

Charles manson: serial murderer? essay



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Charles Manson: Serial Murderer? Serial Killers Does the definition of a serial murderer only encompass one who commits the act or is the definition able to be enlarged to include one who leads others to commit murder? A jury in 1971 decided that, yes a person can lead others to commit heinous murders and be labeled a serial killer.

Such person is Charles Manson. A serial murderer according to Steve Egger is a murderer that commits two or more murders for reasons that differ from traditional motives. A serial murder is usually a compulsive act, primarily for fulfillment of a fantasy. The most important component is that the murders are dissimilar in the events that surround them. Victims however can share a common thread including individuals that belong to prestigeless, powerless, or lower socioeconomic groups (Hickey, p 19). The case has become nearly become urban legend in the almost forty years since the story began.

It is still often wondered how a young convict can lead seemingly peace loving people to commit such violence on victims apparently innocent with no tangible threads to the killers themselves. How did Charles Manson create the cult that would later become the Manson Family? Charles Manson was born on November 12, 1934, though he liked to say that his birthday was November 11th (Armistice Day). Born to Kathleen Maddox the hospital he was born in dubbed him ‘ no-name Maddox” because his mother was unmarried and his father was not present. Since his mother had been married to William Manson he was given that surname.

Though in 1936 a paternity judgment was called on a “ Colonel Scott” (who was ordered to pay Maddox \$30 per month in child support and did not

comply), Manson later claimed his father was the “ jailhouse” (Bravin, p 49). In 1939 his mother was convicted of armed robbery and sent to prison at which time Manson was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in West Virginia. His uncle thought that young Charles was a sissy and forced him to wear girls clothing on the first day of school. When Manson was eight his mother was released from prison and he was sent to live with her and her various boyfriends and sometime girlfriends. At age twelve he was sent to the Gibault Scholl for Boys in Terre Haute, IN presumably because his mother’s newest lover considered him a burden. After only ten months at the school Manson ran away and stole a bicycle and some cash to rent a room.

After a second burglary he was sentenced to Juvenile Hall in Indianapolis. During his incarceration at Juvenile Hall he escaped and was recaptured and then sent to Father Flannagans’s School for Boys after being mistaken for a Catholic. Four days into his stay there he and another ward stole a car and drove to Illinois. He was thirteen years old. After several more robberies he was apprehended and sentenced to Plainfield Indiana’s School for Boys.

Here he was first raped and it is believed that he would burn himself with cigarettes and push needles into his body to help build up his pain tolerance. He succeeded in escaping eighteen different times from the Plainfield school and finally in February of 1951 broke out again with two other wards and stole another vehicle and ended up in Utah where he was apprehended yet again and sent to the National Training School for Boys in Washington DC because driving a car across state lines is a felony. At the Training School officials rated Manson ““ average” intelligence, manual dexterity, and mechanical aptitude. According to records, his favorite subject was music.

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He was illiterate. ” (Bravin, p 49) A psychiatrist decided that Manson relied on facile techniques in how he interacted with others. The psychiatrist also decided that underneath the lying thief was a sensitive young man who basically just wanted to be loved. Because of this analysis Manson was moved to the less strict Natural Bridge Honor Camp but was transferred three months later to the Federal Reformatory in Petersburg, VA for sodomizing another boy while holding a razor to the boy’s throat. Later it was noted that Manson said the encounter was allowed by the other young man.

After Petersburg he went to the harsher Federal Reformatory in Chillicothe, Ohio. Apparently his behavior improved and he was paroled in May 1954. He married a seventeen year old girl in January of 1955 and in July he stole a car and drove with her pregnant to California. After getting caught he received probation for the crime per a psychiatrists report but a few weeks after not appearing for a second charges hearing the probation was revoked and Manson was a wanted man. He was picked up in Indianapolis and sent to Terminal Island off of Los Angeles Harbor for three years.

In April of 1957 just twelve days before his parole hearing he was caught attempting to hotwire a car in front of the penitentiary. Manson claimed he was trying to reach his wife who had left him for a trucker. For his efforts she divorced him and he had five years probation added to his sentence. Manson improved his behavior and requested admittance into the Dale Carnegie Course (a self help course created by the author of How to Win Friends) and was accepted. Later Manson learned the art of pimping from several of his inmates.

In September of 1958 he was paroled and began a pimping service and lived with his prostitute and referred to himself as her “ producer”. Just a brief six months later Manson was charged with mail theft and forgery for stealing a government check and was turned over to the Secret Service. The check went missing and the officers said that they “ felt certain [that Manson] took it off the table and swallowed it when they momentarily turned their backs,” (Bravin, p50). For his efforts Manson received a suspended ten year sentence after a nineteen year old woman claimed she was pregnant and the judge believed once again that domesticity would be good for the young man.

As it turns out the women was lying and there was no child on the way. After being arrested several times for various crimes (most of which the charges were dropped) Manson’s parole officer thought to bring him in after a parent made accusations against Manson concerning his daughter. However, Manson was nowhere in California, but instead in Texas with two of his prostitutes at a convention. Manson was returned to Los Angeles and returned to his ten year sentence to be served at McNeil Island, Washington.

After his parole in 1967 Manson headed back to Los Angeles where the rest of his story begins. While at McNeil Charles Manson began to “ studying magic, warlockry, hypnotism, astral projection, Masonic lore, scientology, ego, games, subliminal motivation, music, and perhaps Rosiencrucianism,” (Sanders, p 8). Basically anything that Mason could get his hands on that he thought would help him control others he deemed as an asset and would study deeply. One of the first experiments was on subliminal messages.

According to story Manson used the close-circuit prison radio to send messages to inmates at night while they were sleeping to first cheer for a team that often lost (the outcome was that the team lost and after betting with the fans thinking they would win because of his messages Manson received two hundred packs of cigarettes). The second was for a prison talent show where he instructed inmates to keep on applauding for him and at the actual talent show won after a long standing ovation. After the apparent success of these “ schemes” he researched deeper into scientology. Scientology basically is a religion that claims to train believers to “ leave their bodies to achieve immortality among other things,” (Sanders, p9). He became a pupil of Lanier Ramer, Gene Deaton, and Jerry Milman the latter being his cellmate. Manson picked up some phrases from scientology and some Masonic hand messages and used them to his own benefit.

During his stay at McNeil Manson also read *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert Heinlein, which would become a basis for his teachings. Another book he could quote with certainty was the Bible. He also took up the steel guitar and fancied himself as good as the Beatles often bragging on how he could be famous if he was only given the chance. After his release he headed back to Los Angeles and spent the better part of three years roaming and singing. It was during his roaming at Berkley he met his first follower, Mary Brunner who was later joined by Lynne “ Squeaky” Fromme.

These two were just the beginning of his followers. He often preyed upon young homeless girls and others while wondering the Haight (a area largely renowned for hippies). After tripping on LSD for the first time Manson developed a Jesus complex and preached among his followers that he was

also a version of the Son of Man and came up with stories that rewrote the Bible and its sexual history. During his wonderings Manson encountered all the things about the sixties he had missed while incarcerated. Sex, drugs, rock and roll, free love, peace rallies, and all the other topics that resemble that era were a first time experience. But with all the good that went with the sixties so came the bad.

Manson led his followers away from the negative side of free love and the Haight. At the end of 1967 a funeral was held for “ Hippie, devoted son of Mass Media,” (Sanders, p 18). After sending out invitations Manson’s group grew even larger. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters met up with Manson showing them their tour bus, so naturally Manson and his followers found a bus that would accommodate them also. Next came Susan Atkins and Ella. By December 1967 Manson and his followers were so large they needed to put down some roots in a friendly area.

Their first stay was in Topanga Canyon at Spiral Staircase. From there they were nomadic stopping for the night anywhere they were considered welcome and adding new members along the way. Their first visit to Spahn Ranch was in May 1968 after staying for awhile they moved again ending up rubbing elbows with Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys and finally in August returned to Spahn Ranch after making a deal to “ cook, bale hay, help rent out horses, keep the barn, corral, and grounds clean,” (Sanders, p66).

Manson also set up a nearly nude group of young women to help take care of the elderly George Spahn. While between August 1968 and August 1969 Manson and his family moved and travelled more Spahn Ranch was the known resident of Manson and his family at the time the murders occurred.

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While there are many rumors surround the amount of people Manson actually killed, the major cases involved Sharon Tate and her friends and the LaBianca Murders.

Five bodies were found at the first crime scene. In the living room a man and woman's mutilated bodies were found. The young woman was curled in the fetal position and covered in blood, a rope was looped around her neck and attached to a young man four feet away with a towel over his face. On the lawn outside another man and woman were found.

The man was punctured by dozens of wounds and his face and head were bashed in. Twenty five feet beyond him was the young woman in a nightgown also appearing to have been stabbed several dozen times. The youngest victim was a boy found in his vehicle in the driveway appearing to be shot to death. The young woman lying in the fetal position in the living room was Sharon Tate.

A young impregnated actress married to Roman Polanski. Tate had been in several films including Rosemary's Baby but had never really made it big. Friends described Tate as sweet and somewhat naive. At the time of her death she was 26 years old and seemingly perfectly happy with her marriage and impending motherhood. The coroner's report listed her cause of death from multiple stab wounds and any one of five of those would have been fatal. She was attached to Jay Sebring, born Thomas John Kummer who later changed his name to Sebring because he liked the air it gave off.

He had dated Sharon Tate until she filmed with Roman Polanski and fell in love with him. Sebring was rumored to have taken the split well and

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remained good friends with the couple. Sebring was a hair stylist and the CEO of Sebring International. His cause of death was exsanguination (bled to death) head been shot once and stabbed seven times.

The young woman on the lawn was Abigail Folger, heiress to the Folger Coffee. She had been -stabbed twenty-eight times. The other victim on the lawn was her boyfriend Wojciech “ Voytek” Frykowski. A Polish immigrant that had been long time friends with Roman Polanski, though he had no fortune of his own he was known as friendly person who delved deeply into drugs and supposedly led Abigail Folger into drug usage also.

He was stabbed fifty-one times, hit over the head 13 times, and shot twice. The last victim was Steven Parent. An eighteen year old boy that had visited William Garretson that night for a few moments trying to sell a clock radio he had been working on. According to family and friends Parent was a techno-geek. He was shot four times and had one defensive slash wound on his body. The second set of murders occurred shortly after.

The victims were Leno and Rosemary LaBianca. Leno, a president of a chain of Los Angeles supermarket stores and Rosemary the owner of a clothing boutique were a happily married couple that were last seen buying a paper from John Fokianos and later the bodies were found by their children Suzanne and Frank and Suzanne’s boyfriend Joe Dogan. Both bodies were found with a pillow case over their heads and a lamp cord, still attached to the lamp. Leno LaBianca had fourteen punctured wounds and had been stabbed twelve times. Rosemary had been stabbed forty-one times.

For all seven of the victims death was a painful and terrifying process. A previous murder before the Tate house occurred had been Gary Hinman, he was stabbed twice after being held captive for several days over a money dispute with Manson and his family. How did they come to find the killers? The investigators at the Tate scene collected as much evidence as possible and same for the LaBianca scene. Still much was over looked and valuable blood samples were missed.

Finger prints were lifted and some evidence was inadvertently tampered with. The first arrest for the Tate murders was William Garretson the groundskeeper. After extensive questioning and a polygraph test the suspect was finally released. Because much of the evidence had been leaked to the press the second set of murders at the LaBianca residence was considered and copy cat and there was no initial link to the Hinman murder. After going through the list of acquaintances and friends of the victims no plausible suspect could be turned up.

One of the noticeable pieces of evidence at the Tate house was the fragmented remains of a gun handle. The gun Weiss found was also missing its grip. A reward was set at \$25, 000 dollars for anyone who could give evidence as to who owned the gun. A set of horn-rimmed glasses was also found at the Tate residence. Mostly forgotten at first they were also used in profiling the murderer(s). Finally the report on the LaBianca murders was released and Charles Manson's name was on the list of suspects.

Following ensued a raid on Spahn Ranch and later on Barker Ranch, for warrants on grand theft auto and arson, rounding up the Manson Family. At

the Barker raid two young women turned themselves into the police asking for protection from the Manson Family. Stephanie Schram and Kitty Lutesinger both gave statements to the police though neither was overly forthcoming and though Schram mildly implicated Manson, she blamed the Hinman murder on Bobby Beausoleil. Susan Atkins, one of the girls arrested at the raids snitched on herself to other inmates while incarcerated on charges. The testimonies of her fellow inmates were a major help in the prosecution case.

The court proceeding dragged on for well over a year with Vincent Bugliosi as the prosecuting attorney, finally on March 29, 1971 a verdict was reached. Manson was found guilty of murder in the first degree and was initially sentenced with the death penalty. The death penalty was later rescinded to a life sentence which Manson is still carrying out. So finally the question comes around, how did Charles Manson get his followers to engage in such violent acts? While he himself has bragged to committing over thirty-five murders, the final indictments came for something he himself only issued an order for. Charles Manson was often considered a charismatic man and he preyed on those who were lost and looking for answers in tumultuous times. Was that the key to his success? The amount of drug trips and free love ideas obviously aided in Manson's control over his followers, and his extensive research into psychology and other ways of gaining control all could have contributed to the events that led up to the deaths of so many seemingly innocent people.

Still, were those people all sociopaths as Manson has been dubbed or were they just lost souls susceptible to his lies? Manson can truly be called a child

of the system. After spending over half of his life in some institution or another he claimed he was free from being programmed because of it. His most formative years were in places of unspeakable violence and he was noted as being one for potential for violence. It is said that Manson gained much of his inspiration from the Beatles albums while on LSD. Even after his incarceration he still had zealous followers who believed in his teachings including Lynette Alice Fromme who later tried to assassinate President Gerald Ford.

In the over forty years since the crimes many psychologists have studied Manson and still no real answers for Manson's behavior have been unearthed, just speculation. Manson is truly a sociopath that believes he is right to this day and he will be saved in the afterlife because of his divine nature. Manson can easily be compared to Hitler, what could he have done in so "modern" a time if he had the power that Hitler had? Would a second American holocaust have occurred? At the other end of the spectrum what could he have done if he used his charisma and oratory skills to better human kind? Could there have been a reform that the people of his generation so searched for? The what-ifs go on and on. The main conclusion is that Charles Manson is a serial murderer capable of leading others to do his vile acts for him, and is now serving a sentence for his crimes.

Where he will ultimately die in prison as it seems he spent the beginning of his life. Reference List Bugliosi, Vincent (1974) *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* New York: Norton Sanders, Ed (2002) *The Family*, New York: Thunders Mouth Press Bravin, Jess (1997) *Squeaky: The Life and Times of Lynette Alice Fromme*, New York: St. Martins Press Hickey, Eric W
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