipulate the justice system, Charles married Leona, the prostitute he had brought across the state line, to keep her from testifying. This plan only worked so long as his fidelity lasted, and when Charles predictably tired of his new bride, Leona testified against him for the pimping charges. These charges did not stick, but the forgery charges did: Charles was heading back to prison.

This time, Charles was sentenced to a ten year stint in the U.S. Penitentiary on Washington's McNeil Island. There, he supplemented his Dale Carnegie education with teachings from the Church of Scientology, a group that had a large following among inmates.

²⁵ In 1969, Pat Krenwinkel tried to leave the Family and made it outside of L.A. but Manson managed to find her through his biker contacts. She was so impressed with Manson's ability to track her down that she returned to the commune. (Guinn, *Manson*, p. 225).

²⁶ "The only way on earth to influence the other fellow is to talk about what he wants and show him how to get it," "You have to use showmanship...Dramatize your ideas," and "Let the other fellow feel that the idea is his" specifically became Manson's most important tools. Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936).

Scientology preached the importance of changing oneself, participating in a brotherhood of all men, and understanding that one's life does not just include time on Earth; Charles would later regurgitate these as his own doctrines and would use them to recruit and influence his followers.²⁷ Charles encountered another philosophical force at McNeil, one that arguably became the most influential of his life: the Beatles. Imprisoned at McNeil in 1964 when the Beatles became a worldwide phenomenon, Charles heard their music on the radio and became entranced. Not only did the Beatles become Charles' musical idols, he also admired their superstardom. As a man who had never received the respect and adoration he felt he so deserved, Charles was impressed with the influence the Beatles had on so many. He modelled himself after the Beatles, obsessing over lyrics and guitar melodies that he felt would catapult him into fame. Now that he knew that this type of stardom was possible, Charles would not rest until he had achieved it himself. Becoming a music star remained Charles' life goal long after his prison term at McNeil, and this ambition would serve as one of the key motives behind Charles' actions throughout the 1960s.

In 1967, Charles was paroled and found himself with few personal connections, no resources, and a dream of becoming a music star. He called a fellow parolee who invited him to stay in Berkeley, California, marking one of the major relocations of Charles' life. He made his way to San Francisco and set about adjusting to the bizarre culture, political unrest, and societal upheaval of the city that would provide the backdrop for Charles' developing psychopathy. San Francisco was at the heart of the national counter-cultural movement, and its inhabitants were open to new ideas, new lifestyles, and, most importantly, new leaders. Thanks to his prison

²⁷ Exactly what Charles read of Scientology can be found in L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (New York: Hermitage House, 1950)

education, ambition, and natural propensity for manipulation, Charles found himself perfectly poised to become one of these leaders, and thus began the next chapter of his deviant life.

CHAPTER II

A BACKGROUND OF THE 1960S COUNTER-CULTURE

On January 14th, 1967, a crowd gathered in Golden Gate Park's Polo Field in San Francisco. Full of what had become known as "hippies," the throng circulated LSD, communal food, marijuana, and good vibes.²⁸ These hippies represented a growing population of radical young adults whose ideals stressed radicalism, self-expression, creativity, and worldly consciousness. Neighborhood cafes and shops closed to encourage their customers to participate, and local and national media curiosity was piqued. Allen Cohen, a poet who served as one of the gathering's organizers, described it as "A Gathering of the Tribes..." and explained that "[n]ow that a new race is evolving in the midst of the old, we can join together to affirm our unity, and generate waves of joy and conscious penetration of the veil of ignorance and fear that hides the original face of human kind."²⁹

The event was advertised as a Human Be-In, and subsequently became a well-publicized and landmark event for the 1960s counter-culture. Slated to appear were Allen Ginsberg, a popular Beat poet and Timothy Leary, an influential LSD advocate from Harvard, along with others who were some of the most revered gurus of the counter-cultural movement. Cohen wrote that the purpose of the Be-In was to "overcome the paranoia and separation with which the state wishes to divide and silence the increasing revolutionary sense of Californians."³⁰ Radical leaders spoke, local bands performed, and attendees smoked marijuana and took LSD. Anti-war protestors from the University of California at Berkeley mingled with Civil Rights activists, who

²⁸ "A hipster; a person, usually exotically dressed, who is, or is taken to be, given to the use of hallucinogenic drugs; a beatnik" *Oxford English Dictionary*, online resource at www.oed.com.

²⁹ Letter to the Art Kunkin, editor of the *L.A. Free Press* from Allen Cohen January 1, 1967. Accessed via onlinehome.us/allencohen.

³⁰ Letter to Assemblyman Willie Brown from Allen Cohen, September 27, 1966. Accessed via onlinehome.us/allencohen.

shared cigarettes with frequent drug users and drifters who finagled meals from dumpsters and preached communal living and waste-free existences. The convergence of so many ideologies and practices eventually helped to produce a unified counter-culture, and the Human Be-In established itself as the event to define the burgeoning movement among American youth.

What Manson encountered in San Francisco was a microcosm of a larger, international trend recognized by historians as the counter-culture of the 1960s. This movement, like many social and cultural revolutions of modern history, was orchestrated largely by students and young adults. The counter-culture coincided, and in many ways overlapped, with the rise of the New Left, which was a more politically focused vehicle for change. The New Left often shared social concerns with the counter-culture, though more ambitious activists of the New Left refused to be distracted from their progressive and action-oriented agenda by counter-culture mainstays like drug use and sexual exploration. The blending of these two movements in political and social reform was remarkable: anti-war and anti-governmental sentiment spilled over into the social sphere, while anti-segregation demonstrations and ideals managed to influence public policy. While these values and more change-oriented foci were absolutely crucial to the organization and mass effort behind the counter-culture, they were, perhaps predictably, largely ignored by Charles Manson. The aspects Manson found most important were the ones that provided for him an environment of vulnerable and trusting young adults who were resistant to parental, societal, and otherwise mainstream influence. These aspects predominately included the rock music, psychedelic drug use, and the infamous “Free love” ideal that is used to characterize the era. Staunch believers in the politics of the New Left were not who Manson sought for his companions, as anyone who already had ideas about how to change society would be less easily impressed by Manson’s own theories. The counter-culture, however, provided an environment

for casual believers to thrive: sexual freedom, psychedelic drug use, and musical activism crossed over enough that participants could consider themselves part of the progressive movement without possessing expert knowledge about its issues. It was this that Manson exploited, as the individuals who fell into this category of counter-culture members without strong beliefs were those that were most susceptible to his influence. The New Left was useful to Manson for its attraction of potential followers, not for its politics. The combination of counter-cultural elements with New Left politics and practices set the San Francisco scene that Manson encountered for the first time in 1967 and exploited until his final conviction after the 1969 murders. One of the driving forces behind the counter-cultural movement-- and one of its main connections to the New Left-- was its idea of anti-authority, manifesting through anti-war sentiment, pro-integration idealism, and political and anti-authoritarian dissent. The war in Vietnam was intensely unpopular among young adults—which, due to the draft, was the generation of Americans it most directly affected. Concurrently, the struggle for full integration and equal rights was largely carried on by young adults and students across America, whose grassroots efforts managed to influence public policy.

Largely the first generation to view college attendance as a right rather than a privilege, young adults coming of age in the 1960s counted World War II's final years among their first memories. They were children silently observing the consequences of mindless obedience when the Nuremberg Trials made international headlines and teenagers when Joseph McCarthy made liberalism a crime against the state. They bore witness to the beginnings of both the war in Vietnam and the fight for racial integration, and these students made their voices heard through various liberal and radical organizations and large scale protests. Established in 1960, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called for policy change, public outrage regarding U.S.

foreign policy (by 1965, especially in Vietnam), and a more extreme reaction from activists and subscribers to political liberalism, which was generally too moderate for their progressive agenda. While their parents still reeled from the after-effects of World War II and the looming crisis of the Cold War, these students brought to the national table an urgency for change that would shape the political scene of the 1960s. In San Francisco, the SDS and student leaders operated out of the University of California at Berkeley, the “cradle of the student-protest movement itself.”³¹ The primary relevance these student movements had to Charles Manson was their influence on the San Francisco social scene. The prevalence and growing power of student groups made San Francisco a destination for dissenters and anti-authoritarian young adults who dominated Berkeley culture, antagonizing conservatives and law-makers in the area. As a man who had never been able to fit in to a structured and conservative society, Manson found the student-controlled environment of San Francisco to be a far friendlier one than he had experienced in his Midwestern upbringing. Students gladly accepted anyone who did not fit the conservative mold, and Manson, though he did not share their political aspirations, certainly presented as someone who would fight against the proverbial Man.

In the spirit of inclusivity and with some desperation for support and membership, the New Left sought to bring together African-Americans, liberals, and labor groups to create a new society, one that would promote “one, and only one, basic solution for society’s ills, and some people call that solution socialism.”³² These emphases on socialism and on unity among minority groups to form a veritable Utopia were crucial to the counter-culture. The counter-culture stressed unity and love for all, and the New Left implemented these abstract sentiments with

³¹ “Civil Disorder: The Battle of Berkeley,” *Newsweek* (New York: June 2, 1969) p. 35.

³² Jim Williams, “The New Left Today: Two Years of the “New Era.” Working paper for the 1965 SDS national convention, p 1.

demonstrations and activism. The ambitious students were not trying just to change school policy or education, but were endeavoring to bring about a full societal upheaval. In 1962, the SDS outlined their organization's goals in a document famously circulated as the Port Huron Statement. In the statement, student leadership recognizes that "[u]nlike youth in other countries we are used to moral leadership being exercised and moral dimensions being clarified by our elders....it has been said that...our own generation is plagued by program without vision."³³ This reclamation of society's political discourse was further detailed in the statement:

In the last few years, thousands of American students demonstrated that they at least felt the urgency of the times. They moved actively and directly against racial injustices, the threat of war, violations of individual rights of conscience and, less frequently, against economic manipulation. They succeeded in restoring a small measure of controversy to the campuses after the stillness of the McCarthy period. They succeeded, too, in gaining some concessions from the people and institutions they opposed, especially in the fight against racial bigotry. The significance of these scattered movements lies not in their success or failure in gaining objectives -- at least not yet. Nor does the significance lie in the intellectual "competence" or "maturity" of the students involved -- as some pedantic elders allege. The significance is in the fact the students are breaking the crust of apathy and overcoming the inner alienation that remain the defining characteristics of American college life.

The Port Huron Statement and SDS policy stressed the necessity of unity between different liberal and radical groups to reach common goals, and one such over-arching goal became an end to racial segregation. In California, race relations hit a peak of tension in the 1965

³³ Tom Hayden et al, "Port Huron Statement" (New York: Students for a Democratic Society, 1962), www.sds-1960s.org.

Watts Riots in Los Angeles, when the arrest of a young black man for reckless driving set off rioting that resulted in thirty-four deaths and thousands of injuries over only six days.³⁴ This violence was a stark contrast to the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement, whose leadership preached the importance of peaceful protest. It was a sentiment, however, adopted by the militant Black Panthers, an organization whose platform is possibly best described through black musician and writer Julius Lester's lyrics, "Too much love/Too much love/Nothing kills a nigger like/Too much love."³⁵ Many African-Americans, especially young adults, had become exasperated by the peaceful protest that characterized the majority of the civil rights movement. They viewed the movement as ineffective and as a long-term solution to a very immediate problem, and in 1966 Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale created the Black Panther Party to combat that problem. The Party was founded in Oakland, California, and wanted little to do with local, mainly white student groups like the SDS who also counted racial integration as a goal. Espousing a new slogan of "Black Power" the Black Panthers represented a more radical movement, one that did not welcome the white students trying to establish a utopian society that would include all races. This disconnect led the SDS, other student organizations, and the broader counter-cultural movement to embrace different minorities to fill the void left by the young, radical, African-American community. Thus, newly prioritized were Chinese Communists, Cubans, the Vietnamese, feminists, and homosexuals: the counter-cultural movement had become a catch-all for anyone claiming outsider status, a forgiving community that accepted anyone seeking the advocacy of students eager to make their mark.³⁶ Because of their focus on inclusion, they did not question the motives of those joining their cause: through

³⁴ Sorin Adam Matei and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, "Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles Riots, and the Communicative Construction of the Fear Epicenter of Los Angeles" *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 72, No.3 (Sept 2005), p. 301.

³⁵ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 206.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p 207.

this, Manson was able to insert himself into the counter-culture. Manson was a virulent racist who hated being around African-Americans so his co-existence in a counter-culture with African-Americans in close quarters would have been unrealistic and unlikely.³⁷ However, the disconnect between the Black Power movement and the rest of the counter-culture meant that Manson could reap the benefits of a society that preached acceptance for all without ever actually having to prove he believed in its teachings.

Many of these outsiders who were embraced by the counter-culture journeyed to California to participate in the prolific music scene that thrived in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. In addition to The Beatles' meteoric rise and the rest of the British Invasion, the music scene in 1960s California was a fluid arena that saw seasoned music veterans rubbing shoulders with wide-eyed hopefuls all trying to stay afloat in the competitive and often ruthless California music industry. Charles Manson would himself fall victim to this system, as did many singer-songwriters who traveled to Los Angeles and San Francisco to become superstars. The growing popularity of FM radio, cassette tapes, and television programs like *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *American Bandstand* made a new surge of commercialization possible. Not only could producers market their performers for live audiences, but they could expose them to an unprecedented amount of people through television and radio. This changed both the influence that artists had on their audiences and the shape and prevalence of the industry itself.

Once producers saw how much performers could influence their loyal listeners, they capitalized on this discovery by scouring the California counter-cultural arena for fresh new

³⁷ It is unclear how and why Manson's racism developed, but his childhood spent in McMechen (a white, conservative town) and in segregated reform schools likely instilled an early wariness of integration and of African-Americans in general. In his research for *Manson*, Guinn interviewed Manson's fellow inmate Phil Kaufman, who reported that Manson took prison segregation to an extreme level. Guinn writes that Manson "wouldn't talk to or even look at blacks...didn't think they were anywhere close to a white man's equal" (*Manson*, p. 74).

sounds they could market back to the counter-cultural movement itself.³⁸ University of Lund historians Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison explain that “the emergent potential of a youth market was recognized by the mass media and other consumer products industries; not only did they re-tailor their marketing strategies, they also developed new product lines and forms of production that were amenable to the preferences and life style orientations of ‘youth.’”³⁹ This environment not only attracted young artists to the promising new industry, but increased the willingness of producers to meet young singer-songwriters who could be the next sensation, as the success of the industry largely rested on the shoulders of consumerist, counter-cultural youth. Producers saw the unprecedented opportunity for commercialization of their clients’ images, but the musicians themselves largely cared more about the possibility of broadcasting their messages to such a receptive and enthusiastic audience.

The 1950s saw a major cultural revolution in music, with the success of rock and roll modernizing and energizing the face of popular music. In the ‘60s, however, this revolution spilled over into the political spectrum and the “cultural” realm encompassed far more than just the traditional musical scene. Eyerman and Jamison describe that

[A] pregnant mixture of acoustic folk and electrified rock music, and eventually a creative recombination of a wide range of other musical genres- blues, gospel, jazz, even classical- spread a spirit of cultural pluralism through the airwaves by electronic means. This popular

³⁸ One needs only to see photographs of the Beatles stepping out of their plane or hear a crowd lose control over Elvis Presley to believe wholeheartedly that these producers had indeed stumbled on what would become an international trend of artistry.

³⁹ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, “Social Movements and Cultural Transformation: Popular Music in the 1960s” *Media Culture and Society* Vol. 17 (1995): p. 453.

musical innovation process was... a major force in the collective will formation of a new generation and a source of fundamental cultural transformation in American society.⁴⁰

Musicians found themselves on an international stage with an impressionable audience and used this opportunity to further their own ideas: many of these personal agendas paralleled those of counter-cultural activists. Folk singer Joan Baez refused to perform in front of segregated audiences on tour in the South, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young immortalized the Kent State shootings in their 1970 hit “Ohio,”⁴¹ and Bob Dylan became a national icon for his song “Blowing in the Wind,” with its protest lyrics.⁴² The Jefferson Airplane urged their fans to involve themselves in the counter-cultural movement, proclaiming that “One generation got old/One generation got soul/This generation got no destination to hold/Pick up the cry/Hey now it’s time for you and me/Got a revolution/Got to revolution”⁴³ and Country Joe and the Fish egged on anti-war protestors with “And it’s one, two, three, what are we fighting for?/Don’t ask me I don’t give a damn/Next stop is Vietnam...Well there ain’t no time to wonder why/Whoopsie! We’re all gonna die!”⁴⁴ Countless musicians who performed at collective festivals like the Human Be-In used politically incendiary lyrics or actively participated in organized political protests. Historian Sharon Monteith reports that “the boundary between musical culture and politics was porous”⁴⁵ These artists recognized that not only was their largest

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 455

⁴¹ On May 4th, 1970, the Ohio National Guard fatally shot four students on the Kent State campus during a protest against Nixon’s Cambodian Campaign. The song immortalizing the incident is Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, “Ohio” in *So Far*, Atlantic Records, 1970. For more information about the shooting, see Jerry M. Lewis and Thomas R. Hensley’s article “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy” *The Ohio Council for the Social Studies Review* Vol. 34, No 1 (1998), pp. 9-21.

⁴² “How many times can a man turn his head/And pretend that he just doesn’t see?..How many ears must one man have/Before he can hear people cry?/How many deaths will it take till he knows/That too many people have died?” Bob Dylan, “Blowin’ in the Wind” in *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, Columbia Recording Studios, 1963.

⁴³ The Jefferson Airplane, “Volunteers,” in *Volunteers*, RCA Records, 1969.

⁴⁴ Country Joe and the Fish, “The ‘Fish’ Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag,” in *I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die*, Vanguard Records, 1967.

⁴⁵ Sharon Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 45.

consumer audience made up of young adults, but that these same young adults were the ones listening to and acting on their lyrics in the social and political arenas. 1960s-era music critic Richard Goldstein commented that “youth power still makes the pop industry move...[t]he underground occupies a pivotal place in the city’s life. The Fillmore and the Avalon are jammed every weekend with beaded, painted faces and flowered shirts...[h]ip has passed the point where it signifies a commitment to rebellion. It has become the style of youth in the Bay Area...”⁴⁶ The energy the counter-cultural music fans created kept music alive and relevant, and in turn artists kept interacting with and catering to their counter-cultural fan bases. Many of these artists owed their popularity and success to the counter-cultural movement, and as such were receptive and open to its members, making the California music scene a place where anyone could try his luck in front of sympathetic producers looking for the next big thing and grateful artists seeking new collaborators to spread their messages. Charles Manson was one of these hopefuls, and his dream for superstardom was shared by many who congregated in California in the late 1960s, searching for a big break.

A side effect of the relationship between the music scene and the counter-culture was the widespread drug use that in many ways characterized the era. Musicians often performed under the influence of marijuana or cocaine, heroin, or other drugs, the abuse of which occasionally resulted in tragedy, as in the drug-induced deaths of counter-cultural music icons Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. Concert-goers, however, generally preferred to enjoy the music under the influence of the most popular drug of the day: LSD. When Owsley Stanley began mass producing LSD in 1963 from a basement near UC Berkeley’s campus, it was a significant step in popularizing the growing trend of psychedelic drug usage throughout California’s counter-

⁴⁶ Richard Goldstein, “San Francisco Bray,” reprinted in Bloom and Breines’ *Takin’ it to the Streets*, pp. 294-296.

cultural scene. Drug usage became a focal point for counter-culturalists, who considered their experiences while on these drugs a step toward a higher level of consciousness and an important other-worldly experience that helped to define their interactions and relationships to others, to nature, and especially to music. David E. Smith, a physician who started a free clinic in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, the veritable counter-cultural headquarters, observed this phenomenon and commented that “the philosophy of the Haight-Ashbury subculture is in great part dependent on the LSD-induced psychedelic experience.”⁴⁷

Prevalence of drug use grew out of the Beat movement, and in many ways the Beats were the counter-culture’s predecessors. Ken Kesey preached the importance of LSD to creativity, claiming that the drug inspired many parts of his bestselling novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.⁴⁸ In 1964 Kesey and his band of Merry Pranksters drove all over the country promoting the drug, and this promotion was intensely effective: the “Acid Tests” Kesey and his group hosted introduced hundreds of people to LSD at once, launching group trips that became a unifying and spiritual experience for large populations.⁴⁹ These group experiences shaped a group mentality that grew to include communes and group sexual experiences that expressed the counter-cultural ideals most attractive to Charles Manson.

In keeping with their anti-war and anti-establishment mentality, students and members of the counter-cultural movement enthusiastically accepted psychedelic drugs as another way to rebel against institutional values. As Lee and Shlain note,

⁴⁷ David E. Smith, “Use of LSD in the Haight-Ashbury: Observations at a Neighborhood Clinic” *California Medicine* Vol. 110, No. 6 (1969) p. 472.

⁴⁸ “Before I took drugs...I didn’t know why the guys in the psycho ward at the VA Hospital were there. I didn’t understand them. After I took LSD, suddenly I saw it. I saw it all. I listened to them and watched them, and I saw that what they were saying and doing was not so crazy after all.” Recounted by Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain in their book *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, The Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).

⁴⁹ Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1968).

For sixties activists, the quest for social justice was in many ways a direct extension of the search for personal authenticity. They were as much concerned with questions of psychic liberation as with economic and political issues. Their demand for a high-energy, freewheeling, erotic culture was a keystone of their anti-authoritarian crusade.⁵⁰

The group mentality encouraged by LSD trips further connected members of the counter-culture with one another and made the sense of community a key component of the social revolution. Politically, unity and oneness were crucial to the counter-cultural cause, but this ideal was even more groundbreaking for the social environment inspired by the counter-culture. Communal experiences especially dominated the San Francisco scene, with communal living and openness rapidly becoming the cornerstones of the movement. In the Haight, an experimental environment was forming, centering around a group called “the Diggers.” The Diggers fed people free of charge in a Berkeley park and housed them in their own lodgings without asking for any compensation. In their manifesto, the Diggers declare their purpose:

By now we all have guns, know how to use them, know our enemy, and are ready to defend. We know that we ain't gonna take no more shit. So it's about time we carried ourselves a little heavier and got down to the business of creating free cities within the urban environments of the western world. *Free* cities are composed of Free Families...who establish and maintain services that provide a base of freedom for autonomous groups to carry out their programs without having to hassle for food, printing facilities, transportation, mechanics, money, housing, working space, clothes, machinery, trucks, etc...*Every brother should have what he needs to do his thing.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, The Sixties, and Beyond*, p. 123.

⁵¹ “The Digger Papers,” in Bloom and Breines’ *Takin’ it to the Streets* pp. 316-317.

The sentiment spread, and stores began opening around San Francisco providing goods for free so that anyone could take what he or she needed. Rock groups performed for free in the park, communal houses were established, and LSD changed hands quickly and easily.⁵² Residents did not work, nor did they go to school, as they believed they did not need these institutions in order to have a meaningful and fulfilling existence. Often without steady jobs, grouped into transient living situations, and uninterested in earning money, many members of the counter-culture became nearly indiscernible from vagrants and the genuinely homeless. Homeowners who were sympathetic to the counter-culture therefore became far more hospitable and willing to allow young adults stay with them as the stigma attached to vagrancy had been significantly lessened. Many of these young adults had grown up in middle class homes and were generally well-behaved in addition to belonging to a movement to which peace and unity were paramount. For Manson, this openness and welcoming of vagrants meant that the counter-culture provided yet another excuse for his lifestyle.

Communal life also extended to sexual freedoms. Women's rights activists were gaining a strong foothold in this period, and women like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinam, and Jane Fonda fought particularly hard for the role of women to be equal to that of men-- not just in the economic sphere, but also in the sexual one. The New Left and counter-culture translated this differently, though. The women of the New Left felt that their voices were lost even in the progressive movements of era and so they campaigned heavily to remedy the disconnect between male and female societal roles. The counter-culture, on the other hand, stressed the importance of "free love," which was its answer to the question of women's rights. Normalizing sexual

⁵² John Robert Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 382, "Protest in the Sixties" (1969), pp. 43-55; accessed March 13, 2015 via www.jstor.org

exploration and female promiscuity was the counter-culture's way of ameliorating the issue of gender discrimination. Exemplified in Manson and present throughout the era, though, were incidents of sexual exploitation in the name of the counter-culture. Manipulation of women was a prominent issue, and so many women of the counter-culture joined with the New Left and voiced their dissent against the gender roles that were still being enforced in a purportedly progressive movement. However, the counter-culture had positive influences on many women as well: the social stigmas attached to lesbianism, working women, and more untraditional female roles were slowly starting to fade, and this became an increasingly attractive prospect for young women all over the country who were suddenly being made aware of new options and opportunities outside of their small towns and largely sheltered lives.⁵³

One hopeful, opportunistic, and cunning vagrant also entering San Francisco was Charles Manson, who made his appearance in 1967 while the counter-culture thrived in the Haight. Manson entered the Haight in a time when LSD use was not only acceptable but encouraged, when young women from all over the country were coming to the neighborhood looking for experiences that would defy their conservative upbringings, when African-American activists and white activists had largely parted ways, and--most importantly-- when music producers were actively looking for the next humble singer to catapult to stardom. A more perfect scenario for Charles Manson to begin the next chapter of his life could not possibly have existed.

⁵³ Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, "Second-wave Feminism," in Nancy A. Hewitt's *A Companion to American Women's History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002), pp. 414-432.

CHAPTER III

MANSON'S EXPLOITATION

By now we understand elements of Manson's particular psychopathy and enjoy a rudimentary familiarity with the 1960s counter-culture. The crux of this argument and the climax of this essay will be revealed in the following chapter, which will detail Manson's exploitation of the counter-culture's ideals. This manipulation, not only of counter-cultural values but also of some of their most zealous subscribers, allowed Manson to serve his own pathological needs, to influence and control his followers, and eventually to orchestrate some of Los Angeles's most infamous murders.

Just after midnight on Saturday, August 9th, 1969, 10050 Cielo Drive in Los Angeles received four unexpected visitors. A popular party destination, the home was no stranger to late night guests, and its occupant, actress Sharon Tate, was known for being a willing and generous hostess. On that particular night, Tate was hosting her friends Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger, and Voytek Frykowski, so the scene was a sociable and a comfortable one, albeit slightly crowded.⁵⁴ But the four late-night visitors-- Tex Watson, Patricia Krenwinkel, Linda Kasabian, and Sadie Atkins⁵⁵-- had not come to socialize or to stay the night. They had come to kill.

The next night, the four made another late-night call, this time to 3301 Waverly Place in the Los Feliz area of Los Angeles, with two new additions to their group: Clem Grogan and

⁵⁴ Steve Parent was also killed at the Tate scene, but was not a member of Ms. Tate's social gathering. He had been visiting the home's temporary groundskeeper, William Garretson, who was staying in a separate house on the property.

⁵⁵ Tex Watson's real name was Charles, and Sadie Atkins' real name was Susan, but their identities in the Manson Family were Tex and Sadie, so for consistency's sake I will refer to them by their Family aliases.

Leslie Van Houten.⁵⁶ Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, the residents of 3301, had just returned from Lake Isabella and were preparing for bed when the six broke into the house; when their bodies were found the next day, the LaBiancas were wearing their pajamas.

Connections between the two murder scenes became increasingly obvious over the course of the separate investigations: the sheer scope of the savagery and violence at both scenes was shocking, as the victims were stabbed repeatedly and some were also beaten or strangled. Written in blood on the walls of both residences were messages such as “PIG” and “POLITICAL PIGGY,” and both houses were robbed, though the theft seemed a mere afterthought.⁵⁷ With an unclear motive, a baffling chain of events, and a seemingly unprecedented escalation of violence, the Tate-LaBianca murders became an immediate phenomenon, and law enforcement, media, and Los Angeles residents all asked the same question: who could possibly have committed such crimes? We now know the perpetrators, the organizer, and the intimate details of the crimes, and we even have some explanation to account for their motive. What has rarely been addressed, though, is not the question *who*, but the question *how*. *How* could Manson convince his followers to commit such crimes? *How* could he create such an environment that his word became ultimate law? *How* were these targets chosen, and how were the murders carried out without suspicious neighbors calling in complaints about late-night visitors? These questions are answered by an explanation of Manson’s exploitation of the counter-culture. To the question of why someone becomes a murderer, the answer can only ever be a partial one. To fully understand the murders that shocked Los Angeles and the rest of the country, one needs to understand the environment

⁵⁶ In the same vein, Clem’s real name was Steve Grogan, but the Family referred to him as Clem.

⁵⁷ For full detail of the murders, see Vincent Bugliosi’s *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders*, (New York: Norton, 1974)

that cultivated these murderers and allowed these deviant plans to be formulated. Understanding Manson's pathology is an important step in understanding the murders, but it is only half the story. The rest comes from understanding how Manson's pathology interacted with the broader ideology of the 1960s and how he used that interaction to further his psychopathic agenda.

Upon his arrival in San Francisco, Manson took in his new surroundings and noticed a problem: there was no room for pimps in Haight-Ashbury. Due to the counter cultural mainstay of free love and sexual exploration, the need to pay for sex simply did not exist in the neighborhood: there were plenty of girls who had flocked to the Haight in search of a sexual awakening, and love as a commodity was not on the hippies' list of intrinsic values. Manson had assumed that pimping was the best manifestation of his desire to control and influence women, but since this was no longer a viable option, he was forced to re-evaluate.⁵⁸ Manson hung around Haight-Ashbury as a local, living off the collection of free food the Diggers and other communes provided, as did countless vagrants who made their ways to San Francisco during the "Summer of Love."⁵⁹ Manson became fascinated with the Diggers and admired their self-sufficiency. They managed to feed themselves from dumpsters and by other nonconventional means, and Manson became enamored with this type of freedom. For a man who had never been able to hold down a job or support himself without turning to crime, the opportunity to live without relying on a paycheck must surely have been a tempting one. Manson, however, needed more than the Diggers did. While they earned their happiness from providing food for others, Manson could not comprehend that kind of selflessness. While he approved of the idea of communal living, he

⁵⁸ Most of the information about Manson's time in the Haight comes from Guinn's *Manson* (chapters "Berkeley and the Haight" and "Charlie in the Summer of Love"), and is supplemented by Susan Atkins' book *The Myth of Helter Skelter* (California: Menelorelin Dorenay's Publishing, 2012).

⁵⁹ The influx of hippies to the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood during the summer of 1967 has become known as the "Summer of Love" to historians, sociologists, and laypeople.

saw in this type of lifestyle an opportunity for control of a new group, one not made up of prostitutes.

In drifting around the Haight, Manson encountered street preachers, a group whose role as a side effect of the counter-culture closely resembled his own. These gurus of the Haight garnered huge followings of hippies who had congregated in the neighborhood but did not know what to do next, and so looked to the closest thing they could find to an authority figure. Cleverly disguising himself as a proponent of the counter-culture, Manson joined their ranks and began using his well-established charm to lure young people to his burgeoning flock. As Jeff Guinn describes, Manson's philosophy consisted of "Beatles song lyrics, biblical passages, Scientology, and the Dale Carnegie technique of presenting everything dramatically."⁶⁰ Manson learned as he went along, bringing his guitar to the streets, preaching an anti-consumption ideal and the myth of materialism, presenting himself as a wise and humble teacher. This lifestyle was enough for Manson temporarily, but he soon discovered that the youths he and other street preachers attracted were largely too transient to stay devoted to one leader. The huge influx of young people into the Haight had consisted of hippies who manifested all different levels of devotion to the movement, and the neighborhood served as an emblem of the counter-culture. For Manson, this environment was no longer ideal. The competition of other preachers allowed too much variability in audience for Manson's comfort, and the Haight itself had become a liability. Manson began to understand that if he wanted to create for himself a devoted group, he would have to isolate them from the rest of the counter cultural movement. But first, he needed to assemble a following.

⁶⁰ Guinn, *Manson*, p 95.

Charles “Tex” Watson later articulated what he and Manson’s other followers shared, saying that “[w]e were young, rebellious, and even angry inside. I blamed my parents for everything going wrong...I was looking for love, identity, direction, and acceptance...I was a very naïve ‘people-pleaser,’ in fear of failure. I had no sound belief system.”⁶¹ The Haight provided for Manson the perfect hunting grounds to find young people sharing Watson’s mindset. The counter-culture was an enticing social phenomenon that attracted those with even a marginal sense of adventure and a peripheral interest in its issues. Young people flocked to the Haight in search of any excitement, and from this rather vast group Manson could easily find the most malleable and convince them to make him their leader.

The first convert was a librarian named Mary Brunner with whom Manson stayed when he first arrived in San Francisco. Mary was infatuated with Manson and, while not a strict subscriber to the counter cultural movement, she was entranced enough that she allowed him to live with her for free. Eventually, Manson began to bring other potential members to stay as well, necessitating a move from Mary’s apartment to a new shared apartment in the Haight. Lynette Fromme, an eighteen-year-old with a history of emotional problems and drug use, was Manson’s second convert. Lynette had fled to California following a fight with her strict father, and her first encounter with Manson on Venice Beach in Los Angeles convinced her that he would be a far better man to serve than her overbearing father. Manson dubbed her Squeaky Fromme, and she would serve as one of Manson’s most loyal lieutenants. Manson slowly gathered more followers from all over California, searching for girls from broken homes or strict lives, preaching the appealing counter cultural ideals that had prompted so many others to pick up and move to the Haight. Once he found a girl who would fit into his group, Manson set about

⁶¹ Charles ‘Tex’ Watson, *Manson’s Right Hand Man Speaks Out*, (Abounding Love Publishers, 2003), p. 11.

indoctrinating her into his philosophy. According to Tex Watson, one of Manson's later followers, Manson's early philosophy followed the counter-cultural trope in that his "goal was to free [them] from [their] past, all sexual inhibitions, all ego and fear, and turn [them] into his image of love."⁶² What differentiated Manson from the rest of the street preachers and made people stay with him were his pimping history, familiarity with Dale Carnegie's and L. Ron Hubbard's work, and natural propensity for manipulation. Manson would use counter cultural ideals to convince his followers that his group was part of a larger, unified movement and then use his powers of manipulation to isolate them from that larger movement, creating a sect of his own over which he held complete control. Watson remembers that when he first met Manson, "it seemed like he could see right into [him]. It was like love filled the air." Manson's manipulation was so honed that he could sense what would evoke a response from his target, "always changing, his movements, his appearance, his dress...rock star, guru, devil, son of God, even a child. He was a magician and a charmer. He was aware, almost catlike. His eyes...ha[d] the ability to psyche you out immediately."⁶³ This capacity for adaptation exemplified the type of intense manipulation that could only come from a man who had spent the majority of his life outfoxing bigger boys and the law in order to survive.

At this particular juncture, it is crucial to remember that while cultivating a bevy of followers was an important tool and worthwhile side effort, it was not Manson's ultimate goal. Manson saw being surrounded by women who would succumb to his every whim as a priority, but he never lost sight of his primary objective: becoming a musical superstar. Manson idolized the Beatles and strove to understand how to emulate their fame; one aspect of their popularity he found particularly appealing was their devoted fan base. Manson saw his growing collection of

⁶² Watson, *Manson's Right Hand Man Speaks Out*, p. 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

followers as a natural step toward his inevitable meteoric rise to fame. All he needed next was a record deal.

While San Francisco was the hub for the counter-culture, the West Coast's music industry capital was Los Angeles. The counter-culture appealed to musical artists, but the idea of scrounging for food and living in a communal setting clashed with the established perks of being a successful musician. To maintain the accessibility to the audience that was a major aspect of the counter-culture most popular musicians and producers lived close enough to the Haight that they could easily appear for concerts and important publicity events, but far enough away to remind the world that they were an industry not overrun by the hippie culture. Manson chose Los Angeles for largely the same reasons: in distancing himself and his group from the center of the counter-culture, he increased his authority over the group and was able to more thoroughly control the aspects of the counter-culture with which they interacted. Los Angeles was close enough to the counter-culture that Manson could convince his followers they were still a part of the movement, and most importantly, was where the music scene thrived. With assurances that he wanted to spread his loving philosophy to the masses with his music, Manson convinced his followers that a move to Los Angeles was the right step toward the world the counter-culture was trying to create. Musicians of the counter-culture pushed their own agendas through their music, and Manson's girls had been exposed to this long before they met him. Yet while many popular musicians' agendas included an element of political or social dissent, Manson's was entirely made of personal ambition. He spouted popular ideals in his lyrics to convince the girls that he really practiced what he preached, but the lack of depth in his music demonstrates the rote regurgitation of counter cultural values he picked up on the streets.

One song, "Your Home is Where You're Happy," reads as follows:

Your home is where you're happy
It's not where you're not free
Your home is where you can be what you are
'Cause you were just born free

Now they'll show you their castles
An' diamonds for all to see
But they'll never show you that peace of mind
'Cause they don't know how to be free

So burn all your bridges
Leave your whole life behind
You can do what you want to do
'Cause you're strong in your mind

And anywhere you might wander
You could make that your home
And as long as you got love in your heart
You'll never be alone

Just as long as you got love in your heart
You'll never be alone no no no
You'll never be alone no no no no⁶⁴

Clearly not identifying any deep counter cultural trait, the lyrics stress only the counter-cultural values of free love and transience: conveniently, the only elements Manson himself

⁶⁴ Charles Manson, "Your Home is Where You're Happy," in *Lie: The Love and Terror Cult*, Gold Star Studios, 1970. While this album was released three years after Manson's move to Los Angeles, the songs were written and performed before Manson was arrested. It is possible that this song in particular had yet to be written when Manson and his girls first left for Los Angeles, but it serves as a reliable example of his lyrical themes and scope of ideas. If this song was not one that specifically inspired the girls to follow Manson to Los Angeles, it represents a body of work that expresses predominately and consistently the same message.

cared about at the time. With messages like “burn all your bridges/leave your whole life behind,” Manson bastardized music as a vehicle for social change, focusing only on the change necessary to convince his followers to join him in Los Angeles. Manson’s music was persuasive, and the girls agreed to the move. Manson was on track to obtain a record deal and secure his future.

The close relationship between artist and audience encouraged by the counter-culture made even a cutthroat industry like the Los Angeles music scene penetrable by a dedicated, persuasive, and talented hopeful. Charles Manson possessed two of these qualities, and what he lacked in talent he made up for in his undeniable charisma. Success in the 1960s counter-culture was measured by loose connections and networking, elements of communal living that implemented a less literal interpretation of “communal.” While the Haight’s Diggers had established the neighborhood as one unified community, the ideal often manifested in less formal ways. For Manson, this broader sense of community became of use in the form of Phil Kaufman, a fellow federal inmate with ties to the Los Angeles music scene. While incarcerated, Kaufman had promised Manson that upon his release, he would connect him to a contact from Universal Studios. When Manson moved his flock down to Los Angeles, it was with this promise in mind. Gary Stromberg, Kaufman’s Universal contact, met with Manson but was unimpressed by his studio performance. He was impressed, however, with Manson’s control over his girls. One of Manson’s earliest followers, Sadie Atkins, later recalled aspects of that control, saying “[f]rom the clothes you wore to the way you wore your hair, the merest comment from Manson sent people scurrying to please him...it was his ability to simply do no more than ‘suggest’ something be done to make it happen...”⁶⁵ Stromberg kept Manson in mind as an eccentric acquaintance, but not as a potential rock star. He tactfully told Manson that he should keep working on his

⁶⁵ Atkins, *The Shattered Myth of Helter Skelter*, p. 18

music and that they might eventually be able to figure something out, but Stromberg had no intention of ever signing Manson. It was only Manson's narcissism that caused him to interpret Stromberg's vague statement not as a crushing blow to his dreams but as an encouragement to keep striving for success. Stromberg had meant his words in the easy and flexible manner of the counter-culture, with no real backing or intent, but Manson's developed psychopathy and self-obsession caused him to take the words to heart. When a deal with Stromberg never panned out, Manson saw this as Stromberg's renegeing on an explicit promise, the first of several such incidents in the music industry over the course of the next two years. Eventually, these incidents compounded into a deep sense of betrayal that was one of the direct motives for the 1969 murders.

The exploitation of loose connections also helped Manson's group find housing in Los Angeles. While an open culture of hospitality and generosity was encouraged, Manson and his flock took advantage of that and encroached on their hosts for far longer than even the counter-culture would deem appropriate. An area of Los Angeles Manson frequented was Topanga Canyon, a progressive neighborhood filled with generous and quirky homeowners who were often willing to host transients in the spirit of counter cultural unity. This openness was perfect for Manson: he did not have to find work, could focus on his music and controlling his followers, and could use Topanga Canyon as a new hunting ground to add members to his growing flock.⁶⁶

Manson's recruiting techniques were largely based on Dale Carnegie's methods and the existing counter cultural rhetoric. To keep potential members interested, Manson emphasized the

⁶⁶ By the tail end of 1967, Manson's little band had grown to six constant followers: Mary, Squeaky, Patricia Krenwinkel, Dianne Lake, and Sadie Atkins. A young man named Bruce Davis was a fairly consistent member, and while never officially becoming a member of the Manson Family, a musician named Bobby Beausoleil was often a companion of Manson's and a key character in the events leading up to the 1969 murders. Also, both Sadie and Mary were pregnant, Mary with Manson's child.

reasons they had left home for Topanga Canyon in the first place: overbearing family lives, stagnant relationships, and a sense of adventure. He reminded them that they had come to California in search of a welcoming environment and a loving community, and most of all, for a change. Above all else, the counter-culture signaled a social shift and young people clamored to be a part of it. Manson singled out those without any connections in California, those who knew they wanted to be a part of the counter-culture but were unsure of what that participation looked like. It was in this disconnect that Manson found his niche: young people who wanted to experience the counter-culture but had no frame of reference for it. Manson was able to successfully convince his followers that he was a representative of the counter-culture without actually subscribing to any of its beliefs; his acting was strong, as he had been lying and posing to escape trouble his entire life. He faced, however, one major obstacle in his recruitment strategies: his techniques only worked on women. Making women believe that they were special was a talent of Manson's, but men were far less susceptible to Manson's charm. He therefore turned to the promise of free love, another tenet of the counter-culture, to literally seduce them into his following.

Upon joining Manson's growing Family⁶⁷ women were put to the test to find out if they would be able to fulfill what Manson saw as their natural lot in life: pleasing men. By then a veritable expert on prostitution, Manson recognized that using the sexuality of his women was the best way for him to acquire members, commodities, and ideally, a record deal. The willingness of his women to perform sexually either for him or with him was, in Manson's mind, the best way for him to control a group. Each initiate was ordered to perform oral sex on

⁶⁷ Manson had consistently referred to his group as a family to foster loyalty and unity; Gregg Jakobson initially used the term "the Family" to describe Manson's followers, and during and after the trial the media (and the Family members themselves) adopted the term as the official moniker for the group. Guinn, *Manson*, p. 157.

Manson; a refusal negated membership in the Family. Manson thrived on this level of utmost control, and the girls had sex as directed. They had heard of the sexual awakening of the counter-culture and of the female liberation movement that was said to run parallel to it. To these small town girls, sex with each other and with men they did not know, according to Manson's directives, was exactly what female liberation and sexual freedom looked like. The allure of sexually willing women was what Manson counted on to attract men to his following, and it generally worked. With the purposeful additions of girls with sex appeal, Manson managed to attract both permanent male members and transient ones who were useful for providing food, shelter, clothes, or car trips. It was difficult for male hosts to say no when a group of sexually-willing women asked to spend some nights, so Manson was able to stay for extended periods of time in different houses throughout Topanga Canyon in return for the promise of sex with his girls. The girls were also helpful for Manson's constant attempts to infiltrate the music industry: arriving uninvited at a party was markedly less of an issue when he arrived with girls. One such house that he frequented was the home of Harold True, an old friend of Phil Kaufman's. In addition to being a good host and allowing Manson to attend his parties, Harold True lived on Waverly Drive in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. Less than two years later, True's house would be occupied by Leno and Rosemary LaBianca.

The environment in Topanga Canyon was a favorable one in many ways for Manson's Family, but staying in Topanga Canyon left Manson's women susceptible to the same threat the Haight posed: the influence of other counter cultural leaders. Suddenly, Manson's plans for stardom had a very real time constraint. He did not want to have to choose either his dream of superstardom or his obsession with controlling his women, so he needed to expedite whatever advantage Topanga Canyon, and LA, was going to give. Manson became pushier and more

determined than ever to succeed, tracking down every possible lead in the music business until one finally stuck: Manson became friends with Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson. Wilson was a hugely popular musician, the Beach Boys having achieved international acclaim and superstar status early in the decade. Wilson was known for being a proponent of the party culture that made up much of Los Angeles' music scene, and experimented with his share of drugs. An easy-going and well-connected man with huge influence on the music industry, Wilson was Manson's ideal point person. Wilson's initial contact with the Family came when he offered a ride to Pat and Yeller, two hitch-hiking members of Manson's group. Wilson took the two back to his house for milk and cookies, and then left for a recording session. When Pat and Yeller told Manson whose house they had just been in, he knew this could be his big break. He ordered them to take him back there, and he and the rest of his group waited inside Wilson's house for Wilson to return. Although initially perturbed by the uninvited crowd, Wilson eventually allowed Manson and his followers to stay the night; this hospitality turned into an extended stay for the Family and a major exploitation of Wilson's music contacts by Manson.

Wilson's two best friends, Gregg Jakobson and Terry Melcher, were also important figures in the music scene. Jakobson was a well-regarded talent scout and Melcher was a producing sensation with heavy Hollywood clout. Wilson introduced both men to Manson, and Manson began aggressively campaigning for a record deal. However, only Wilson was genuinely impressed with Manson's abilities. Wilson had been physically abused as a child, and Manson's insights into self-love and anti-authority sentiments rang true for him. He supported Manson financially, professionally, and personally for months. However, it was not Wilson whose backing Manson desperately needed, but Terry Melcher's. In addition to growing up within the Hollywood elite due to the fame of his mother Doris Day, Melcher had been behind some of the

greatest successes of the '60s, including the Byrds, and was an extremely powerful figure in the business. He was, however, far more capable than Wilson of keeping his personal and professional lives separate. Even if he did like Manson, he was business-savvy enough to know that a record deal was probably not in the cards for the aspiring singer. Further, Melcher's feelings about Manson were only lukewarm. He certainly did not see him as the visionary Wilson saw, nor was he taken in by the availability of sex with Family women that so enticed Jakobson. Melcher never invited Manson to parties at his home, though Manson was once in Wilson's car as they dropped Melcher off at the house he and girlfriend Candice Bergen rented—10050 Cielo Drive. If he wanted to impress Melcher, Manson could not count on any aid from his loose connections or charisma: he was going to have to do it solely based on his music. Since he had never before needed to rest solely on his musical abilities, Manson bided his time before making a formal pitch to Melcher. When he eventually presented himself to Melcher, he was turned down and humiliated in front of his followers, and Terry Melcher became Charles Manson's sworn enemy. Manson's burgeoning new dreams were further crushed when Wilson, who had eventually grown tired of the Family's excessive free-loading, moved out of his mansion and into a much smaller house, effectively ridding himself of the Family's extended presence. Left without the luxury to which he had grown accustomed, and the connections he had so hoped would bring him a music deal, Manson scrambled for a new place to establish his Family and a new plan to achieve his dreams; this time, however, that plan included revenge.

Partly from desperation, partly from convenience, and partly due to its remote location, Manson chose Spahn Ranch, an old ranch outside of Los Angeles near the Simi Valley where many popular Western movies had been filmed. Manson convinced the owner, George Spahn, to allow his group to stay there; in exchange, he would receive regular sex with Squeaky and the

Family would perform maintenance duties around the ranch. Thus, Manson finally had a secluded area where he could fully exercise control over the approximately eighteen Family members who moved there with him. A necessary part of this control was influencing the Family's constant drug use. A counter cultural focal point, the use of psychedelic drugs was a part of the counter-culture Manson gladly encouraged. He could do little to manipulate individual acid trips, but he could certainly do his best to control the surrounding environment while his followers took LSD. Manson organized group trips daily, gathering his Family around him and using the time as an opportunity to instill his ideas into his flock in their vulnerable and drug-induced states. He used the drugs as a precursor to a brainwashing session, in which he would emphasize his total control and scattered philosophies. Tex Watson remembered that "we'd take LSD and get together in a big circle with Charlie playing the guitar...we slowly became one with each other, so much so, that we could see ourselves in the faces of one another."⁶⁸ The counter-culture viewed LSD trips as spiritual journeys, and Manson agreed. He saw tripping as an opportunity to preach to drug-addled minds and did what he could to guide those journeys for his followers. Watson recalled these experiences:

Charlie had worked with us patiently...until we had touched all our deepest fears...and gone past them to come out clean on the other side. Charlie had made us see that once you die to your ego, once you strip yourself down to a perfect being, all body, like some monkey or a coyote free in the wild, not thinking, not willing, once you do that, fear doesn't exist anymore. You've already died, everything except that animal body of yours, so even death can't frighten you. You are free. Free to live, free to die. Free to kill.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Watson, *Manson's Right Hand Man Speaks Out*, p. 17.

⁶⁹ Tex Watson as told to Chaplain Ray, *Will You Die For Me?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1978) p. 5.

Constantly plying them with drugs, Manson was able to even more fully control his Family on what they considered a new spiritual plane. Absorbing Manson's teachings while tripping was a new experience for his followers, and Manson's ability to keep them dependent on him for drugs proved to be a highly effective method of group control.

Perhaps it was the influence of the drugs that helped explain the wholehearted trust the Family had for Manson, or perhaps he really was that charismatic. Either way, Family members trusted Manson completely, no matter how outrageous his ideas. When the Beatles' sensational *White Album* was released, Manson told his Family that the album was full of messages to them and of predictions for the future that the Family was must carry out.⁷⁰ These messages, as interpreted by Manson, called for a phenomenon he dubbed Helter Skelter: a race war from which the Manson Family and the Beatles would together emerge as the victorious leaders of a new, white era. Manson also supported Helter Skelter with Bible passages depicting an apocalyptic future in which the oppressed would rise up against their oppressors. Tex Watson explains the philosophy as Manson presented it:

Los Angeles and all the other pig cities would be in flames. It would be the apocalypse, the deserved judgement on the whole sick establishment that hated us and all the other free children, the establishment that had cheated Charlie out of his genius. While the rich piggies lay butchered on their own manicured front lawns, we would have found safety. Charlie would have led us through a secret Devil's Hole into the Bottomless Pit: an underground paradise beneath Death Valley where water from a lake would give

⁷⁰ Actually entitled *The Beatles* (EMI and Trident Studios, 1968), the album became known for its completely white cover design and was therefore popularized as the "white album."

everlasting life and you could eat fruit from twelve magical trees—a different one for each month of the year.⁷¹

Cobbled together, Manson's account described a scene in which African-Americans would rise against their white oppressors, kill or enslave them, and rule the world if not stopped by the Family. He convinced his followers that, if the world was to remain a safe place for white people, the Family would have to hide in the desert during Helter Skelter and then ambush African-Americans after their victory over the white world. Needless to say, this idea was an absolutely outrageous stretch, even for Manson; however, it worked. Manson, a lifelong racist, had just convinced his Family that African-Americans were their ultimate enemy.⁷²

Before they had become members of the Manson Family, Manson's followers had been at least marginally aware of the racial tension that so largely defined the 1960s. The disconnect between Martin Luther King, Jr.'s peaceful protestation and the Black Panthers' more militant approach was well-documented, and as young people in California, Manson's followers had borne witness to the schism. Powerful and prominent in San Francisco, the Black Panthers had split from white radical organizations like the SDS and had openly rejected white membership or alliance. What Manson's followers would have recalled from a time before Manson was this split, the Watts Riots of 1965, and other examples of racial unrest, all adding up to an underlying potential for black militancy. Manson built on these memories, ignoring the leaps and bounds the fight for racial equality had made by 1969 and focusing instead on the militancy of which these factions were capable. By emphasizing racial differences, Manson furthered his own racist agenda and took another important step toward orchestrating his August murders. If they were

⁷¹ Watson, *Will You Die For Me?* p. 5.

⁷² Organized, thorough, and painstakingly recorded accounts of Helter Skelter and the murders can be found in both Guinn's *Manson* and Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*; it is from these two sources that the information presented here originated.

going to become world rulers, Helter Skelter needed to happen, before more racial violence occurred. Perhaps, Manson thought, his Family could help it along. He envisioned a scene in which frustrated blacks broke into rich white homes and murdered their occupants as one that would surely incite a race war. Thanks to his association and subsequent disappointment with Wilson, Jakobson, and Melcher, Manson knew exactly where these murders should happen.

Under the guise of preparing for Helter Skelter, Manson encouraged his Family to begin practicing with knives, guns, and other forms of combat so that they could effectively defend themselves against the blacks when the time came. He also organized “creepy-crawlies,” which were night time ventures designed to establish survival skills and commitment to the cause: Family members would break into houses around Los Angeles at night just to prove they could. At first, creepy-crawlies mainly involved rearranging furniture and rarely theft; however, they escalated into robberies and, like other Family activities of late, became gradually more sinister. Manson’s thirst for revenge was slowly becoming stronger, and some defections among his followers made him more reckless and unpredictable than usual. When a Manson-ordered beating of Gary Hinman, a long-time friend to the family, turned into his murder, Manson saw an opportunity that would not only re-establish his dominance and control over his group, but would also finally incite the race war he had been promulgating for some time. Manson ordered murderer Bobby Beausoleil to make the murder scene look as though the killing had been perpetrated by the Black Panthers, complete with the word “PIGGIES” written on the wall in blood along with the Panthers’ trademark paw print. Manson expected this scene to set in motion the race war he had been waiting for, but did not factor in one important aspect: Beausoleil, an inexperienced criminal, had left a clean fingerprint at the scene. Beausoleil was picked up by police and booked for the murder; this was especially worrisome to Manson because he could

not trust Beausoleil not to reveal Manson's role in the Hinman murder. Manson's plan also backfired because now that the police had Beausoleil in custody for the murder, there was no chance that they would blame it on the Black Panthers. Increasingly desperate, Manson decided that the only way to fully accomplish Helter Skelter was to frame the Black Panthers for a crime that would grab the whole world's attention. The scene needed to be gruesome and the victims had to be famous; to this end, Manson gathered four of those whom he considered his most loyal lieutenants and instructed them to complete the most important creepy-crawly of all—one to take place on August 9th, 1969, at 10050 Cielo Drive.

CONCLUSION

The front page of the January 23rd, 1970 issue of the *Los Angeles Free Press* was emblazoned with the headline “Manson’s Sex Life.”⁷³ The first issue of the prominent counter-cultural publication since the December 1969 apprehension of Charles Manson, the paper features an exposé on the Manson Family that also ran in the *Berkeley Barb*, another major counter-cultural news source. Because this was such a sensational story at the time, news outlets inundated their audiences with every available detail of the murders and ongoing investigation. The counter-culture, however, prioritized other aspects of Manson’s character in its media reports. Instead of focusing on the murders for which the Family was charged, the *Free Press* and *Barb* article delves into the sexual relationships of the Manson Family members and their experiences at Spahn’s Ranch. The subtitle for the article reads “Psychologist who lived with Manson family tells about commune.” Charles Manson had just organized the most vicious murders of the decade and the counter-culture was more interested in how he had organized his commune. Yet again, the counter-culture allowed Manson to flourish and excused his psychopathy in favor of furthering the counter-culture’s own agendas. After providing a backdrop in which Manson could execute his extreme manipulation, the counter-culture continued to give him the attention and interest he had gleaned from it since he first arrived in San Francisco. The irony of this is manifest, the Manson murders signified the most negative aspects of the counter-culture yet Manson was still celebrated and accepted as a member by the counter-culture.

⁷³ "Manson's Sex Life." *Los Angeles Free Press*, January 23, 1970, sec. 1. The psychologist referred to is Dr. David E. Smith, the creator of the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, who spent some time observing the Manson Family during their time in the Haight, and sparingly once they relocated to Spahn’s Ranch.

After their convictions, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Charles “Tex” Watson denounced Manson and became devout Christians. Linda Kasabian, who had fled the Family after the murders, had denounced Manson long before them and served as a key witness for the prosecution in Manson’s trial. The very people who had once killed for Manson, who had been prepared to follow him into a Bottomless Pit to await the apocalypse, turned on him. Perhaps it was the time away from Manson that allowed them to de-program themselves, and perhaps it was simply the desire to displace guilt. No matter the auxiliary motives, one stands out as concrete and prevalent: when they denounced Manson, his followers had been removed from the counter-culture. Proximity to Manson was unimportant—Squeaky Fromme and Sandy Good, two Manson Family members who were not incarcerated for the murders, continued to cultivate and manage the Manson Family long after Manson was imprisoned. What, then, could have made Atkins, Watson, and Kasabian condemn their time with Manson and their actions under his orders? They were no longer in contact with the counter-culture, and so their actions no longer had a viable context in which to hide. No longer plied with drugs, no longer heavily exposed to popular music, and with prison a far cry from a commune, Manson’s followers began to understand the manipulation to which they had fallen victim. Atkins wrote that “In hindsight I’ve come to believe the most prominent character trait Charles Manson displays is that of Manipulator....it has taken me years and years to be able to see Charles Manson like this.”⁷⁴

What Manson’s followers realized tragically late was that Manson’s particular psychology could only have been so successful in the context of the counter-culture. Throughout his adolescence he searched for the ideal environment in which to enact his manipulations and various indiscretions, but could not find it in the conservative core of the American Midwest.

⁷⁴ Susan Atkins, *The Shattered Myth of Helter Skelter*, p. 11 (California: Menelorelin Dorenay’s Publishing, 2012)

California offered him a willing audience and an opportunity to influence the country's most vulnerable minds.

In many ways, the Manson murders were major contributors to the decline of the counter-culture. The sense of security homeowners had felt when hosting large numbers of transients evaporated; the relationship between musician and fan became more distant, with no one wanting to emulate Dennis Wilson's monumental mistake of befriending the Family. Communes, already in the process of disbanding, became rare, and the prevalence of LSD shrank after its criminalization in 1968. The Manson murders shocked the public and revealed to the country the negative consequences the counter-culture could produce.

Not all was lost for the counter-culture, though, and its relationship to Manson seems now to be inextricable. The *LA Free Press* article demonstrates the interest he still generated immediately after his guilt was asserted, and Manson's prolific fan base, which persists to the present day, serves as a reminder that the counter-culture never truly died; until it does, Manson will be able to exploit its values in young hopefuls trying to change society. Currently incarcerated at Corcoran State Prison in California, Manson receives hundreds of letters professing admiration, praise, and support for his anti-authoritarian philosophies and ideals. Wherever there lives a culture of rebellion and dissent, Manson support will exist and thrive. Understanding the nature of that culture in relation to Manson himself was crucial for the 1960s and remains just as imperative today. Susan Atkins sums up Manson's character succinctly, declaring Manson to be "a liar, a con artist, a physical abuser of women and children, a psychological and emotional abuser of human beings, a thief, a dope pusher, a kidnaper, a child

stealer, a pimp, a rapist, and a child molester.”⁷⁵ He is indeed guilty of all of these crimes, and also of bastardizing a culture founded on peace, equality, and love into a framework of death, manipulation, and destruction.

⁷⁵ Susan Atkins, *The Shattered Myth of Helter Skelter*, (City, California: Menelorelin Dorenay’s Publishing, 2012), p. 11.

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