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2014

# The Dark Side of the Love Generation

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### Recommended Citation

Stanze, Jessica, "The Dark Side of the Love Generation" (2014). *A with Honors Projects*. 124.  
<http://spark.parkland.edu/ah/124>

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History 105

November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Dark Side of the Love Generation  
*Course Project*

During the summer evening of August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1969, beloved actress Sharon Tate was brutally murdered alongside close friends. Tate had starred in many iconic, kitschy films of the 1960s and was pregnant with acclaimed director Roman Polanski's child. The trials that proceeded struck both fear and fascination into the minds of the public and at the center of it all was a cult, a buzz word that had been growing in popularity through the decade. The American public devoured the story and began a full on love affair with true crime and the sensationalism that generated around fringe culture. While the 1960s will forever be marked by many historic events it is no doubt the decade in which America truly learned to fear its own people.

To quote Harvey Cox, former Thomas Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, "It seems Americans are never really happy unless there is some unfamiliar religious group to abuse." (*The Great American Cult Scare*. Bromley, Shupe. Beacon 1981, print)

The word *cult* is derived from the word culture and is commonly used when referring to a group that has separated itself from general society and popular thought. The practice of breaking off from an original school of thought and developing your own separate beliefs

with a group of like minded people is nothing new. The perfect example of this is the Christian Church which broke away from the Catholic Church and went on to splinter into hundreds of different denominations. When any group makes its initial break away, it is viewed with suspicion from the original, parent belief system. Parties involved in the “original” school of thought feel left out and threatened by this new development and will often times take extreme measures to discredit the new formation. This is particularly a time honored tradition in America, a country founded by those who saw fit to impose their own belief systems onto the indigenous persons who already inhabited the land.

America in the 1960s was ripe with changes in both politics and culture. World War II had long been over and the children that had directly benefited from the blossoming economy that emerged after the war were now young adults. While the concept of the nuclear family had been widely accepted in the 1950s, America’s citizens were now looking for something different, something presumably with more substance. The path towards finding a new way led young people to break away from their families to live in bigger cities and experiment with drugs. There was a big push towards expanding your horizons and stepping outside of your comfort zone. People often found themselves in alternative living situations as a result. Communal living was on the rise as people sought affordable ways to survive in larger cities or areas they had no resources in. Communes became a popular option because they offered not only food and shelter but often times offered some sort of income. LSD had become widely available in the late 1960s and took a strong hold on the west coast, where the majority of American cults

were formed. LSD put people in a trance like state that allowed them to experience strong hallucinations and emotions. Early advocates for the drug, like former professor and psychologist Timothy Leary, felt that LSD expanded your mind and made you a better person. Leary also believed that the world belonged to the youth and that anyone over forty should “drop out” and let the next wave of young people take over. It was in this spirit that many cults gained followers. Cults were started by guru like figures who were very passionate and often times very convicted towards a view that wasn’t shared by many. For those who were seeking something different yet still tangible enough to cling to, these types of leaders were very appealing. Often times the early cults combined many elements of communal living, giving the followers a sense of belonging and higher purpose. Groups like *The Source Family*, headed by father Yod, worked to create their own micro societies with bands, restaurants, and group space. People still holding onto a more traditional Christian view of God were drawn into religious cults like *The People’s Temple* and *The Children Of God*. These specific groups would continue to operate far past the 1960s and ultimately be exposed for having sinister intents, claiming the lives of many of their followers

While most cults were firmly rooted in the hippie counter culture, there were even deeper counter movements developing in America that not only rejected “normal” society but also the ideals of the “love generation”. The most noted of these fringe groups called themselves *Satanists* and were lead by Anton LaVey. LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966 and authored *The Satanic Bible* in 1969. The group largely appealed to

celebrities and well educated middle class of America. While other groups promoted drug use and worship of a leader, Satanism encouraged abstaining from drugs so as not to alter your intelligence and worshipping yourself because you are your own God. LaVey believed that man must not forsake his true nature and should indulge during his time on earth. LaVey believed in using imagery to channel ones desires and connect with your inner power. He chose occult symbols to accomplish these goals because they represent defiance of the church and free thinking. Despite the name and the rituals performed for the sake of channeling energy into a proper place, neither LaVey or his followers believed in or worshiped the Devil. In fact, they didn't believe in any higher power other than themselves and were at their core a more refined version of an atheist. The Church of Satan is still active today even after the passing of its founder. While there have been a small amount of break away Satanic churches, the original still attracts people from all walks of life and remains the most successful 1960s cult.

The cult most synonymous with America in the 1960s is one dubbed *The Manson Family*. Born in Cincinnati Ohio in 1934, Charles Manson spent a large portion of his childhood in and out of various youth correctional facilities. Released in 1967 after serving seven of a ten year sentence for forging a check, Mason found his way to San Francisco. In the 1960s, San Francisco was a melting pot for American youth who were seeking out alternative ways of living. Several of Manson's early followers, particularly those who would go on to commit seven horrific murders in his name, expressed a certain disillusionment with the American dream. Many had backgrounds from either broken or emotionally withdrawn homes in the heartland and were searching an identity. This

created certain vulnerability within them that Manson was easily able to identify and exploit. Manson encouraged members in the group to take LSD, remaining sober himself so that he could “guide” them through their visions. There are accounts of him recreating the crucifixion of Christ in effort to elevate himself to a God like status in their eyes.

Although it can be hard to remove any preconceived notions about Charles Manson and his intent for building his “family”, early accounts of the group formation point to need for acceptance and love on both sides. Those who followed Manson wanted to be understood and appreciated; Manson wanted to be taken seriously and respected. During the murder trials, Manson saw a chance to create a platform. He ordered the family to take part in certain actions while in and out of the court room which included singing his music and carving an “x” in their foreheads. Manson understood that this would spark fear into the hearts of Americans keeping up with trials via television and newspapers and used that fear to portray “the family” as a bigger, wider spread movement than it really was. (*“Charles Manson: Journey Into Evil” Biography*. A&E. Television)

The reason Charles Manson resonated so much with the American public is because he is a direct product of the American system gone astray. Here is a man who spent half his life in a government controlled correctional facility before getting out and inspiring a murder spree. His actions are a reflection of our inactions. Physical proof of a deeply flawed system that threatens to seep into suburban America; Charles Manson was everything that had gone wrong with the 1960s.

At eighty years old, Charles Manson is still in prison. Although he and certain

members of his family were sentenced to death after their trials, the state of California withdrew the death penalty in the early 1970s causing Manson and his follower's sentences to be switched over to life in prison. While most of his "family" now express regret for the murders, Manson still denies that he had any direct involvement and plays the part of the political prisoner. Charles Manson is still a popular topic in the media and has, in many ways, become the modern boogie man. After the Manson trials the American media fully understood how much death sells and have used that coverage as template for all other stories of horror and intrigue. Manson is beloved by our culture because he is the monster that we created, the ultimate cautionary tale of what happens when you rebel. This overexposure of Manson has no doubt shaped America's view on modern fringe groups. The fear that someone like him could rise to power is so ingrained in America's subconscious that anyone who looks like a "cult leader" is immediately dealt with in hostile manner. The media keeps this frenzy alive by regularly doing exposes on the Manson family every time there is a similar killing spree or significant anniversary since the tragedy took place. There is also the argument that all of this attention on Manson, although negative, encourages his type of behavior in others who are wishing to be noticed. The implications of both Manson's deeds and how those actions have been both documented and represented could go on forever. What's most notable is how America has held onto this story and turned it into a crazed folklore.

It is very easy to romanticize the Summer of Love. Hippie aesthetics have turned into universal symbols of free thinking and youth, carefully preserved on the pages of coffee table books forever. Likewise, the allure of drugs, crime and serial killers will forever

hold our attention and be passed down in literature and documentaries. What we fear has a way of turning into what we obsess over as time moves forward. This is the history of America's culture. These things are unique to the United States and for a country who has so desperately wished to be established from the moment it was formed, these things become of the utmost importance.



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