THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WITNESSES TO MURDER: A HISTORY OF SPECTACLE VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1969

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2022

This work is for all those who have experienced violence.

May you heal in ways that do not harm others.

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Acknowledgments

I found it so difficult to construct proper acknowledgments that I almost considered skipping this section all together – but the only thing worse than forgetting one or two people would be choosing not to thank anyone. This has been a true community effort, and I would like to briefly thank the following people, whose support during my time at the University of Chicago provided me with hope, care, and courage to finish: Kathleen Belew; Jonathan Levy; Michelle Nickerson; Amy K. DeFalco Lippert; Adam Green; Charles Payne; Thomas Holt; Julie Saville; Leora Auslander; Destin Jenkins; Jane Dailey; Robert Suits; Alex Jania; Gregory Valdespino; Usama Rafi; Mariana Flores, Zeynep Tezer; Jordie Davies; David Knight; Eilin Perez; Emily Masghati; Savi Maya Kunze; Gregory Montoya-Mora; Naama Maor; Allison Robinson; Jessa Dahl; Alex Hofmann; Keegan Boyar; Serena Covkin; Corbin Page; Evelyn Kessler; Nick Foster; Emma Kitchen; Natalie Smith; Caine Jordan; Nathalie Barton; Nahomi Esquivel; Leila Blackbird; Annie Heffernan; Andrew Seber; Kai Parker; Guy Emerson Mount; Trish Kahle; Clara Nizard; Abhishek Battacharyya; Grigory Gorbun; Eman Elshaikh; and Kyra Schulman. Members of my first- and second-year seminars, led by Tom Holt and Amy Dru Stanley, deserve special mention. Attendees and organizers of the US History Workshop; Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop; US Locations Workshop; and Newberry Urban History Workshop, as well as fellow organizers with Graduate Students United, provided the conditions for rich discussion – and their creativity, drive and political commitments helped me to find purpose.

Outside of these formal spaces, I found ways to connect also with Elizabeth Hinton; Nathan Connolly; Anne Gray Fischer; Simon Balto; Eladio Bobadilla; Natalia Petrzela; Nicole Hemmer; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall; Garrett Felber; Paul Renfro; Dan Berger; Alice Kim; Charlotte Rosen; Andrew Needham; Ruth Wilson Gilmore; Bob Trafford; Imani Jacqueline Brown; Rachel Monroe; Jacqui Shine; and Margo Beth Fleming, from whom I have learned so much about learning in community – and how to share what I know with others.

Hometown friends, teachers, and chosen family members who helped me to see myself as worthy of listening to – especially when I was not sure of it myself – include Taylor Matherly; Grant Matherly; Beth and Barron Matherly; Norman Allard; Bob and Patti Reinheimer; Elizabeth Benninger; Hannah Fiss; Shane Vincent; Krystal Turner, Jonathan Smith; Robin McMahon; Kathleen Rhodes; Alfred Moss; Leslie Rowland; Michael Ross; Ira Berlin; Kelly Pawlak; Sarah Bronson; Ally Childress; Alex Slamowitz; Tara Sones; Mary Catherine Curran; Colleen Puma; Bridget Wilkinson; and Daniel and Teresa Puma.

Finally, my own family members, who know more than anyone how difficult this has been for me, have pushed me to be a better person – and, in so doing, they have made this work worthwhile. I'd like to thank my mom and dad, Deborah Dawn Taylor and Jay Michael Smith, who gave me more than they ever gave themselves and made sure I had access to worlds they had not; my brother, Connor, whose depth of feeling and artistry is an inspiration to me every day (and without whom I would not have been able to stomach much of this work!); and my partner Daniel James Puma, who convinced me I could go to graduate school in the first place. His deep love and undying belief in me drove this entire endeavor and I am grateful for him, always. Though they will not read this, I'd like also to thank my grandparents for raising me – and my dogs, Roxanne and Clementine, who taught me how to love harder than I thought I ever could.

I am certain I have forgotten some very important people, as I have intentionally kept this short to avoid weeping and I suffer from a chronic inability to organize my thoughts. I hope the reader will take these errors – as well as any in the following pages – as evidence not of negligence but of great care to the point of overwhelm. I am grateful for anyone reading.

Introduction

About ten years ago, as an undergraduate studying history at the University of Maryland, I hosted my mom for a weekend. My parents grew up in Maryland and were more than familiar with Washington, DC, so we steered clear of the national mall, avoiding the crowded monuments and Smithsonian buildings. Within two blocks of the historic Ford's Theater – where John Wilkes Booth shot President Abraham Lincoln – and just down the street from the National Portrait Gallery, we stumbled upon a museum that neither of us had ever heard of before: the National Museum of Crime and Punishment.

I thought I had been to all the "national" museums, but this establishment was different. It looked like a fixer-upper that had been taken over by a horror carnival; the glass difficult to see through to prevent us from sneaking a peek without buying a ticket. Posters on the doors advertised never-before-seen objects associated with the "history of crime and punishment" in the United States. Intrigued, we went in.

Though I did not know it at the time, one of the museums' founders was legendary crime entertainment talking head, John Walsh. A leader in the victims' rights movement of the '1980s and '90s, Walsh also hosted the television show *America's Most Wanted*, which had pioneered a type of reality television with which I was very familiar. The hybrid model combined testimonials with reenactments of events as they *might* have occurred. I had watched many of these nameless, faceless entertainers act out the murders of hundreds of people through the specialty programming my friends and I had binged growing up, like Court TV's *Forensic Files*. Walsh became associated with what I knew then as the "true crime world" after his young son was abducted from a shopping mall and murdered in Florida in 1981. Over the course of the following two decades, perhaps no one did more to aestheticize crime politics than Walsh, who introduced and narrated the stories of open investigations on *Fox* every Sunday night.[1] A

[1] John Walsh and Susan Schindehette, *Tears of Rage: From Grieving Father to Crusader for Justice: The Untold Story of the Adam Walsh Case* (Atria Books, 2009); Paul M. Renfro, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (New York:

clever twist on the film reel model of television news that the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) had introduced during World War II – and long since abandoned for longer, integrated segments and live reporting – Walsh's show allowed fiction to enter the realm of "infotainment" news by imagining a scene as told through the words of an ordinary person, who had witnessed some part of the event and wanted to share their story. While I had not grown up on the show, my mom and my friends' moms remembered it well.

In the lobby, we encountered a cream-colored Volkswagen Bug – the same one a man named Ted Bundy had used to abduct and murder women who looked like my mother between 1974 and 1978. I am not sure what we were expecting, but it wasn't this. Once inside the exhibit, we found hundreds of items relating to infamous gunslingers, murderers, and crooks. It even had a hands-on forensics room.

How, I wondered, *had all these items found their way here*?

Aside from the fact that someone, somewhere, had somehow died near; or because of; or in relation to them, what did they even have in common?

I found myself drawn to a case in the "serial killer" exhibit displaying a massive clown suit and set of paints that had belonged to a man named John Wayne Gacy. Next to these were a set of handcuffs he had allegedly used to murder dozens of young men and boys before he hid their bodies in the crawlspace beneath his home in Chicago in the late '70s. Even as he "clowned" for neighborhood children in his free time and was an integral and visible member of his local community, I knew that he had trapped and killed largely without suspicion.[2]

Oxford University Press, 2020); Carrie A. Rentschler, *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011).

[2] It is certainly up for debate whether these were the handcuffs Gacy used – I have seen three pairs in different locations. This is the case for a lot of "murderabilia" items, which we will discuss further in Chapter 6. While I do not have space to go into more depth in this introduction, it is worth noting also that Gacy was not just a visible person but an active participant in Democratic Party politics and local governance, of which much was made in the years following, particularly by members of the Republican Party and officers in the Chicago Police Department. From what I can tell, Gacy, like many of his contemporaries, sought out opportunities to blend in. This does not mean that he did not genuinely hold Demoractic Party ideals, but the random attachment of political party affiliation to perpetrators after the fact has usually been done to distract the reader from other issues at hand. Had I endeavored to write a full chapter on Gacy, I would have certainly included more on his local community and political work – hopefully I will be able to do so in another piece of writing. I do try to bring political motives into my discussion of Ted Bundy in Chapter 3, though it is intentionally through shared experiences with FBI Special Agent Robert Ressler. For more on Gacy, see Sam L. Amirante and Danny Broaderick, *John Wayne Gacy: Defending a Monster* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2011); Joe Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer: The John Wayne Gacy Tapes*, Documentary (Mike Mathis

While the specificity of Gacy's violent acts reflected events and details that had shaped his own life, his pattern was not unique in 1978 when the events came to light. One of the reasons I had entered the museum in the first place was an existing interest in the spectacle crimes of the past, many of which had been introduced to me by parents' generation. Having received Vincent Bugliosi's true crime tome *Helter Skelter* (1974) as a birthday present at just age sixteen, I spent many a late night spiraling on Wikipedia as an anxious teenager learning more about the infamous "Manson Family," whose members reminded me bizarrely of myself. Before long, I was well versed on the influx of serial killers that had seemed to follow Charles Manson: "Zodiac;" the "Night Stalker;" the "Green River Killer;" the "Hillside Stranglers;" Ted Bundy; Jeffrey Dahmer; "BTK"… on, and on, and on.

In college, I watched endless YouTube videos containing primary source news footage and televised interviews with these men; later, I would find entire fan bases dedicated to them on social media and blogging sites like Tumblr and Instagram, where users also idolized the mass shooters who terrorized my own childhood and early adulthood. Everyone in my friend groups knew who these murderers were too. As journalist and fellow obsessive Rachel Monroe can attest, it was a common body of shared knowledge for people of my age group, especially those who had born as women.[3]

I already knew about Gacy, but I still felt a pronounced tightening in my chest as a looked up at his heavy leather jacket; the one, according to the placard, that he had been arrested wearing. I couldn't help but feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, as if the spirit of the killer clown himself still lingered behind the glass; or, perhaps, it was more like a feeling that the ghosts of his victims were

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Productions, 2022); Sam Amirante, *John Wayne Gacy: Devil in Disguise*, Documentary (NBC News Studios, Witchcraft Motion Picture Company, 2021).

[3] Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974); Rachel Monroe, *Savage Appetites: Four True Stories of Women, Crime, and Obsession* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2019); Rachel Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry," *Believer Magazine*, November 20, 2017; Alice Bolin, *Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession* (New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2018); Cheyna Roth, *Cold Cases: A True Crime Collection: Unidentified Serial Killers, Unsolved Kidnappings, and Mysterious Murders*, (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2021); Rachel Monroe, "'Have You Ever Thought About Killing Someone?,'" *Matter* (blog), April 28, 2015; Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark, *Stay Sexy & Don't Get Murdered: The Definitive How-to Guide* (New York: Forge, 2019); Rich Juzwiak, "Half-True Crime: Why the Stranger-Danger Panic of the 1980s Refuses to Let Go," *Jezebel*, October 28, 2020; Charlotte Colombo, "Experts Say We're Hardwired to Become Fascinated with True-Crime Cases like Gabby Petito's," *Yahoo News*, September 26, 2021; David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*, New Ed edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); John Borowski, *Serial Killer Culture*, Documentary (Waterfront Productions, 2014); Marcel Danesi, *The "Dexter Syndrome": The Serial Killer in Popular Culture*, New edition (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2016).

watching me ogle these arbitrary items that once belonged to a man who had taken their lives, and which I had just paid $20 to see.

The tone of the museum makes more sense once you realize that its curators were not interested in historic preservation or educating the public about crime and punishment over time, the models I had come to expect from other credentialed history museums in the Washington, D.C. area. Instead, they were telling a story about the United States through the displaying of objects from a very specific type of crime entertainment that emerged in the wake of what I call "spectacle murders" in 1969. A rapidly transforming media landscape provided new avenues during this period for Americans to access and connect with one another and a seemingly "new" problem of serial murder soon became a vessel for new political actors to push their memories, fears, and desires into mainstream entertainment content.[4]

For our purposes, a "spectacle murder" describes an event in which at least one person kills another person, and narratives and images of the victim(s) and/or perpetrator(s) are then repeatedly constructed, reconstructed, and reproduced through whisper networks, news media, and other cultural venues long after the crime has ended. This is an intentionally expansive definition. Modern spectacle, a concept I borrow largely from cultural and urban history, creates an illusion of intimacy, while functioning to distance the spectator from reality. Guy Debord theorized that representation began to replace authentic life in the twentieth century and thus spectacle should be best understood not as a collection of images but as a social relation among people mediated through them. There were some outlying examples of crime cases that had become media sensations in the decades preceding the Gacy's of American history, like Richard Speck, who had killed eight nurses in one night in Chicago in 1966; or even Truman Capote's bestselling and genre-defining "true crime novel" *In Cold Blood* (1964), which chronicled his investigation into a bizarre home invasion in rural Kansas and the resulting fallout among community members, family, and even the

[4] See Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Translataed edition (Black & Red, 1977); Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1st Picador ed (New York: Picador, 2004); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Reprint edition (New York: Pantheon, 2002); Jaeho Kang, *Walter Benjamin and the Media: The Spectacle of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014); Christopher Sharrett, ed., *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Amy K. DeFalco Lippert, *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2004).

perpetrators. Capote's careful study and measured empathy toward each of the story's characters inspired countless journalists, writers, and filmmakers to follow their noses - or, rather, their hearts - and begin to experiment with fiction, reality, evidence, and testimonials in depictions of what Karen Halttunen has called "murder narratives."[5]

The Tate-LaBianca murders in 1969, which readers probably know as the Manson murders, created a wedge for both civilians and journalists to begin asking more pointed questions of historical actors who found themselves in the position of representing and defending a police state in formation.[6] Black residents of the United States – like Mamie Till, whose son Emmett was murdered by white supremacists in 1955; and Rosa Parks, whose seat on a bus launched a world-changing boycott in Montgomery, Alabama – called attention to the brutality of policing in a society formulated by proponents of racial slavery in the years preceding. They found during civil rights organizing that

[5] Karen Halttunen's work focuses on these stories during another period of transformation in the concept of reality: the Enlightenment era, when murder stories provided a way for people to make sense of trends toward secularization in institutions and society by maintaining the dichotomies of "good" and "evil" through Gothic horror, sermons, and dime novels. Jean Murley has furthered this line of inquiry by tracing the development of the major bodies of true crime media (including radio, print, and television) as continuations of this sense-making project during the twentieth century. We will discuss this in further detail in Chapter 3 in our discussion of the invention of the "serial killer" as a culturally relevant and very precisely criminalized figure. For an introduction, see John E. Douglas and Mark Olshaker, *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* (Gallery Books, 2017); Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (New York: Random House, 1965); Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008); Pamela Burger, "The Bloody History of the True Crime Genre," *JSTOR Daily*, August 24, 2016.

[6] For more about how legacies of racial slavery came to a head through debates over safety and danger during the spectacles of the civil rights movement, see: Michelle Alexander and Cornel West, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Tenth anniversary edition (New York: The New Press, 2020), Patrick Elliot Alexander, *From Slave Ship to Supermax: Mass Incarceration, Prisoner Abuse, and the New Neo-Slave Novel* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Kathleen Belew and Ramon A. Gutierrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Dan Berger, "Social Movements and Mass Incarceration," *Souls* 15, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2013): 3–18; Stuart M. Hall, ed., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, Critical Social Studies (London: Macmillan, 1978); Angela Y. Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Blackwell Publishing, 1998); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Matthew Guariglia and Charlotte Rosen, "Disciplining the City: Scholarship and the Carceral State Year in Review 2020," *The Metropole* (blog), January 4, 2021; Matthew Guariglia and Charlotte Rosen, "Disciplining the City Review Essay 2019," *The Metropole* (blog), December 19, 2019; Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021); Mike King, *When Riot Cops Are Not Enough : The Policing and Repression of Occupy Oakland* (Rutgers University Press, 2017); Ameer Hasan Loggins, "We're All Living in a Future Created by Slavery," *LEVEL* (blog), October 16, 2020; Paul A. Passavant, *Policing Protest: The Post-Democratic State and the FIgure of Black Insurrection* (Duke University Press, 2021); Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017),; Mariame Kaba, Naomi Murakawa, and Tamara K. Nopper, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, The Abolitionist Papers Series (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021); Mariame Kaba; Andrea J. Richie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: The New Press, 2022).

providing an audience for state procedure tended to both expose existing problems *and* force the hand of those who might be otherwise reluctant to expand state protections to them.[7]

By the time this history had found its way to me by way of my white parents and true crime, however, alternate paths and moments of opportunity to respond differently to the problem of "serial murder" had been hidden from my view. The National Museum of Crime and Punishment represented itself as a neutral history, and it was telling a very powerful story in which one of its own founders had played a role in banishing perpetrators like Gacy squarely to the realm of memory. There is strange comfort in a genre that never stops producing content about the same thing – especially when it provides further avenues of exploration; rabbit holes to go down in moments of darkness. Rachel Monroe has called it "discomfort food" for our anxiety – it is comforting only because it confirms the things that we already know but wish we did not have to. Knowing it, in the true crime world, is itself a form of remembering; of paying tribute to those we've lost.[8]

Begrudgingly, I bought the memoir by Sam Amirante, Gacy's defense attorney, in the gift shop of the Crime Museum. In *Defending a Monster*, he wrote of his experiences through the slick familiar voice of a noir-style detective. Having faced fierce scrutiny and countless death threats from those who wondered how he could defend such a heinous murderer in a court of law, Amirante wrote of his role as a sacrifice he and his family made to safeguard the institution of American democracy. In this stilted account (which provided much of the material for later depictions of the case on television and elsewhere), Gacy suffered from shameful "homosexual urges" that caused him to lash out in violence; and his victims had gone unnoticed only because it was not within the realm of possibility, at the time, for

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[7] Anne Gray Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us: Sex, Race, and Police Power from Segregation to Gentrification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Thomas C. Holt, *Children of Fire: A History of African Americans*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010); Hinton, *America on Fire*; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi*, Revised edition (Nation Books, 2006).

[8] Kilgariff and Hardstark, *Stay Sexy & Don't Get Murdered*; Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry"; William Genovese, *The Witness*, Documentary (Five More Minutes Productions, 2016).

Americans to understand young men as victims of sexual abuse.[9] Defending Gacy was not something Amirante had done out of love for his fellow man but for his country and its institutions, which, in his view, provided even the most evil of its citizens the right to a fair trial.

Even in 2012, before I was anything close to an expert on true crime, this framing did not sit right with me. I remembered how I had felt as a teenage girl reading *Helter Skelter* – that the women in the story had done horrible things but they were also being cheated by its narrator, who did not see them as human beings but as characters in a who-dunnit game he was playing with his friends. Young, vulnerable women in search of community and shelter may have been more likely to commit acts of violence than those in stable environments, but they were not fundamentally evil or even foolish; they were people who had acted out of circumstance, like all historical actors do. I felt the same way about how Amirante described Gacy's victims, most of them boys even younger than girls of the Manson family.

I am not stupid, I remember thinking, *and neither are these people*.

But I was supposed to believe that the 1970s just *happened* to produce a batch of murderers with the supernatural powers to blend in, inflict horrendous violence, and then disappear despite law enforcement doing *everything they could* to stop them? If it were true, why had I still grown up under a reign of terror from spectacle violence?

Since then, I still see John Wayne Gacy everywhere; his painted face as "Pogo" the clown on t-shirts and rugs. In 2018, I found an entire clown-themed room in the haunted house ("haunted prison" themed) that opens annually down the road from the *real* Stateville Penitentiary where Gacy died by lethal injection in 1994.[10] Even the University of Chicago has exhibited some of Gacy's clown paintings as part of a transgressive art show called "Pay for your Pleasure" by Mike Kelley.[11] *Two* multi-part

[9] In addition to a lengthy prologue in the book, you can also find Amirante framing the case this way in a recent documentary. Amirante and Broaderick, *John Wayne Gacy*; Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer*.

[10] Stateville is still an operational correctional facility.

[11] For more on this exhibit, see Cary Levine, *Pay for Your Pleasures: Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

documentary series have been released about the Gacy case on major streaming platforms in the last two years alone.[12] He never seems to go away.

With so much material available about his victims, and even the secondary and tertiary characters in his story, depictions of Gacy's crimes are still surprisingly limited in their perspective, argumentation, and solutions to the violence to which they direct so much of their attention. Narrative accounts can offer more information about a violent crime than the decontextualized objects I found in museum collection – but even the inclusion of more evidence rarely provides a satisfying ending to these stories, which always leave us feeling in need of just a *little* bit more information. If anything, the content is stiflingly repetitive, regurgitating much of the same material; a nostalgia trap for our traumas, to relive them as we see fit.

Ultimately, mainstream depictions of the spectacle murders of the era tend to amount to the same argument: that the existence of these cases during the '70s, '80s, and '90s was unique, and this history should not lead us to challenge – or even question – the criminal-legal system in place today, which transformed for the better after learning from these experiences. Depending on what you read, watch, or listen to, you might even come to think that the law itself is at risk of deadly attack, and that we should thank our lucky stars that those who uphold it exist at all.[13]

Much of our social, political, and cultural reality in the United States relies on the underlying assumption that one cannot be both a victim and a perpetrator of violence at the same time.[14] Within this paradigm, we find the central organizing principle that necessitates the existence of our entire criminal-legal system – sorting people into categories – and a powerful discursive tool for maintaining

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[12] See Amirante et al., *John Wayne Gacy* and Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer*.

[13] Derecka Purnell, "'The "Missing White Woman Syndrome" Still Plagues America,'" *The Guardian*, September 29, 2021; Derecka Purnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom* (Astra House, 2021); Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, Reprint edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014); Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975–2001* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); Nancy Grace, *Don't Be a Victim: Fighting Back Against America's Crime Wave* (Grand Central Publishing, 2020).

[14] Rentschler, *Second Wounds*.

existing power structures while allowing those who have suffered to believe they received justice.[15] Status as a criminal or a victim was much more prevalent in the popular culture I consumed growing up than, say, debates about the status conferred by citizenship, even as the languages of criminalization and victimization (primarily narrative in their invocation) structured the material realities of who gained access to state protections and who deserved to be protected, policed, and punished in the world that raised me.

What is "true crime"?

Let's take a step back – because our story is not about Gacy; it is not even about Chicago. A key feature of true crime's mass appeal is its narrative portability and, if you ask a true crime fan which state has the most spectacular murder cases, the answer is a no-brainer: it's California.

The western state's varied terrains and long stretches of highway allowed during these decades for the easy movement of people across hundreds of miles of land; while blank, open desert and never-ending construction projects provided more than a few nooks and crannies in which to hide nefarious deeds.[16] The mythic lawlessness of the Wild West was also not a myth depending on where you went

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[15] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Second Vintage books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Caleb Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Murley, *The Rise of True Crime*.

[16] Recently, I have seen more true crime accounts begin to take into consideration the development of highways and real estate in California and the western United States as a factor in creating the conditions that produced the spectacle murders of the 1970s. See, for example, Michelle McNamara, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark: One Woman's Obsessive Search for the Golden State Killer* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018); Elizabeth Kendall, *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer*, Documentary (Amazon Studios, Saloon Media, 2020).*Ted Bundy*. While this is a step in the right direction, I suggest grounding any research in the framework that geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called "abolition geography," a way of mapping out how power functions relationally across space. For Gilmore, California's development into a carceral state relied on a "carceral geography" that allowed for a surplus of land, labor, capital, and state capacity to be harnessed in service of an unprecedented volume of punitive projects in the 1980s. We will think with this theory throughout the following pages. See: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Brenna Bhandar, and Alberto Toscano, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (London ; New York: Verso, 2022); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006); Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*, Justice, Power, and Politics (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013); Emma Shaw Crane, "The New Geography of the Carceral State," *Public Books* (blog), September 21, 2022; Sarah A. Seo, *Policing the Open Road: How Cars Transformed American Freedom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019); Barbara Y. Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914," *Law and History Review* 13, no. 2 (1995): 261–316.

and who you were, as a lack of communication between neighboring law enforcement agencies prior to the '80s allowed perpetrators of horrific crimes to reinvent themselves a few towns over, as long as they did not attract suspicion from those with the power to stop them. California thus often became the shared visual landscape onto which many of Americans' fears and fantasies, real and imagined, were projected in the years following the Second World War, as it simultaneously rose to prominence as America's primary staging ground for film and television.[17]

To untangle what historical work is useful here, we must first acknowledge that the scholarship produced about crime, policing, and the city over the last five decades was written alongside the events in the following page. Much of this – particularly after uprisings in the late-'60s and mid-'90s – responded defensively to mainstream conservative arguments against social movement activity and progressive welfare policies, seeking explicitly to challenge the austerity and surveillance of the neoliberal project, whose anti-intellectualist proponents painted academic research (and academics themselves) as out of touch with the "real" experience of being an American.[18] This remains one of the reasons that true crime narratives became a more popular and integrated history of the United States than that produced by researchers like me. While our works demanded that readers examine their own role in the past and denied them the opportunity to identify as victims of outside forces or the standards of a past time, mainstream crime coverage and its resulting true crime content provided avenues for the illusion of betterment through witnessing another's pain for posterity – as well as the option to take

[17] For more on latchkey kids and being raised by television see "Karen's Step by Step Guide on How to Be a Latchkey Kid" in Kilgariff and Hardstark, *Stay Sexy & Don't Get Murdered*. See also Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2006); John Buntin, *L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City* (New York: Crown, 2010); Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*, Documentary, (ABC News, Highway 41 Productions, 2021); Marlene Smith-Baranzini, ed. John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi *Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[18] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1966); Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd ed., (University of California Press 2013); Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); D. J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For an example of how this anti-intellectualism continues to thrive on the right today, see public debates over the 1619 Project: Nikole Hannah-Jones and *The New York Times Magazine*, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (New York: One World, 2021); Executive Office of the President, "Executive Order 13958: Establishing the President's Advisory 1776 Commission," November 5, 2020.

action by supporting the expansion of what historians have deemed the "carceral state," or a set of enforcing institutions, networks, and norms that extended state surveillance and carceral power to all aspects of American life. Those at the center of funding these projects were usually investors in carceral logics with material interest in their maintenance.[19]

California was ground zero for three important shifts in political culture in the '60s: the ascent of grassroots conservatism from the suburb to the ballot; the "punitive turn" in American life; and the development of a new concept of reality focused on visual evidence, all of which contributed to the spectacle murder phenomenon in the following chapters. As Michelle Nickerson and others have argued, anti-communism provided a language and framework for the inclusion of more civilians into political projects as defenders of the homeland during the Cold War. These newer conservative actors, many of them women who drew on their labor as mothers and housewives to claim power in the domestic space and community, opposed liberal collectivism, the intrusion of the state into economic matters, and feared a perceived decline in morality, individual responsibility, and adherence to traditional structures of authority. Their issues – which mapped onto white supremacist aims – became nationalized through the Republican Party with the presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater in 1964, who united libertarians, social conservatives, and evangelicals for the subsequent election of former film star Ronald Reagan (then California governor) in 1980. The "New Right" exhibited a preoccupation not with foreign enemies, but those hiding in their midst, and justified its lust for violent repression by drawing on race-neutral language to support race-based policies while channeling more effort than ever into strong media networks and image curation.[20]

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[19] Gilmore, Bhandar, and Toscano, *Abolition Geography*; Sarah T. Hamid, "Community Defense: Sarah T. Hamid on Abolishing Carceral Technologies," *Logic*, August 31, 2020; Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg, *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform* (Oakland,California: University of California Press, 2021); Kaba, Murakawa, and Nopper, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*; Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, "What Abolitionists Do," *Jacobin*, August 24, 2017; Mariame Kaba; Andrea J. Richie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition.*

[20] While I am speaking specifically about the grassroots conservatives of the '50s and '60s here, white women have historically been central to upholding projects of racial domination in the United States. See: Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012); Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York, NY:

In the "Sunbelt," they created a thriving new defense economy that rivaled the dying manufacturing industry in the Northeastern and Rust Belt states and helped to usher in the spectacular inequality of the Reagan Revolution, a political transformation that – like its namesake – often led its agents to value illusion, imagination, and speculation over material reality.[21]

Spending money on private goods (rather than public services) became a form of patriotism too, as businesses and political elites combined efforts to create new commercial spaces and stimulate consumption, encouraging Americans to embrace consumer rights incentives and aspirational communities at the expense of their own rights or the rights of others. Many veterans and their families had gained access to property ownership and higher education for the first time through the GI Bill after returning from war, but these provisions intentionally excluded large swaths of Black veterans and their families employed in service and agricultural work and combined with reactionary urban planning policies like redlining to shape the demographic development of cities and the developments on their outskirts.[22] Even though more nonwhite people began to live in these neighborhoods over time, suburban politics continued to center whiteness through the veil of property value.[23]

Oxford University Press, 2018); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997); Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, Revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[21] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012); Michelle M. Nickerson, Darren Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012); Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism: A History of the United States* (New York: Random House, 2021); Timothy Melley, *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Masco, *The Theater of Operations*.

[22] See Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2006); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, A Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

[23] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1998); N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the*

Conservatives seemed preoccupied with going back to the "good old days," but theirs was an imagined past that histories of white supremacy and resistance outright reject. Social movement historians have countered these arguments by focusing on relationship-building, collective organizing efforts, and the importance of learning from the survival and resilience strategies of past generations, showing that Black resistance to white supremacy has been the guiding narrative of our shared history. In these accounts, both the promises of American liberalism and the reality that many Americans were less inclined to subscribe to them if liberalism applied to *everyone* revolved around the problem of nonwhite subjects (particularly emancipated slaves and laborers from Asia and Central and South America) entering a political project that naturalized, defended, and advanced a clear correlation between whiteness, wealth, and power.[24]

Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Destin Jenkins, *The Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021); Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy, eds., *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, Columbia Studies in the History of U.S. Capitalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th anniversary edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*, Twenty-fifth anniversary edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Robin D. G. Kelley, "What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020.

[24] Historians and researchers of violence, imperialism, white supremacy, and fascism have long argued that epistemological violence – or the ways in which our methods determine whose stories deserve a place in the historical archive – is a primary function of maintaining power, but we often mistakenly identify it in our popular media as simply "forgetting history." For more, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, 20th Anniversary Edition*, 2nd Revised edition (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005): 1233–63; Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997); Belew, *Bring the War Home*; Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*; Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Random House, 2008); Joshua Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing*, Documentary (Final Cut for Real, Piraya Film A/S, Novaya Zemlya, 2012); Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97; Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The First White President," *The Atlantic*, September 7, 2017; Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 1st American ed. (New York: Knopf, 1953); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Thomas C Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, February 1995, 1–20; Rachel Hope Cleves, "On Writing the History of Violence," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 641–55; Debbie Doyle, "The National Parks and the Value of History," *American Historical Association Today* (blog), March 13, 2013; Thomas C. Holt and Dennie Wolf, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1990); Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*; (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Nicole Marie Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006); Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso Books, 2019).

In the early '00s, historians took Democratic leaders and self-described progressives to task for their consistent willingness to sacrifice the needs of their Black neighbors in favor of racially restrictive policies and violent state repression during the '70s, and '80s. The new histories of capitalism have elucidated these networks by arguing that the economic system of slavery foundationally shaped the development of modern capitalism, cementing white supremacy into the built environment and leading to widespread urban rebellions. International solidarity against capitalism through decolonization produced a growing demand to abolish policing and prisons – the agents of empire and capital – by a new social movement that took its name (abolition) from the movement that had worked in the 18th and 19th centuries to abolish racial slavery.[25] Most recently, scholars have identified the '90s as a moment of consolidation for neoliberal proponents of "multiculturalism" and "diversity," as the introduction of Black studies programs in academic spaces marked the triumph of consumer capitalism and the hollowing out of material support for radical movements in favor of "representation." These new initiatives allowed people to begin adopting radical terms and using them incorrectly, appearing to oppose power without engaging in the social work, imagination, or personal reflection required to challenge it in the spaces where white supremacist patriarchal violence thrives.[26]

Most true crime consumers have already internalized the contradictions inherent in learning our history through crime entertainment – and have chosen to replace them with more easily categorizable

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[25] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition"; Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Orisanmi Burton, "Diluting Radical History: Blood in the Water and the Politics of Erasure," *Abolition Journal*, January 26, 2017; Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York, New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017); Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Danielle Lee Wiggins, "Crime Capital: Public Safety, Urban Development, and Post-Civil Rights Black Politics in Atlanta" (Ph.D., United States - Georgia, Emory University), ProQuest dissertation accessed October 25, 2022.; Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Loggins, "We're All Living in a Future Created by Slavery"; Berger, Kaba, and Stein, "What Abolitionists Do"; Derecka Purnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom*.

[26] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Roxane Gay, *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde* (New York, New York: WW Norton & Company, 2020); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2014); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2017); Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99.

problems. A shorthand developed to replace our history in mainstream narratives and let us know which characters are good and which are bad – a murder is not just any murder, but a "brutal" one; the victim was "a fighter" who would not have died without leaving evidence behind; that is a good police officer because he balks at the n-word and gets one over on his corrupt fellow agents.

I grew up learning that if I were ever attacked, it was important for me to remember to use my fingernails to scratch my murderer so that evidence on my body would provide clues for whoever found me. Advice like this echoed conversations in the wake of the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York City in 1964 and illustrate perfectly how true crime parables shape our history by telling it differently than we remember it, thereby changing reality once we forget. While the details of Kitty Genovese's murder as they were reported in the press – primarily that dozens of people had watched her die without coming to her aid – turned out to be false, women learned of her as an example of why you cannot trust your neighbors. I saw this case come up over and over – especially in the Hillside Strangler coverage we will see in Chapter 2 – and even though the "bystander" theory it birthed had already been disproven by 1977, the myth persisted nonetheless.[27]

Growing up, it was these stories that made me question myself, my loved ones, and my community members constantly. As a historian, I wondered what this had done to me – what it done to us – and I started to search beyond these mainstream accounts for the people I recognized; people whose traumas had built the vast and bloody archive that I was beginning to realize had been used against them.

Method: A History of the Present

Several methodological problems with how I had originally framed an examination of the spectacle murder phenomenon pushed me in new directions and shaped the parameters of the study, changing my political and personal investments in this history. Most of the questions I brought to the

[27] Sarah Marshall and Michael Hobbes, "You're Wrong About: Kitty Genovese and 'Bystander Apathy,'" *You're Wrong About Podcast*; William Genovese, *The Witness*.

material in 2018, when I began, had to do with categorization: why am I seeing *this* described in the archive as "violent" but not *that*? When I first started writing, I used a frame that I thought served my goal of challenging power because it had come primarily from anti-rape activists and the parents of murdered children. When writing about attacks like these, their method suggested, do not write about perpetrators because there has been "enough" already said about them. Focus, instead, on the victims whose lives were cut short without reason – turn *them* into the spectacle instead of the killer. I recognized this impulse in most true crime written by women already, but I felt that it was just as dehumanizing as focusing on the perpetrator, as women with full lives were reduced to caricatures of what others had expected them to be. In their work on victims' rights, media, and suburban crime, Carrie Rentschler, Paul Renfro, and Kyle Riismandel all later confirmed my suspicion by arguing that the "secondary victims" of violent crime like John Walsh came to coopt and even make profitable and productive the airing of their pain in public in the wake of these events. They even created and distributed representational guidelines for journalists, limiting what could or could not be shared with the public.[28]

In December of 2019, I attended a conference in Oxford, Mississippi, called *Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration*. Here, for the first time, I heard many people speaking about the same discomfort I had yet to put into words, and they gave me more to read, listen to, watch, and think with. Just six months later, it seemed like we were living in a different world under the COVID-19 pandemic, but these new contacts helped me to experience and process the urban uprisings in support of the Black Lives Matter movement as spectacular moments that revealed things we existed, but which had formerly been hidden from us. Like many others, I learned more about the history of state violence and returned to my work with a new sense of obligation to those who had come before me.[29] Rather than just be a witness to the

[28] Rentschler, *Second Wounds*; Renfro, *Stranger Danger*; Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear*.

[29] Simon Balto, "What 'Defund the Police' Really Means," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2021; Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2020; Reina Sultan et al., "#8toAbolition," #8ToAbolition, accessed October 4, 2022, https://www.8toabolition.com; Micah Herskind, "Some Reflections on Prison Abolition after #MUMI," *Medium* (blog), September 23, 2020; Reginald Dwayne Betts, *Bastards of the Reagan Era* (New York, NY: Four Way Books, 2015).

victims in mainstream true crime stories, I worked on including the victims of police brutality, state violence, white supremacy, patriarchal abuse, and capitalism into my witnessing practice. I attempted, to the best of my ability, to take all witnesses at their word and to believe their internal experiences even when I did not share their beliefs about how to use and activate those experiences in the present.

In the spirit of shared vulnerability, allow me to share some of what such expansive witnessing did to my mind and body while I consumed decades of murder narratives. I fought years of insomnia and consistently relied on self-medication for sleep. I had weekly, sometimes nightly, violent dreams; some of them incorporated direct details or images of the crimes I was researching while others imagined violence against the people I loved. I saw brutality and the potential for violence everywhere, resisting intrusive thoughts about dying and harming myself or other people. While processing both secondary and primary source materials, I noticed my body doing things I did not tell it to do; wringing my hands and wrists; waving my arms; shaking my head; clenching my eyes closed; stretching and tensing the muscles in my shoulders, neck, and back. I often experienced an increased heart rate; heavy breathing; chest tightness (I have asthma); a rush of adrenaline to my legs; misplaced energy that would result in shifting feet or other nervous habits.

Sometimes I felt gripped by a visceral desire, or even a cellular need, to get out of wherever I was. Others times, I found I had zoned out to the point of being unable to perceive what was in front of my eyes, as if my brain had just decided to pause the input. I felt physically ill and unable to breathe at the thought of returning to work and yet I could not stop thinking about it. It was everywhere. I felt disconnected from the people close to me because they could not understand what I had seen or how it was affecting me, which they also saw as my own choice; something I was putting myself through. I longed to connect with others in ways that uplifted them and made them feel happy, but I did not know how because I felt like violence was the only thing I knew about and could only speak with those whose struggles I recognized to be as severe as mine.

I faced immense difficulty attempting to narrativize the events, as experiences of time change during trauma, making timeline construction difficult as both a researcher attempting to do justice to a

subject and as a witness of this history, which affected me deeply. While the argument central to this dissertation acknowledge how much cases collapsed and influenced one another, even I could not anticipate the difficulty of attempting to disentangle and separate those stories; it took me ages. Even with more archival material than most historians can hope for, I often felt that I was reinventing the wheel. I practiced writing out what had happened without using criminalizing language (nearly impossible at times); participated in transformative justice efforts that challenged the limits of my empathy; readjusted my relationships and friendships; learned how to set boundaries; and began recognizing when I was projecting my own personal hurt onto others. This last one was the most difficult, as it is not technically related to the material and often felt like a distraction – but it was crucial in allowing me to channel my method.

Working on our own traumas requires us to acknowledge that we hurt people even when we do not mean to, which was the missing puzzle piece in most of the mainstream news coverage and true crime I consumed, which demonized mistakes like those of Polly Klaas's mother, Eve Nichol of Chapter. 5, who accidentally left the back door unlocked one time – and was blamed for her daughter's abduction. People like Eve did not have to be convicted in a court of law for these accusations to change their lives. Harm, rather than violence, is a metric that considers the internal experience instead of what people can "see" and "prove" for purposes of judgment, an approach to studying crime and violence that understands processes of victimization to be intimately tied to processes of criminalization, taking for granted that those same processes *create new violence*. It is rooted in a firm belief that no one comes to harm first as a perpetrator and that we desperately need more frameworks when involved parties can be both recipients and enactors of harm within the same story. As Mariame Kaba has emphasized, surviving harm and causing it usually happen concurrently.[30]

[30] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, New York: Viking, 2014); Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan, *Fumbling towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators* (Chicago: Project NIA, 2019); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Countless writers have critiqued the genre birthed by Truman Capote, Ann Rule – whom we will meet in Chapter 3 – and their contemporaries, pointing to an appetite for violence as a broader symptom of our desensitization to harmful material and a tacit acceptance of the place of violence in American culture. Most often, these critics focus less on what is included in true crime than on what is left out – primarily nonwhite victims, who have become props in recent years reformist arguments.

If you are a true crime consumer (most of us are), you already know that the most common response to the problem of murder is to make everything "better:" better policing, better technology, better training, and more resources for everything except the group of people in danger. The internal logic of true crime may seem contradictory at times, but at its center is Sam Amirante's fierce guiding belief in the state's ability and intention to uphold justice. This means that its architects can admit when the system makes mistakes *some* of the time, as we will see in Chapter 1, but they are rarely capable of critiquing power because they rely almost exclusively on state actors for information, and because police officers, administrators, and lawmakers do not play the role of perpetrator in our broader cultural project.

A focus on experience in the genre means that the "truth" is based on primary source material: state records, media coverage, and interviews with witnesses, victims, police officers, and prosecutors. Some of these stories point to shoddy policework and, occasionally, to corruption – but I found that police disasters were nearly always presented as exceptional and instructive. Time and again in the following pages, local and federal law enforcement will fail splendidly to prevent the horrific violence they claimed made their own agencies necessary. But, like the state expansions of the Progressive era, their failures became learning imperatives, further upholding the logic of police reform: that failure should result in *more* of our time and energy to prevent future failures.[31]

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[31] Naomi Murakawa, "Why Police Reform Is Actually a Bailout for Cops," *LEVEL* (blog), October 22, 2020; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*; Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); Jen Manion, *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Tiffany Roberts and Micah Herskind, "The Failure of Police Reform," *Intelligencer*, January 31, 2022; Dylan Rodriguez, "Reformism Isn't Liberation, It's Counterinsurgency," *LEVEL* (blog), October 21, 2020; Hinton, *America on Fire*; Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration

The newest histories of the carceral state have offered a more complete understanding of how race, power, and fear have functioned in the wake of spectacle murders in recent U.S. history. After the murders of Trayvon Martin by a night watch patrolman in 2014 and Michael Brown by a police officer in 2015, many took up new questions about the role of policing in our society and pushed for broader conversations about state brutality. Drawing on decades of organizing work, these scholars and activists have re-dedicated themselves since the murder of George Floyd in June of 2020, sounding a renewed call for "white feminists" (as Audre Lorde called them in the '90s) to actively reexamine their own roles in maintaining a violent and harmful status quo that absolves us of responsibility. Through advocating for what bell hooks has called a "carceral feminism," many of us have often bought into the myth that policing could protect us from sexual violence, misunderstanding their role as agents and enforcers of racial capitalism at the direct expense of our nonwhite community members while also denying ourselves a world that acknowledges our experiences and traumas by displacing them onto others.[32]

By considering how these histories interacted with the present in the state of California, I found a pronounced increase in true crime content entering the mainstream at specific moments in time. It took me a long time to recognize that these influxes were usually an indication of multiple coordinated retellings featuring the same people, which worked to displace a citizen-led narrative that had recently exposed police incompetence, failure, and inaction – either about the case in question, or another that involved the same people. While the content itself changed rapidly – taking the form of fictional representations and longform print journalism in the '70s and early '80s; specialty infotainment programming on cable television and documentary film in the late '80s and early '90s; live or breaking

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Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 703–34; Julia Sudbury, "Reform or Abolition? Using Popular Mobilisations to Dismantle the 'Prisonindustrial Complex,'" *Criminal Justice Matters* 102, no. 1 (July 3, 2015): 17–19; Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg, *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform*, First edition (Oakland,California: University of California Press, 2021).

[32] For more on "white feminism" and resulting "carceral feminism," which built on older systems of racialized power, see Anna Terwiel, "What Is Carceral Feminism?," *Political Theory* 48 (November 26, 2019); Tamara K. Nopper, "Understanding Abolition through bell hooks," *The New Inquiry*, April 25, 2022; Kaba, Murakawa, and Nopper, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*"; Maggie Doherty, "The Long Awakening of Adrienne Rich," *The New Yorker*, November 23, 2020; Gay, *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*. James R. Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy: The Cases That Challenged American Legal and Social Justice* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2008); Aya Gruber, *The Feminist War on Crime: The Unexpected Role of Women's Liberation in Mass Incarceration* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

news programs that required journalists to fill hours of broadcasting slots with fresh content in these same years; and, finally, the corporate-sponsored crowdsourcing efforts like Oxygen's "Crime Con," which attempt in our present to harness the efforts of enterprising web sleuths with the power to question the police in service of making it harder to question them at all. Over the course of these decades, the form of the storytelling itself shaped these stories and how people remembered them as much as the events that produced them did. In other words: whenever historical actors reopened old wounds by beginning to question established narratives around the spectacle crimes that they and their communities had experienced, they created the potential for mass mobilization to disinvest in the structures of racial capitalism – forcing those invested in their maintenance to reintroduce easy morality tales that restored order and foreclosed on our ability to imagine worlds beyond them.

To orient you as you work your way through the following pages, you can think of the history of true crime as falling into one of two categories:

The first challenges official narratives and is often made by people without professional ties to law enforcement, like Robert Graysmith, Ann Rule, and Michelle McNamara, whose interests lie in a concept of discovery and spring from a sense obligation to tell more of the story than has been publicly shared. They often used personal connections to gain access to sources and evidence that investigators had previously kept under tight control.

The second is a product of relationships between entertainment institutions and policing institutions, and these use celebrity victims like John Walsh to narrate a crime from the state's perspective. Their interests lie primarily in closure, which stops the media cycle and demobilizes political movements that gain power and appeal by spectacularizing police failures. While not all murders can become a spectacle, once cases reached a certain threshold of public detectability it behooved officials involved in the investigation to produce their own, definitive version to dispel rumor and maintain legitimacy. These events, though they vary based on individual experience, followed a concrete historical pattern that I was able to break down into four phases.

The first, lasting several days or weeks, occurred in the immediate aftermath of a murder, when neighbors, family, friends, and locals mobilized to aid in the investigation by drawing on lessons they had learned from their participation in social movements or past experiences of violence. Local police proved clumsy and defensive as narrative and visual material leaked to the press and enraged members of the public who, left to fend for themselves, pushed officials to be more proactive while attempting to protect themselves through extralegal means. This could take the form of public protest and testimony about the embodied experience of terror, like the opening vignette of Chapter 2; or through the formation of neighborhood watch patrols, phone trees, and dissemination of self-defense education and materials, like that shown in Chapter 4.

In a second phase, much to the chagrin of police leadership, witnesses and secondary victims thrust their stories into the limelight to pressure police to act. Once a case entered the national media stage, it took on a life of its own and the number of people affected grew exponentially, making it a moment of great opportunity to make demands on and seek accountability from officials. In each case examined here, however – and in many, many others – local police, detectives, and federal agents neglected to live up to expectations the public had learned from entertainment, accelerating the local activism that strengthened extralegal surveillance networks and materially funneled resources into law enforcement throughout these decades.

Next, the perpetrator was identified due to civilian participation in the investigation, leading to celebration, public displays of grief, and a thirst for more detail. A groundswell of anti-crime organizing followed, often in the form of memorial legislation like the Amber Alert, which were designed to prevent or criminalize specific details of a spectacle murder story, most of which failed to prevent the same type of crime later, as we will see in Chapter 5. Criminal trials brought new information and a larger body of testimonials to public attention, providing much of the source material used in the true crime books and specials that shortly followed. It was during this third phase that state actors – particularly prosecutors like Vincent Bugliosi and investigators like Special Agent John Douglas of the FBI – hustled to reshape the narrative, presenting failures as reasons for their own existence and offering themselves as experts

and talking heads (but only to approved sources). They aligned with record numbers of advocates of the growing victims' rights movement, particularly white women, who had themselves begun to respond to these same failures by calling for change and hoped that police could provide it.

In the final phase of a spectacle murder, the incident is revived through the true crime genre, taking on new relevance for those who did not live through it and discover themselves anew in stories from the past that have been kept from them. If public interest in a case can be maintained and producers find new and exciting ways to present the story – usually when a similar crime occurs in the present, providing evidence that things have *not* changed and thus leaving previous storytellers vulnerable to the revelations of new evidence – there is no reason that this final phase cannot continue indefinitely. It is this repetition that leads to obsession and re-traumatization for victims, practitioners, and consumers alike.

Despite massive changes during this period, there was often very little separation physically, virtually, or across time, between the actors in the story. This is particularly useful here as we consider spectacle events because the tenets and conditions of spectacle evolved so quickly between these decades from radio to broadcast television; broadcast to cable; cable to Internet – that each new set of spectators consumed them differently. The parent-child relationship was also a central concern for agents of this history and how people raised their children was just as important as how those children reproduced or rejected those teachings in their adult lives, or rediscovered them through new violent events in their own present that reminded them of the past. It is through interactions between these people across time that we can trace the development of the spectacle murder in American culture and pull back the curtain of the true crime narratives that have prevented us from seeing the whole picture at once.

In Chapter 1, we explore the conditions of possibility in 1969 when two storytelling models emerged because of media frenzies surrounding the Tate-LaBianca murders and the "Zodiac Killer" in the North San Francisco Bay Area. Prior to the victims' rights movement, the narrative of the crime *itself* (rather than its aftermath, evidence, and trial) was the focus as members of the public attempted to make sense of various clues left by the killers and leaked through the press. These events both occurred in the

wake of several years of spectacularized police brutality nationally and contemporary arguments against the criminal-legal system (particularly the birth of an organized movement to abolish prisons) put agents of the law on defense. New media access allowed perpetrators, victims, journalists, and activists to use the press strategically in the face of broader political debates about the role of policing, the military, and the administrative state in American life during the Vietnam War.

As we will see in the case of Robert Graysmith's ragtag investigation of the unsolved Zodiac case, these events opened space for witnesses to revise official accounts and learn from one another about how often the key pieces of evidence in spectacular trials came not from police but from regular folks who were just trying to help. Quick attempts on the part of law enforcement agents, public officials, and conservative celebrities to "set the record straight" through depictions like Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter* and Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* (1971) led amateurs interested and invested in resolution to continue asking questions. The undeniable fact that information had been intentionally withheld from the public left many with an itch to uncover a *real* truth. There was something not right – something they couldn't quite put their finger on – and the lingering mystery was part of the intrigue that produced a record number of retellings in the decades that followed.

In Chapter 2, we consider the emergence of the new social problem of "serial murder" through the case of the Hillside Stranglers, two men who terrorized the city of Los Angeles for five long months in 1977 and 1978. People going about their daily business stumbled upon the nude, mutilated bodies of young women on their lawns; in their driveways; and on their golf courses. For a moment in time, national news segments broadcast the images of these women's bodies without censorship, producing a visceral reaction for those who viewed them and creating a density of violent material that combined with other cases across the country in a distinct sense of ever-present danger, particularly for women. Suburban mothers, radical feminists, and sex workers all protested police inaction and understood the murders to be part of a larger constellation of violence against them, as evidenced by a spectacular demonstration on the steps of City Hall in December called "In Mourning and Rage" and the efforts of women in sex districts to protect themselves without police help. Around the same time, low-budget

slasher movies employed a record number of young women actresses and introduced the concept of the "final girl" to film audiences. Like Laurie Strode of John Carpenter's *Halloween*, who survives attack after attack from the formidable Michael Myers by keeping her wits about her and fighting back, these feminine heroes provided a counter to representations of violence against women that exclusively served the male gaze.

In Chapter 3, we begin to see the concept and cultural identity of the "serial killer" take shape in both popular culture, as exemplified through the influence of the "queen of true crime" Ann Rule, and through the work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's novel Behavioral Science Unit, or BSU as it is commonly known (you may recognize it from shows like *Criminal Minds*, based on the memoirs of Special Agents John E. Douglas and Robert Ressler). These two approaches were vastly different in method, but they remained intimately and co-constitutively linked in their goals. Together they pathologized white male sexual violence, locating it in the mind of the perpetrator rather than in social conditions, and produced a set of solutions in line with the expansion of both the FBI and all other institutions of policing: the influx of women police officers to dedicated homicide units and the funneling of more federal resources into crime research and crime science.

These accompanied a widespread campaign to link crime-solving techniques with both moral and scientific authority through film, television, and print media. Federal law enforcement continued to excel throughout these decades at suppressing leftist movements across the globe, but the BSU furnished a new era of "copaganda" to encourage audiences to move on from the embarrassing COINTELPRO and civil rights abuse scandals of the '60s and '70s and support federal crime control initiatives. A new generation of children grew up hoping to become FBI agents, encountering more spectacle violence than any that had come before them, but it turns out that many of these stories were oddly specific to the experiences of the agents who told them, whose reliability as narrators is suspect at best – but whose emotional vulnerability in true crime testimonials offers us the opportunity to consider new directions in the history of emotions and carceral state scholarship.

In Chapter 4, we see how ineffective proposed solutions to the serial murder problem had been through the stories of those who experienced the reign of terror unleashed by the so-called "Night Stalker" in Los Angeles during the summer of 1985. While the LAPD once again scrambled to manage both the investigation and the public's access to it, many Angelenos responded by turning to self-defense, forming neighborhood watch patrols and lionizing vigilantes while their neighbors locked themselves inside, imagining their own deaths.[33] During the same decade, infotainment networks produced new hybrid forms of crime news and reality television like *America's Most Wanted*, which asked audiences to participate in carceral projects like surveillance, reporting, and even investigation. The very existence of crime coverage in the news helped to sell crime entertainment television, and a new cast of characters – John Walsh among them – began platforming ordinary people, many of whom would never have been on television otherwise, alongside more established experts. Unassuming folks like Curtis Sliwa, Maury Terry, and Nancy Grace became nationally recognized experts through their proximity to cases despite little training, encouraging audiences to "do their own research" and peddling theories that often bordered on conspiracy. Meanwhile, the police remained as inefficient as ever at stopping violence in progress or solving murders that had already happened. Instead, they focused their efforts on proactively policing the poorest neighborhoods, using crime statistics to procure paramilitary equipment and train special ops teams. Black and brown communities described feeling that they lived in "occupied territory," as if at war with the United States, while officers rallied around the concept of the "thin blue line."[34]

In Chapter 5, I chronicle my experiences attempting to understand and process the murder of 12-year-old Polly Klaas in Petaluma, California, in 1993. Polly's abduction from her bedroom during a sleepover exemplified a broader panic about child safety and "stranger danger," which Paul Renfro has

[33] May, *Fortress America*; Philip Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*, Reprint edition (Citadel, 2016); Paul Skolnick, *Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer*, Documentary (The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC), 2021).

[34] Simon Balto, "Presidential Debate: Stop and Frisk's Warning From Chicago," *TIME*, September 27, 2016. He takes this from James Baldwin.

identified as part of a moral panic over the concepts of home and family.[35] Secondary victims of crimes like Marc Klaas helped push stories like Polly's to larger audiences – but it was primarily the actions of the citizens of Petaluma in the days following the abduction that cemented the case in popular memory, as images of their search and rescue effort touched those who had never met them and their labor launched Polly's image far and wide.

Despite reactionary legislation designed to quell public dissent in the wake of stories like these, Polly's family later felt swindled by the solutions they had been provided through California's infamous three-strikes law, which would have done nothing to save Polly's life but did incarcerate record numbers of Californians for life on stacked drug and property crimes. Over the course of the '90s, the 24-hour news cycle gave way to new specialty programming on cable channels like Court TV and journalists like Zoey Tur – who had captured iconic moments like the beating of Reginald Denny in Watts in 1992 and the OJ Simpson Bronco chase from a helicopter, pushing crime coverage to *literally* new heights from the skies – struggled with the weight of the things they had seen as well as internal conflicts that accompany participating in the sensationalizing of violence in a punitive political environment.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we meet a countercultural group of murder obsessives: those operating and communing outside of state sponsorship. An examination of the murderabilia industry reveals how, during an especially punitive moment, serial killers like John Wayne Gacy became some of the only incarcerated voices to reach the public from behind bars. Victims' rights advocates lobbied for the end of the murder trade, giving audiences the impression that men like Manson and Dahmer were making a pretty penny off the arts, crafts, and letters that had found their way onto EBay, and they fought hard to limit prison correspondence. Many were especially incensed by women who formed romantic relationships with incarcerated murderers.

It was not until I began working with prisoner rights groups and corresponding with incarcerated people that I realized how exceptional it was for inmates to get things in and out of prison

[35] Renfro, *Stranger Danger*.

walls. As Albert Woodfox has shown in his memoir *Solitary*, the prison remained a highly controlled environment in which corrections officers exercised complete discretion during these decades. Outliers like Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Dennis Rader ("BTK") thus became covers for making it even harder to get, for example, anti-capitalist and anti-prison literature to folks attempting to improve their conditions behind bars. In this way, the development of a culture industry around serial killers can be understood as a result of the total removal of the possibility for empathy toward perpetrators of crimes within the criminal-legal system and mainstream conversations about safety and danger in the "tough on crime" era. Geeks, goths, and rejects who felt alienated from the parents and teachers working hard to sell them sanitized versions of American history thus found a strange solace in the existence of so many others still struggling to let go of traumas that felt, looked, and sounded like theirs.

While exploring how people felt in real time, we are necessarily questioning the truth claims of true crime by challenging its place in our history as a rich and storied archive of violence. You will find narratives, images, and historical actors that are familiar to you, either directly or in the abstract. I hope you will also find stories, images, and historical actors that unsettle you; that make you question why the former come so easily while the latter feel so challenging. It is not perfect – this is a clumsy attempt at untangling the knot that is this history. There are many problems with it, and I especially worry about ways that my evidence and words might be twisted to suit purposes that advance projects of victimization and criminalization. But that is exactly what this dissertation is about, after all: how our stories influence us and change over time.

The evidence provided here suggests that spectacle murder stories are not going anywhere. Perhaps we can find better ways to tell them

1: Another Bizarre Murder

Bettye June Harden and her husband Donald lived in Salinas, California, and they liked puzzles. On a leisurely Sunday, they came across something that piqued their interest in the morning paper. On page 9 of the *San Francisco Examiner*, nestled atop three ads for women's clothing, sat an unsolved cipher made up of strange symbols. Reportedly, it contained the identity of a man claiming to have murdered three people in two separate attacks about an hour north of the Hardens' home by car, in Vallejo. Several days earlier, on July 31, 1969, editors at the *Examiner*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Vallejo Times-Herald* had all received handwritten letters and a single section of the mysterious three-part coded message. The author of these letters had included privileged details about the crime scenes and made a troubling demand of the editors: if they did not print the cipher on the front page by the evening of Friday, August 1, the man would kill again. He wrote: "I will cruse around all weekend killing lone people in the night then move on to kill again, until I end up with a dozen people over the weekend."[1]

Vallejo Police Chief Jack Stiltz, who had been notified immediately, expressed skepticism that a person responsible for multiple murders would send such a brazen confession and deemed it a probable hoax. Stiltz requested that the "Cipher Killer," as the papers began calling him, "send more letters with more facts to prove it." He sent another note to the *Examiner* in response. This time, he gave himself a symbol, and a name:

ZODIAC ⊕

[1] The Zodiac Killer's letters often included misspellings and strange grammatical errors, which investigators attempted to use to identify him throughout the twentieth century. While handwriting analysis (analyzing patterns in both the content of the writing and in its form and aesthetic quality) was a common form of early forensic science popularized by the FBI through their teachings on hostage negotiation, handwriting analysis is now considered a form of junk science. We will talk more about junk science in Chapter 3. For more on "graphology," you can start here: Maarten Boudry, Stefaan Blancke, and Massimo Pigliucci, "What Makes Weird Beliefs Thrive? The Epidemiology of Pseudoscience," *Philosophical Psychology* 28, no. 8 (December 2015): 1177–98.

While Zodiac had not followed through on his promise of a weekend rampage before providing more evidence, he threatened the papers once again: "I was not happy to see that I did not get front page coverage." Police, upon receiving pressure from the editors, sent the cipher to Naval cryptographers and code specialists at the local Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offices and to the Bureau's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Not one expert was able to make headway before the editors agreed, reluctantly, to send it to print.

The Hardens encountered all three ciphers printed together for the first time and I can imagine there were likely others, too, who passed over the crossword or skimmed past the funny pages to take a crack at the Cipher's code. Donald, a high school history teacher, had been fascinated by codes since he was a kid. He grabbed a codebreaking book he had picked up at some point over the years and set to work but, after several hours, he was ready to give up. When Betty June got involved in earnest, she became determined to uncover the message if it took all night. With no background in codes, she helped by using her basic deductive reasoning skills instead: Anyone with an ego big enough to send such a message would probably begin writing with the letter "I;" and if they claimed to have killed someone, it made sense to start by trying to decode the letters K, I, and L, which would give them the words "I" and "KILL," with which they could work backwards to decode the rest. Bettye June and Donald worked together for more than twenty hours on what essentially amounted to a real-life murder mystery game.

They finally revealed a long and chilling message that would make national headlines and enter the annals of true crime lore. While the couple attempted to hand the disturbing solution over to the *Chronicle* immediately, they were told on the phone to mail it in instead.[2]

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[2] At this point in time, Zodiac had attacked four people (two couples) but one of the men survived. He appears not to have known this at the time he wrote the letter, and thus claimed responsibility for a murder that had not occurred. Still, he gravely wounded the survivor. It has been difficult to balance storytelling with the disparity in knowledge between police, the public, and those experiencing the crime through a personal connection. I have tried, wherever possible, to be clear about these timelines but details may sometimes appear in the analysis before they have officially "happened" in the narrative. Ultimately, I learned a lot from my own narrativizing process about how uncertain these events felt for historical actors at the time, who did not have access to the truth but had to imagine many potential truths at once. For a full account of the Hardens and their fascinating decoding story, see Robert Graysmith, *Zodiac: The Shocking True Story of the Hunt for the Nation's Most Elusive Serial Killer* (Berkley, 2007); Robert Graysmith, *Zodiac Unmasked: The Identity of America's Most Elusive Serial Killer Revealed* (Berkeley, 2007). You can see the ciphers here: Tom Voigt, "ZodiacKiller.Com: The ONLY Zodiac Website Recognized by Law Enforcement," 1998, https://www.zodiackiller.com/Letters.html. For fairly trustworthy narrative representations of the public's reception to the

It began with the words "I like killing people because it is so much fun."

The "Zodiac Killer," as he came to be known, continued to terrorize the Bay Area with threats and attacks over the following months. He stabbed another couple picnicking at Lake Berryessa in Napa County in late September, killing the woman and gravely wounding the man before leaving his calling card in thick, dark ink on the driver's side door of their car. In mid-October, he murdered a cab driver in San Francisco, placing the case within the jurisdiction of San Francisco Police Department. While the SFPD had more resources in 1969 than they had ever had before, they were ill equipped for a state-wide manhunt and, even if they had been equipped, they did not share information between local agencies and thus missed the opportunity to combine efforts.

With such a bizarre case exposed to national media coverage, however, police fears of prying eyes from spectators now trumped concerns over who would catch the Zodiac first. Over the course many years, Zodiac continued to send letters, ciphers, maps, and drawings, claiming responsibility for several crimes he may or may not have committed. He took advantage of rifts between police and the press by choosing to correspond exclusively with journalists and media outlets, through which he relentlessly taunted and mocked the proud SFPD. Through increasingly strange and cryptic communications, he reminded many officers of the infamous Jack the Ripper, another unidentified murderer, who had killed seven women in London and similarly taunted police through anonymous letters during the 19th century.[3]

The fact that the Zodiac chose to communicate with newspapers rather than police is illustrative of the shifts that had taken place in the decades since the rise of what we have come to call "yellow

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Zodiac case, I do recommend the 2008 movie by David Fincher, particularly for its aesthetic qualities. You can also access high resolution images of all of the Zodiac communications online at the website listed above. See David Fincher, *Zodiac*, (Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros., Phoenix Pictures, 2007).

[3] London's Jack the Ripper is widely considered the first "serial killer," with H.H. Holmes following in Chicago in 1893. Both attained mythic status through their press contacts but were considered extreme outliers by police, who were much more concerned with the policing of space than the policing of activities during this period. We will talk more about the professionalization of policing in cities and beyond in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. For more on Jack the Ripper and H. H. Holmes, see: David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.); Hallie Rubenhold, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* (Houghton Mifflin, 2019); Alan Whitehouse, *The Ripper*, (Netflix, 2020); Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004).

journalism," a form of reporting from the turn of the twentieth century that stressed sensational details for mass appeal. While Jack the Ripper took advantage of the quiet anonymity of the London sex districts, America's first "serial killer," H. H. Holmes, relied on the anonymity offered by the new spectacles of the modern city.[4] The women he killed were, to him, just a drop in the sea of faceless people flowing in and out of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition in 1893. Between then and the Zodiac Killer, there had been many spectacular crimes to satiate public interest in both news and entertainment. This, however, was an important moment of vulnerability for the SFPD – and for police departments across the nation – whose agents had learned from widespread critiques of police brutality during the civil rights demonstrations of the preceding years that an audience could fundamentally change police procedure.[5]

On October 13, 1969, while claiming responsibility for the murder of a San Francisco cabbie named Paul Stine, the Zodiac wrote forebodingly to the *Chronicle*: "School children make nice targets, I think I shall wipe out a school bus some morning. Just shoot out the front tires + then pick off the kiddies as they come bouncing out." *Chronicle* editors had to make the decision whether to print it knowing that they would antagonize the SFPD if they did – but would lose public allegiance if another

[4] For examples of historical literature on modern spectacle, see: Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000); Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Amy K. DeFalco Lippert, "The Visual Pedagogy of Reform: Picturing White Slavery in America," *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 854–88; Amy K. DeFalco Lippert, *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*, 1969, 26; Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle*, translated edition (Black & Red, 1977).

[5] Between 1893 and 1969, there were a few cases that reached similar heights in contemporary coverage, most notably the kidnapping of the "Lindbergh baby" in 1932. Importantly, Charles Lindbergh himself was already a celebrity at the time, meaning that the spectacle that surrounded these events had little to do with the actions of the public or the perpetrator; it already existed by virtue of the victims' social status and the structure of contemporary crime journalism. Lindbergh's fame, in fact, led to a lot of speculation about whether he had collaborated with the media to stage the coverage, or even the crime itself, as a distraction from his own involvement with the Nazi Party. Another comparable case, the murder of Elizabeth Short, or the "Black Dahlia," which we will discuss briefly in another chapter, received national coverage but developed significantly *more* cultural influence during the '80s with the release of the crime scene photos. This was a direct result of shifts in crime entertainment chronicled in this dissertation – and so it is a prehistory, like Lindbergh, that is not included here. For more on these cases see Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Miles Corwin, "The Black Dahlia: The Long, Strange History of Los Angeles' Coldest Cold Case," *CrimeReads* (blog), September 10, 2020; David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2nd edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003); "Charles Lindbergh's Real Nazi Ties Are at the Heart of David Simon's 'The Plot Against America,'" *Esquire*, March 16, 2020.

paper printed the story first. They chose to print the bus letter on October 15, also making the public aware of the killer's moniker for the first time.[6]

Those who could afford to do so began driving their children to school rather than sending them on the bus, and SFPD stationed helicopters across the city and bulked up car and foot patrols around local schools to monitor suspicious activity. A week later, a man claiming to be the Zodiac phoned the news talk show *A.M. San Francisco* demanding to speak on the air with Melvin Belli, a celebrity in the legal world with clients including Chuck Barry, Muhammad Ali, and Jack Ruby, who had murdered JFK assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Just a few weeks earlier, Belli had even represented the legendary Rolling Stones in their negotiations to play the Altamont Speedway, San Francisco's attempt at Woodstock.[7]

Belli agreed to the interview, which was broadcast live on local television the week before Halloween on October 22. Viewers tuned in across the area as a local station recorded Belli's conversation with a gravelly-voiced stranger who made strange noises and complained of headaches that made him kill people. After several minutes on the air, police determined that the call had been traced to a mental institution and could not possibly have been made by the culprit. The SFPD had used local television news as a stage to potentially identify and capture the mysterious Zodiac killer; instead, they forced audiences to imagine him on the other end of the line, thereby inviting more public engagement with an active investigation that had few leads.[8] Beloved CBS anchor Walter Cronkite, who had joined

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[6] While I do not have time to discuss it here for fear of overwhelming the reader, I suggest reviewing the Patty Hearst kidnapping for a microhistory on the twentieth-century legacy of yellow journalism. For primary material, see Hearst's own 1976 account of the events *The Trial of Patty Hearst*. For secondary analysis, see William Graebner, *Patty's Got a Gun: Patricia Hearst in 1970s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016).

[7] For more on another decade-defining murder – as well as primary footage of Belli – see Albert and David Maysles, *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles Films, Penforta, 1970). In December of 1969, four people died at the Altamont Speedway Free Festival; three as a result of poor planning and one, Meredith Hunter, at the hands of a security guard. The latter was caught on film during the making of the music documentary *Gimme Shelter*, making it another important spectacle murder in short succession to those discussed in this chapter. Like the Manson Family, which we will discuss in the next few pages, its participants became proof of the perils of rock and roll as well as the potential dangers of rejecting capitalism. For more on how shifting class politics shaped popular culture after 1969 – particularly music – see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010).

[8] I have not seen the full interview with Melvin Belli with my own eyes, but I have seen portions aired on national news. Throughout the research process, I found that I had trouble accessing certain archival sources that were in high demand (including once being told, for example, that a documentary film crew had the footage I needed!) Since I could not always rely on being able to find the original source, and because of the volume of material I already had to provide context in those cases, I describe some of these scenes based on a combination of what I have seen in primary material and what I have seen in

the nightly news in 1962 and quite powerfully cried on air while reporting the news that President John F. Kennedy had been shot, aired portions of the Belli interview on his segment.

In 1969, television news looked a lot different than it does now. While today we exercise great personal discretion over which news sources to consume and where to find them, there were only three broadcast networks in 1969: ABC, CBS, and NBC. Television news began in earnest during the Second World War in the form of 10- to -15-minute newsreels. By 1969, each of the "big three" aired a nightly segment that lasted thirty minutes and, chances were, you and your neighbors saw the same coverage. Figures like Cronkite were not just celebrities to many in the audience – they were trusted household names.[9]

In the decade preceding, however, the repression of civil rights demonstrations; coverage of the war in Vietnam; and several high-profile assassinations (and their aftermaths) had been caught on film, including those of President Kennedy in 1963 and both Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The same year, many watched members of the Chicago Police Department beat and brutalize anti-war protestors at the Democratic National Convention at the behest of Mayor Richard Daley. With the veil between formal news coverage and the reality of events beginning to thin, viewers and broadcasters alike struggled to negotiate a new relationship between a consuming public and the media ambassadors who furnished them with the news. Many voters agreed when President Richard Nixon drew on the same language as George Wallace and Barry Goldwater in calling for a new era of

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dramatized reenactments of the events based on the same research. For this scene, I recommend David Fincher's *Zodiac*. Fincher consulted with Robert Graysmith, whose account I trust when it comes to describing the atmosphere of an event and its aftermath because he relied heavily on testimonials – the same method I use. I would not necessarily trust Graysmith's accounts, however, when it comes to who is responsible for certain actions. This is no sleight against him, but a methodological choice.

[9] Cronkite retired in 1981, which ushered in the era of the 24-hour news cycle and eventual "live" and "breaking" news craze. For a look at how television began to change during this period, see "Television Gets Real" in Tom Hanks, *The Seventies*, (CNN, 2015). While the framing is a bit simplistic here and its participants far from neutral, it is an excellent visual overview of this shift that includes primary evidence. Be wary of decontextualized speakers, including Patrick Buchanan, whose involvement in conservative media shaped how audiences perceived and responded to spectacular crimes. For more context, see Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Carrie A. Rentschler, *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Media Nation: The Political History of News in Modern America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). I also recommend the documentary series by Rebecca Arzoian, *Trial By Media*, (Netflix, 2020).

"law and order" to suppress the widespread violence they were collectively experiencing through television for the first time.[10]

In a series of lectures in 1996, historian Dan T. Carter remarked that the influx of video footage following events like these on the nightly news – particularly the urban uprisings that resulted from the King assassination – created a distinctly new sense of intimacy (and, thus, proximity to danger) between the consumer themselves and the potential for terror in the outside world.[11] While the urban conflagrations of the mid- to late-60s were obvious expressions of political dissatisfaction, grief, and anger, police and public officials represented them as senseless mob rule and began to build violent repressive tactics in the form of crowd-control and "nonlethal weapons" training into the fabric of how the public understood the purpose of policing: to protect the viewer from what they saw on television.[12]

To watch TV from home, however, you have to be able to afford a TV. The two decades following World War II had brought prosperity to more Americans than ever before through the privileges of home ownership, dramatically expanding the market for household consumer goods, gadgets, and electronics, the purchases of which were marketed as patriotic during the Cold War.[13] Suburbanization drastically shifted the political landscape of the United States as droves of young adults

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[10] For a few works on spectacles of police repression, see Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016); Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right*; Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

[11] Hinton, *America on Fire*; Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action* (New York City, NY: Bold Type Books, 2020); Robin D.G. Kelley, "What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?" *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020.

[12] For more on how warfare has contributed to the expansion of domestic policing, including through forms of crowd control developed during World War II and in the fight against communism during the Cold War, see Anna Feigenbaum, *Tear Gas: From the Battlefields of World War I to the Streets of Today* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017); Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles : Cambridge, Mass: Semiotext, 2009); Hinton, *America on Fire*; P. B. Kraska, "Militarization and Policing—Its Relevance to 21st Century Police," *Policing* 1, no. 4 (November 7, 2007): 501–13; Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019).

[13] For primary source material on consumption to fight communism, see Kevin Rafferty, *The Atomic Cafe*, Documentary (Libra Films, 1982); Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

and families left urban areas for secluded enclaves on the outskirts during these years – often working and being paid within the city but taking their spending money with them at the end of the day.[14] Mike Davis has written extensively about how the suburbanites of Los Angeles used the power and stability conferred to them by homeownership to turn the city into a veritable "fortress" of surveillance.[15]

After the Watts rebellion in 1965, homeowners opposed with new zeal the communal living of back-to-the-land movements for many of the same reasons they rejected the Oakland Black Panther Party's robust network of social programs: these were potentially successful experiments in communism, which undermined their claim to power through private property. Community supervision efforts led by "housewife populists" of the grassroots conservative movement worked to exclude leftist academics and labor leaders from school boards while radical wings of the New Right like the John Birch Society, of which many women were members, similarly encouraged redbaiting and identification of local communists. For these activists, "communism" could be as expansive a term as it had been under Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s – referring to any group or set of actions that could potentially challenge the primacy of the male-breadwinner nuclear family ideal – and they set about raising the alarm against

[14] While some historians have called this an era of "white flight" from urban areas (particularly in the South), it is more accurate to describe this as "capital flight," which focuses on the allocation of resources rather than the identities of those fleeing the city. While these *were* most often white-presenting suburbanites, theories of racial capitalism – as well as the history of racial passing – require us to be more precise here. In Los Angeles in particular, newfound celebrity status could also alter or improve an individual's relationship to existing power structures. See Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Allyson Vanessa Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014); Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). For literature on racial capitalism that deals directly with questions of violence, spectacle, and space in this moment, see Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983); Stuart M. Hall, ed., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006); Andrew J. Diamond and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar Urban America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2021); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[15] For more on homeowner movements, See "Fortress L.A." in Davis, *City of Quartz;* Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th anniversary edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Paul M. Renfro, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

brainwashing, psychiatry, and cult leaders.[16] Considering this context, it was especially alarming to police officers in the North Bay that the Zodiac began referring to them within the leftist labor tradition as "pigs."[17] It was these activists on the left – the great specter of the police state – who argued that policing was not a system interested in safety, protection, or even law, but the protection of private property and the control of physical space.

In the bus letter, Zodiac even called attention to how frequently the race-based policing of the SFPD stood in the way of its ability to solve crimes and apprehend violent perpetrators by outing them for an embarrassing mistake: On the night he had murdered Paul Stine in Presidio Heights, the first two officers to arrive on scene allowed the Zodiac to escape because they had incorrectly assumed the murder suspect was Black despite the fact that witnesses described him clearly as a tall white man with a crew cut. They had stopped him while fleeing the scene to ask if he had seen the suspect or anything

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[16] I am drawing here on research I conducted into the history of anti-cultism in the state of California. I focused on trying to bridge a gap between representations of the members of Peoples' Temple, who died in the Jonestown massacre in 1978, and the realities of their politics and experiences while still in the United States. Made up primarily of Black members – many of them elderly – they advocated for the abolition of capitalism and modeled their church on the social programs of other leftist organizations and movements in Oakland and Los Angeles. Alyssa Smith, "Those Whom the Gods Wish to Destroy: Peoples Temple, The Counterculture, and the Anticult Movement in California, 1965-1978," unpublished seminar paper, University of Chicago, 2015. For examples of contemporary anti-cult literature, see Jack Sparks, *The Mind Benders*, Second Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979); Ted Patrick and Tom Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!* (New York: Dutton, 1976). For relevant historiography, see Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012); Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Anson D. Shupe and David G. Bromley, *The New Vigilantes: Deprogrammers, Anti-Cultists, and the New Religions* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980); Anson D. Shupe and Susan E. Darnell, *Agents of Discord: Deprogramming, Pseudo-Science, and the American Anticult Movement* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2006); Anson D. Shupe, David G. Bromley, and Donna L. Oliver, *The Anti-Cult Movement in America: A Bibliography and Historical Survey* (New York: Garland, 1984); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

[17] For more on the history of anti-capitalist organizing against individual instances of racialized police brutality and institutionalized forms of racial control in prisons, see: Howard Alk, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, Documentary (The Film Group, Chicago, 1971); Keisha N. Blain, *Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer's Enduring Message to America* (New York: Random House, 2022); Matthew Guariglia, "The Dirty Truth about Police Departments? They're Lying to Us," *NBC News*, June 7, 2020; Mike King, *When Riot Cops Are Not Enough : The Policing and Repression of Occupy Oakland* (Rutgers University Press, 2017); Paul A. Passavant, *Policing Protest: The Post-Democratic State and the Figure of Black Insurrection* (Duke University Press, 2021); Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Dan Berger, "Social Movements and Mass Incarceration," *Souls* 15, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2013): 3–18; David Correia and Tyler Wall, *Police: A Field Guide* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018); Hall, *Policing the Crisis*; Alon Harel, "The Duty to Criminalize," *Law and Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2015): 1–22; Hinton, *America on Fire*; Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); The Freedom Archives, *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation* (AK Press, 2002); Heather Ann Thompson, ed., *Speaking out: Activism and Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010); Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016); Orisanmi Burton, "Revolution is Illegal," *Spectre Journal*, April 21, 2021; Orisanmi Burton, "Diluting Radical History: Blood in the Water and the Politics of Erasure," *Abolition Journal*, January 26, 2017.

suspicious. As he wrote in the letter, "I said yes there was this man who was runnig by waveing a gun & the cops peeled rubber + went around the corner as I directed them + I disappeared into the park a block + a half away never to be seen again." Inspector Dave Toschi confirmed the Zodiac's account with the two officers a few days later.[18]

Within the broader context of unrest, political assassination, anti-communist fervor, growing inequality, and police violence – and believe it or not, within just a week of Bettye June Harden's solution to the cipher – entered America's perfect boogeyman.

Race War

Around midnight, one man and three women cut the phone lines and scaled the wall of 10050 Cielo Drive, a gated house in a neighborhood populated largely by celebrities, public figures, and the privately wealthy, nestled high in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles. Walking up the driveway, the intruders met a teenager named Stephen Parent on his way out by car. The man shot him, killing him instantly, and then entered the house by cutting a window screen. He then let two of the women inside to help him round up and bind the four occupants in the living room: Sharon Tate; Jay Sebring; Abigail Folger; and Voytek Frykowski. After a brief and horrifying struggle, the three intruders murdered all four occupants by shooting, stabbing, and beating them with knives and guns. Before leaving, one of them wrote "PIG" on the front door of the house using a victim's blood.

The following night, amid a bonanza of national and international media coverage of their first crime, the same four people plus three more (making seven in total; two men and five women), drove to 3301 Waverly Drive in nearby Los Feliz, a more modest residential area housing many middle-class

[18] The full quote: "If you don't want me to have this blast you must do two things. 1 Tell every one about the bus bomb with details. 2 I would like to see some nice Zodiac butons wandering about town. Every one else has these buttons like, [peace sign], black power, melvin eats bluber, etc. Well it would cheer me up considerably if I saw a lot of people wearing my buton. Please no nasty ones like melvin's Thank you." In all likelihood, he is referring here to Melvin Belli. Again, you can find his correspondence printed in Graysmith, *Zodiac: The Shocking True Story of the Hunt for the Nation's Most Elusive Serial Killer*; Graysmith, *Zodiac Unmasked: The Identity of America's Most Elusive Serial Killer Revealed*; Voigt, "ZodiacKiller.Com: The ONLY Zodiac Website Recognized by Law Enforcement."

families. The two men entered the house through an unlocked door and tied up its occupants, Rosemary and Leno LaBianca, as they had done the night before. One of the men then left, sending two of the women in. These three proceeded to murder the couple by stabbing them with knives and a bayonet. They carved the word "WAR" into the man's stomach and wrote several other words on the walls in blood. They all then returned, though separately, to their shared communal home at a ranch in Death Valley about twenty miles north of the city.[19]

Field reporter Dick Shoemaker reported on Monday (there was no nightly news on Sunday then) that "another bizarre murder" had occurred in Los Angeles and that investigators were shocked, confused, and had "found nothing" in the way of intelligible clues at either murder scene.[20] For weeks that turned to months, audiences across the United States consumed footage of the victims' bodies covered in sheets on a manicured lawn next to the pool; or zipped in bags and wheeled out the front door. During and after the resulting criminal trial in 1970, there would be more – years, even decades

[19] I have put together this narrative account over fifteen years of research on the Tate-LaBianca murders. While I had originally intended to spend time on the period of uncertainty between August and December, during which speculation spread like wildfire in Hollywood and beyond with most details provided by police and witnesses (focused on the gruesome violence of the crime scene) and celebrities who knew the victims (tabloid rumor colliding with traditional news). Such a deep dive proved impossible within the scope of this project if I wanted the reader to be able to focus on a density of similar material around this time, as there are so many other accounts that allow the case itself to drive readers to disparate conclusions. This set of murders has produced such a rich historical archive, with so many deeply personal stories, that I struggled to prioritize them and began to feel a strong sense of obligation to the actors. As such, I've chosen to save much of that analysis for another piece of writing.

Here, however, I have constructed a very basic account of the violent events themselves – sensationalized over time beyond recognition – with the intention of countering some of the harmful narrativizing that has already been done around this case. Notice my careful attribution of action and the absence of detail about felt or witnessed experiences of the victims' wounds, decisions I have made as a direct result of how those aspects of the story warped and metastasized over time and as an antidote to the "cop speak" of state accounts. The very creation of such a varied imagined landscape before details came to light was instrumental in providing an appetite for the "truth," of Vincent Bugliosi's definitive account, *Helter Skelter* (1974), which I do recommend reading if you are pursuing research on Manson; true crime; or the case itself. For my personal recommendations on what to consult about Tate-LaBianca, see: Monroe, *Savage Appetites*. Jeffrey Melnick, *Creepy Crawling: Charles Manson and the Many Lives of America's Most Infamous Family* (New York, NY: Arcade, 2018); Karina Longworth, "Charlie Manson's Hollywood," *You Must Remember This Podcast*; Hadar Aviram, *Yesterday's Monsters: The Manson Family Cases and the Illusion of Parole* (University of California Press, 2020); David Felton and David Dalton, "Special Report on Charles Manson," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, February 1970; Rachel Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry," *Believer Magazine*, November 20, 2017; Jay Duplass, *Manson Family Vacation*, Comedy, Drama, Thriller (Duplass Brothers Productions, Extremophiles Inc., Logolite Entertainment, 2015); John Borowski, *Serial Killer Culture*, Documentary (Waterfront Productions, 2014); Joan Didion, *White Album*, 59246th edition (New York: FSG Adult, 2009); Mary Harron, *Charlie Says*, Drama (Epic Level Entertainment, Roxwell Films, 2019); Jeffrey Melnick, "'Charlie Says' and the Santa Cruz Prison Project," *Nursing Clio*, July 25, 2019.

[20] Quote by Dick Shoemaker, ABC Evening News, August 10, 1969. Accessed via Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.

worth of consumable coverage of the infamous Tate-LaBianca murders, the figurative "end of the sixties" in the words of countercultural icon Joan Didion.[21]

The first press agents to arrive on scene at Cielo Drive were a television crew from local ABC7, which quickly began capturing footage of the youngest victim in the driveway and widely circulated footage of homicide detectives searching the area around the home. The crew had no idea what they had stumbled upon until reporter Al Wiman ran into gossip columnist Rona Barrett near the driveway, with whom he was familiar because of her regular segment on his channel. Confused by her interest in a seemingly random homicide in the Hills, Wiman asked what she was doing there. "Don't you know who lives here?" she replied incredulously. "This is Roman Polanksi's house."[22] Polanski was an up-and-coming French-Polish film director who had survived the Holocaust and begun to make a name for himself in Hollywood, marrying movie star Sharon Tate and enjoying both critical and popular acclaim for his 1968 film Rosemary's Baby, in which a young housewife played by Mia Farrow becomes pregnant with Satan's child.[23]

As news spread that his wife, Sharon Tate, had been among the victims, the tone shifted in Hollywood as media outlets in Los Angeles and beyond immediately focused in on the tragic death of the beautiful blond actress, who had been eight months pregnant. This was in part because of how many professional images already existed of her and partly because so many in the public eye knew and could speak about her. Aside from Parent (who just happened to be visiting the house caretaker), however, *all* the victims had been high-profile. Among the dead were Abigail Folger, a socialite, philanthropist, and heiress to the Folger Coffee fortune, and boyfriend Voytek Frykowski, another Polish Holocaust survivor and aspiring writer and actor who had worked on several of Polanksi's films. The fifth victim was

[21] Didion, *White Album*; Melnick, *Creepy Crawling*.

[22] David Ono, "Charles Manson: A look back at the Tate-LaBianca murders," *ABC 7 Eyewitness News*, June 15, 2015 (originally published Aug 4, 2009); and David Ono, "Former ABC7 reporter recalls finding evidence in Charles Manson Case," *ABC 7 Eyewitness News*, March 18, 2017.

[23] Roman Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby*, Drama, Horror (William Castle Productions, 1968). Much was made of ties to Satanism in the weeks following the attacks, due in large part to Polanski's film.

celebrity hairstylist Jay Sebring, a close friend of Sharon's whose studio was responsible for styling many of the era's icons, including The Doors' front man Jim Morrison.

One of the first officers on scene remarked that the murders seemed "kind of ritualistic" and others leaked details about what Tate had been wearing, the positioning of her body, and her wounds. Rumors soon swirled about sex parties, drugs, satanism, and human sacrifice in Benedict Canyon and nearby Laurel Canyon, home to many famous musicians already under fire by the establishment as heroes of the counterculture. Throughout September, October, and November, the press leaked rumors about the Tate-LaBianca case to a ravenous public, forcing the nation's most famous police department, the LAPD, to hold several defensive press conferences, most of which consisted of artfully dodging questions and stonewalling reporters. As family members of the victims became increasingly frustrated with the pace of the investigation, Polanski and his celebrity friends posted their own reward for information, further frustrating police leadership. Having inherited the department from predecessor William H. Parker the same month as the murders, Chief of Police Ed Davis soon ensured his own place in the halls of crime celebrity by becoming the voice of the LAPD's case against the Manson Family.[24]

While we will discuss celebrity further in Chapters 5 and 6, it is crucial to point out how central the fame of those murdered at Cielo Drive became to the memory of the events.[25] People still speculate, for example, about the involvement of other well-known names: Had Jack Nicholson really been the one to clean up all that blood at Sharon Tate's house? Who else had been invited that night? (If you ask Scott Michaels, who we will meet later, he'll tell you that folktales proliferated with "everyone in Hollywood" claiming they were supposed to be there.) Celebrity also provided a convenient cover for the police department's refusal to share details with the public, as they could claim they were protecting his

[24] Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974); Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*, Documentary, (ABC News, Highway 41 Productions, Hulu, 2021); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles.*

[25] Vanessa Díaz, *Manufacturing Celebrity: Latino Paparazzi and Women Reporters in Hollywood* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2020); P. David Marshall, ed., *The Celebrity Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006); Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*; Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities.*

privacy despite Polanski's own very public displays of grief. It took the LAPD until mid-October to even connect the Cielo Drive murders to those of Rosemary and Leno LaBianca just a few miles away.[26]

In October, a group of LAPD officers raided a hippie commune on Spahn Ranch – an old film set in Death Valley – and arrested the Tate-LaBianca perpetrators on separate auto-theft charges. Though they failed to make charges stick (actually, they even failed to file crucial paperwork documenting the raid), officers raided the group again a few weeks later, arresting Susan Atkins, who awaited trial for stealing "dune buggies" in a women's facility. While there, she was charged for murder in an entirely separate investigation – of the young musician and drifter Gary Hinman – and told her cell mate and a friend that she had also murdered Sharon Tate. In search of the $25,000 reward, Virginia Graham reported Atkins. Her confession hit the *Los Angeles Times* just a few days after her closed grand jury testimony, and it became clearer that the LAPD had bungled the investigation by failing to follow up on obvious leads.[27]

Al Wiman and his team, eager to provide more information (and boost their ratings), decided once they read Atkins's account to look for breaking evidence themselves. As he remembered years later during an interview outside Cielo: "We came here and we actually stood right here in this spot and said 'OK, if we had just killed these people, we were covered with blood, where would we go and where would we throw the clothes?" They began driving down Benedict Canyon with a stopwatch, Wiman changing his clothes to simulate the amount of time it might have taken the perpetrators – about six and

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[26] In addition to already cited work by Mike Davis, for more on the geography of Los Angeles see Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2006); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Brenna Bhandar, and Alberto Toscano, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (London ; New York: Verso, 2022); N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete*; Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[27] For an account of the raid, see Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter*. While I encountered quite a few letters to the editor protesting the printing of Atkins' confession in the Huntington Library's *Los Angeles Times* papers, again, I decided this story deserved its own space and have chosen not to cover it here. To hear Frank Salerno speak on having raided the ranch and later finding out they had let Manson go without "even filing paperwork," see Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*. For more on Susan Atkins, you can see her own account of her time at Spahn Ranch, the murders, and their aftermath: Susan Atkins-Whitehouse, *The Myth of Helter Skelter* (San Juan Capistrano, California: Menelorelin Dorenay's Publishing, 2012). See also Melnick, "Charlie Says."

a half minutes, as it turned out. Just as he finished changing, the van reached the only stretch of road without a guardrail.

They pulled over and simply looked over the side of the road: there sat the perpetrators' clothes, which had been undisturbed for four months. They were able to take video of what they had found – several dark sweatshirts and pairs of jeans – even before police officers arrived on scene. Apparently, the LAPD had not thought to search the surrounding area in the immediate aftermath of the murders, and they had even failed to do so once they had access to Atkins' account of what the perpetrators had done afterward: drive down Benedict Canyon and toss their clothes over the cliff.[28] Wiman and his colleagues began to wonder how it had even been possible to miss this evidence.

But it got worse.

Bernard Weiss, who lived in the canyon below Beverly Glen Boulevard, came across a story in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* once the investigation into Manson and his mysterious "Family" of hippies had begun in earnest. The LAPD, FBI, and Interpol (an international law enforcement agency based in France) were apparently searching far and wide for a revolver with a broken grip that had been used at the attacks on Cielo Drive.

Bernard began wondering again about a gun he had thought of often recently – one that his 11-year-old son, Steven, had found while playing on their property months earlier, on September 1. To his memory, the gun in the paper looked awfully similar. When he showed the article to his son, Steven agreed and he promptly called the local precinct in Van Nuys to report that he had already turned in the weapon, and it had been sitting in police custody for three months. Too bad, he was told by the officer on the other end of the line – anything that old would have already been disposed of, according to procedure. In disbelief, Bernard contacted a news anchor friend at local Channel 2, who began pushing the police for more information about the weapon.[29] He found that the gun had not, in fact, been disposed of (luckily but unsurprisingly given what we now know, Van Nuys had neglected to follow

[28] Ono, "Charles Manson."

[29] Local news stations staffed local reporters but were still formally affiliated with one of the "big three" national networks.

their disposal protocol) and news broke that the "smoking gun" had finally been located on December 16. As far as I know, no media outlets mentioned Bernard or Stephen Weiss at the time of the discovery.[30]

In November, the Tate-LaBianca case finally began to unravel and the LAPD scrambled to save face. While much remains to be written about the relationship between policing and the public-relations industry, the Los Angeles Police Department had been participating directly in crime entertainment since at least the 1950s, when Jack Webb premiered the archetype of modern police procedural television, *Dragnet*. While other television and radio shows (as well as pulp magazines) had used crime to similarly construct narrative drama, Webb wanted his show to focus on the process of investigating a crime. *Dragnet* featured stories pulled from actual LAPD case files, reminding audiences at the top of the hour that "the story you are about to see is true" and introducing them to concepts with which we are now familiar: police terminology; crime scene investigation; what types of evidence are, or are not, admissible in court. To maintain a steady stream of episodes, LAPD officers were encouraged to record their experiences while on duty and submit anything interesting to an officer in the publicity unit – usually Gene Roddenbury, an excellent storyteller who would go on to create Star Trek – who vetted them before turning them over to Webb. The television version of the show further fetishized the real through its impeccable set design, which reproduced the actual police department headquarters down to the extension numbers on the phones.[31]

As Roger Sabin has written, the formulaic crime tales that emerged from *Dragnet* "offered the American public a vision of the police force as a stabilizer in society made up of virtuous, honest men dedicated both to keeping the bad guys in their place and to the more abstract values of moral order."[32]

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[30] Adrienne Frank, "The Smoking Gun," *American University Magazine*, July 2019.

[31] Jack Webb, *Dragnet*, Crime, (Mark VII Ltd., 1951); Jacqui Shine, "'Dragnet' Was Straight up LAPD Propaganda, on National TV for Years," *Timeline*, June 20, 2017; Roger Sabin et al., *Cop Shows: A Critical History of Police Dramas on Television* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2015); Christopher Sharrett, "Jack Webb and the Vagaries of Right-Wing TV Entertainment," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 165–71; Christopher Sharrett, ed., *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, Contemporary Film and Television Series (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Michael Arntfield, "TVPD: The Generational Diagetics of the Police Procedural on American Television," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41, no. 1 (21): 75–95; Joe Domanick, *Blue: The LAPD and the Battle to Redeem American Policing*, Reprint edition (Simon & Schuster, 2016); Melley, *The Covert Sphere*; Daniel LaChance and Paul Kaplan, "The Seductions of Crimesploitation: The Apprehension of Sex Offenders on Primetime Television," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 127–50.

[32] Sabin, 15.

During the Manson trial, the officers used *Dragnet* to attempt to cover their own mistakes on recovery of the murder weapon. Starting in the summer of 1970, Walter Cronkite began reporting proudly that Steven Weiss (now transformed into an enterprising kid who cracked the case wide open) had learned to carefully preserve the revolver as evidence for police because he had religiously watched the show. Steven insisted – and continues to insist– that he had never even seen the show. He had handled the weapon according to his own common sense and his father's lessons in gun safety. He still remembers, just as he testified in court, that the officer who collected the gun was much less conscientious than he, covering it with his own fingerprints (before, of course, losing it).[33]

It was far from the first time they had done this kind of damage control. In 1928, LAPD leadership incarcerated a woman named Christine Collins for several weeks, claiming that she had endured a psychotic break because she insisted that the young boy officers had returned to her was not her kidnapped son. Despite several attempts to point this out to Captain J.J. Jones, she could not get through to the men who refused to accept her account and told her to take the boy home to "try him out." Eventually, Jones learned that the boy he had forced on her was a runaway chasing Hollywood dreams, but he waited ten more days before releasing Collins from the institution. She spent the rest of her life attempting to collect the settlement money she was promised (and never did).[34]

In popular culture, we tend to assume that police propensity for secrecy is in our best interests, but consider this alternative. Another spectacular murder also took place at the end of 1969: the political assassinations of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by federal agents, who invaded Hampton's home in Chicago and shot him while he slept. Less than a month prior, Hampton had been in Los Angeles and appointed spokesperson for the national Black Panther Party organization. After the

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[33] Frank, "The Smoking Gun." You can also find the Weiss's story in Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter* – but the anecdote about Steven continuing to insist on the falsity of the *Dragnet* claims comes from Scott Michaels, a Manson aficionado whom we will meet in Chapter 6.

[34] See: David Edelstein, "'Changeling': Against The Odds, A Mother's Fight," *NPR*, October 31, 2008; Elizabeth Blair, "Behind 'Changeling,' A Tale Too Strange For Fiction," *NPR*, October 24, 2008; Oliver Jones, "INSIDE STORY: How a Boy Became the Changeling Impostor," *People Magazine*, November 14, 2008; J.H. Moncrieff, "The Bizarre True Story behind the 'Changeling,'" *J.H. Moncrieff* (blog), May 23, 2017; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Joe Domanick, *To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

murder, Party organizers opened the crime scene to the public – not for sensational purposes, but so that Hampton's community members could see that he had been sleeping peacefully in bed when he died, providing contradictory evidence to both the FBI and Chicago police, who reported that the Panthers had fired first (thus justifying the raid by providing probable cause).

Witnessing the crime scene – itself a counternarrative – was central to the anti-capitalist aims of the Party but, just as importantly, it provided communal space for the grieving and healing of those who had shared a community with Clark and Hampton. This privilege was rarely afforded to the friends and family of people murdered by the state, and witnessing was an important political obligation for those who opposed police brutality.[35]

In later narrations of the Tate-LaBianca case, as in the 1973 documentary film *Manson*, Vincent Bugliosi explicitly tied the Family's vague language about race war to "the great black uprisings" of "the 60s," explaining that "the black prisoners with their newly found dignity openly boasted to Charlie of an impending revolution where whitey would no longer run things." The women interviewed for the documentary, all of whom were white, also parroted much of the BPP's radical language around prison, as one insisted "as long as one of us in jail, we're all in jail … none of us will be free until everyone is out."[36] Aside from placing the blame for the murders ultimately on the Black Panthers, Vincent Bugliosi's convoluted race war story was also told as one that only made sense in Charlie's "warped mind." Through this framing, the prosecutor was able to turn Manson, and his Family by extension, into a vessel for the demonization of an array of populations and political groups aligned with leftist movements,

[35] For primary source footage of both the FBI's forensic investigation into the shooting and the Black Panther Party's witness procession, see Howard Alk, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. For more on the Black Panther Party, see Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City*; Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*; Robin D. G. Kelley, "What Abolition Looks Like, From the Panthers to the People," *LEVEL* (blog), October 26, 2020. I would also like to acknowledge fruitful discussions from Adam Green's graduate colloquium on Social Movement History for helping me to integrate this history with my understanding of the Manson case.

[36] Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme as quoted in Robert Hendrickson, *Manson*, Documentary (Merrick International, Tobann International Pictures, 1973). Fromme did not participate in the Tate-LaBianca murders but attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford in 1975, which helped to keep the Family relevant in the year preceding the made-for-TV dramatization of *Helter Skelter* in 1976. Tom Gries, *Helter Skelter*, Drama (Lorimar Productions, 1976).

many of which were expressing legitimate critiques of policing and the Los Angeles Police Department in particular.[37]

The Boogeyman and the Cold Case

In the "trial of the century" – a refrain I found throughout my research for this dissertation – Bugliosi presented the "Helter Skelter" theory, which had leaked into national media via Atkins' confession by 1970 and remains the popular narrative of the case today.[38] According to this theory, Charles Manson was a cult leader who had intended to use the Tate-LaBianca murders to start a race war because of messages he had received through The Beatles "White Album." He and his followers allegedly intended to provoke this scenario, at which point they would hide at the ranch until they could return to rule the world once those in power had been slaughtered.[39]

As this sensational (and mostly false) narrative emerged, Americans obsessed over the bizarre details of the so-called "Manson Family," whose members chanted in unison, shaved their heads, and slept outside the courthouse throughout the trial, proselytizing about their "father," whom they referred to lovingly as "Charlie."[40] According to *Rolling Stone* magazine – a newer publication making a name for itself with politically engaged reporting on the counterculture – the case touched those across the

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[37] For a thorough account of how the Manson case has shaped our popular culture, see Melnick, *Creepy Crawling*. For examples of contemporary resistance to the LAPD, see Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*.

[38] LIFE Magazine followed the investigation and trial closely, providing a set of terrifying and sublime photos of the frenzy surrounding the courtroom, particularly the actions of other residents of the ranch. I suggest looking through the LIFE online archive but, for an overview, see: Ben Cosgrove and Liz Ronk, "Charles Manson and His 'Family': Photos of a Murderous Cult," *LIFE*, August 7, 2012.

[39] For some examples of how "race war" has been used in recent U.S. history, see Michael E. Miller, "'The War of Races': How a Hateful Ideology Echoes through American History," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2019; Belew, *Bring the War Home*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*; Petrzela, *Classroom Wars*; May, *Fortress America*; Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[40] Hendrickson, *Manson*; Melnick, *Creepy Crawling*; Atkins-Whitehouse, *The Myth of Helter Skelter*; Scott Michaels, *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*, Documentary (Not a Hollywood Sign Production, Tenacity Entertainment, 2009); Felton and Dalton, "Special Report on Charles Manson"; David Ono, "Charles Manson;" David Ono, "Former ABC7 Reporter Recalls Finding Evidence in Charles Manson Case;" Longworth, "Charlie Manson's Hollywood"; Monroe, *Savage Appetites*; Bugliosi and Gentry, *Helter Skelter*; Gries, *Helter Skelter*; Robert Hendrickson, *Inside the Manson Gang*, Documentary (Tobann International Pictures, Exclusive Film Network (EFN), 1973; Quentin Tarantino, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, Comedy, Drama (Columbia Pictures, Bona Film Group, Heyday Films, 2019); Aviram, *Yesterday's Monsters*; *Manson Family Vacation*; Daniel Farrands, *The Haunting of Sharon Tate*, Thriller (Skyline Entertainment, ETA Films, 1428 Films, 2019); John R. Leonetti, *Wolves at the Door*, Thriller (New Line Cinema, 2017).

political spectrum, and many sensed that something in the air had shifted. Images of the perpetrators in the press "provoke[d] not words or heated argument, but noises, guttural sound effects, gasps, shrieks, violent physical gestures of repulsion" and many took it as an opportunity to excoriate the hippies of Haight-Ashbury, where Manson had lived before moving to Los Angeles.[41]

Through their embodiment of a broader communal movement in California, the Manson Family undermined conservative notions of the home, advocating for free love, drugs, and the renouncement of birth families. Manson's spaced-out eyes on the cover of *LIFE* soon became a symbol of imaginary "brainwashed" communists who could be spurred to violence at the drop of a hat. While they were convicted in 1971 after the longest and most expensive trial in California history (until the next chapter), Charles Manson and his family remained in the press in fits and spurts for literally thirty years, continuing to reach the public from behind bars.

Authors of the longform *Rolling Stone* article recounted a visit to the Spahn Movie Ranch during trial, capturing the buzz of this terrifying excitement perfectly, even then:

> "The words come from Gypsy's mouth, but it is Charlie who is speaking. The phrases, the ideas, the rhymes, the gestures, are exactly the same, as if Gypsy's own identity had been erased. A dozen or so little Charlie Mansons are living at the ranch right now! And who knows how many are not living at the ranch?"

Criminalizing the Left during the '60s meant there were more leftists behind bars organizing for prisoner rights and the destruction of capitalist institutions. Some – like Angela Davis – began to advocate for the abolition of the entire prison system, having connected it to American imperialism through engagements with international decolonization movements. After the Attica prison rebellion and several other strikes organized by incarcerated men in the first few years of the '70s, conservatives and liberals alike began to worry about what might happen to them if prisons could not properly contain and remove criminalized people from the body politic.

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[41] Felton and Dalton, "Special Report on Charles Manson"; Aviram, *Yesterday's Monsters*; Melnick, *Creepy Crawling*. Melnick's book considers the case as it was portrayed in the San Francisco Free Press. For more on *Rolling Stone*, I suggest reviewing their extensive online archive and Suzanne Joe Kai's *Like a Rolling Stone: The Life and Times of Ben Fong-Torres*, Documentary (StudioLA.TV, XTR, 2022).

During the '80s, films like *Escape from New York* imagined a post-industrial hellscape without the security that Americans imagined the existence of the prison could provide.[42] One of the most horrifying things about the Manson Family was that they did not fear this future at all – or, at least, they said they didn't – and were vocal about their opposition to the American state. In interviews, they expressed their understanding of the murders as the same type of violence that occurred in Vietnam, or that which they grew up watching on shows like *Dragnet*. "What is the big deal?" one of them remarked about killing and dying. "We're just reflecting you back on yourself."[43] While civil rights activists were able to productively use the blatant racism of the criminal-legal system to create spectacles of their own oppression during the '50s and 60s, making "criminality" a mark of honor, care, and moral authority, the Manson Family now functioned as an extreme case that unequivocally discredited their claims in mainstream conversations about crime.[44]

Over the course of the following decade, as lead after lead produced nothing but confusion, the mysterious Zodiac case cooled for investigators but similarly remained in the public eye through other venues, namely popular culture. One of the first films about the Zodiac – and, in fact, the first film featuring the SFPD's nascent Homicide Bureau – premiered in 1971, the same year as the Tate-LaBianca

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[42] John Carpenter, *Escape from New York*, Action (AVCO Embassy Pictures, International Film Investors, Goldcrest Films International, 1981). For more on prison organizing and resulting backlash during this period, see: Bettina Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*, Second edition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); Ronald Berkman, *Opening the Gates: The Rise of the Prisoners' Movement* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1979); Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Albert Woodfox and Leslie George, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope* (New York: Grove Press, 2019); Robert T. Chase, "We Are Not Slaves: Rethinking the Rise of Carceral States through the Lens of the Prisoners' Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 73–86; Berger, *Captive Nation*; Orisanmi Burton, "Organized Disorder: The New York City Jail Rebellion of 1970," *The Black Scholar* 48, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 28–42; Daniel Burton-Rose, *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground of the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Toussaint Losier, "' ... For Strictly Religious Reason[s],'" *Souls* 15, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2013): 19–38; Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013); George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books : Distributed by Independent Publishers Group, 1994); Garrett Felber, *Those Who Know Don't Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Toussaint Losier, "Against 'Law and Order' Lockup: The 1970 NYC Jail Rebellions," *Race & Class* 59, no. 1 (July 1, 2017): 3–35); The Attica Liberation Faction, "Manifesto of Demands," *Race & Class* 53, no. 2 (1971): 28–35; Thompson, *Blood in the Water*; Rodriguez, *Forced Passages*; Burton, "Diluting Radical History"; Dan Berger, *Struggle within: Prisons, Political Prisoners, and Mass Movements in the United States* (Oakland, CA : Montreal, Quebec: PM Press, 2014); Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[43] Interviews in Hendrickson, *Manson*.

[44] Berger, *Captive Nation*; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; Christina Greene, "'She Ain't No Rosa Parks': The Joan Little Rape–Murder Case and Jim Crow Justice in the Post–Civil Rights South," *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 3 (2015): 428–47; Aviram, *Yesterday's Monsters*.

trial. *Dirty Harry* became the first installment in one of the most iconic antihero rogue cop franchises of the era (with many to follow; *TIME* magazine declared 1973 "TV's Year of the Cop").[45]

In the movie, a killer calling himself "Scorpio" taunts the SFPD, leaving strange notes at each crime scene that read, and even look, eerily like the Zodiac's. References to the real case abound: the first action shot shows Scorpio scoping out a victim through a magnifying glass imprinted with the Zodiac symbol; his message begins "I enjoy killing"; he wears paratrooper boots (a key piece of evidence in the real case); he attacks a school bus, sends bloody tokens, and calls the police "pig bastards." It would have been next to impossible to watch *Dirty Harry* in 1971 as a resident of California without knowing exactly what it was about.

By identifying with the frustrated Detective Harry Callahan, who chooses to pursue and kill Scorpio himself when the law fails him, the audience absorbed a propagandistic narrative about the many ways that bureaucracy – particularly adherence to civil rights procedures like *Miranda* – stood in the way of saving innocent people from violence, which could be easily achieved through police reliance on force and "common sense" about crime.[46] Several leading men, including Paul Newman and Burt Reynolds, turned down the role because of the unabashed right-wing politics of the film, but star Clint Eastwood appreciated the victims' rights angle and would later become a celebrity for both the National Rifle Association and Republican Party, frequently attending official police events in Los Angeles.[47] Police never identified Zodiac, much less stopped him, but the narrative that emerged was not that they had failed; it was about how they could have succeeded, a defensive fantasy that took for granted the knowledge of a good homicide detective and considered any critique of policing itself a hindrance to the success of policework.

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[45] Sabin, 3.

[46] Clint Eastwood, *Dirty Harry*, Action, Crime, Thriller (The Malpaso Company, 1971).

[47] I draw these conclusions based on my own viewing of *Dirty Harry*. Details on others having turned down the role can be found in the "trivia" section of the film's IMDB page. It is worth noting that while multiple historians have pointed to the film as an important example of the vigilante films of 1970s and '80s (see, for example, May, *Fortress America*.) I made these connections myself based on naked observation the first time I saw the movie within just a few weeks of conceiving of this project. It was that obvious.

Five years after *Dirty Harry*, however, in 1976, this imagined scenario was still alive and well. Three young men in Chowchilla, California, were inspired by the fictional Scorpio killer (not the Zodiac killer, who had never done this – and they were not aware of his threat to do so) and decided to *actually* kidnap a school bus full of twenty-six children and a driver. They buried all twenty-seven people in an old van in the middle of the desert, underground, hundreds of miles away from their homes. The captives spent more than fifteen hours underground, struggling to breathe, before managing to work together to dig themselves out and escape. They crept by the sleeping perpetrators and high-tailed it for the highway. Incredibly, they all survived – no thanks to press, local police departments, or the FBI agents who had flocked to town in the meantime. Weeks later, the perpetrators were arrested when one of them tried to sell his story to a screenwriter, who reported it. Dramatizing the Zodiac case incorrectly and irresponsibly in *Dirty Harry* thus led directly to traumatizing violence against twenty-seven other people, their entire families, their friends, and their community.[48]

Luckily, those still interested in the Zodiac Killer got a much more complete account of both the murders *and* the official investigation through the careful, obsessive work of one amateur sleuth from the *San Francisco Examiner*, Robert Graysmith, in 1986. As we will see in Chapter 3, citizen detectives like him began to offer alternative – and often more complete, humanistic – accounts of spectacle murder cases than police preoccupations with liability could provide. Graysmith did not know any of the victims personally, though he eventually met the Zodiac's survivors and many of their families, but his personal connection to the murders was most prominent through his friend and colleague Paul Avery, who suffered greatly under the pressure of the Zodiac's communications with the paper, several of which were addressed directly to him. It was Avery, for example, who had been mailed a piece of bloody fabric from one of the victims, after which he took to wearing a button declaring "I Am Not Paul Avery" in case he ran into Zodiac on the street. For years, Avery reported receiving strange phone calls from a stranger

[48] For a thorough narrative account of the kidnapping and its effects see Kaleb Horton, "The Ballad of the Chowchilla Bus Kidnapping," *Vox*, July 16, 2021.

breathing loudly on the other line. For what it's worth, many, many people involved in the Zodiac investigation reported this, including both Robert Graysmith and Inspector Dave Toschi.[49]

Perhaps most importantly, Graysmith was able to publish for his audience all the original Zodiac letters – evidence that normally would have been kept secret from the public – including several unsolved ciphers that still fascinate new codebreakers. Throughout my time researching, I have found police records to be exceptionally difficult to incorporate into archival evidence because these institutions maintain tight control over their records to ward off prying eyes. Prior to FOIA requests, for example, it was not uncommon for officers to simply destroy incriminating records (this was, of course, if they even bothered to fill out reports – which many did not). It was easy in retrospect to dismiss these instances as simple clerical error.[50]

His reporting exposed endemic problems within police investigative procedure, particularly a lack of coordination and destructive turf wars between agencies, but his investigation into an active case still relied heavily on personal relationships he cultivated with police officers and their administrative staff, which gave him a wide lens with little focus. He thus supplemented the gaps in his knowledge with his own version of what *might* have happened, encouraging readers to imagine these scenes with him. Folks like Graysmith became favorite true crime writers precisely because of their exhaustive attention to detail; the more they included, the more leads readers could choose to follow if they wanted to try to figure out the mystery on their own, which many did and continue to do today.[51]

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[49] Graysmith, *Zodiac: The Shocking True Story of the Hunt for the Nation's Most Elusive Serial Killer*; Graysmith, *Zodiac Unmasked: The Identity of America's Most Elusive Serial Killer Revealed*; Harrison Smith, "Dave Toschi, Who Hunted and Was Haunted by the Zodiac Serial Killer, Dies at 86," *Washington Post*, January 11, 2015l; Mitch Farley, "Paul Avery & The Zodiac," *Medium* (blog), September 10, 2019. You can view the card Avery received a few days before Halloween, which contained a piece of bloody evidence, online: "The Halloween Card," ZODIAC CIPHERS, https://www.zodiacciphers.com/the-halloween-card.html. Last accessed October 2022.

[50] In my attempts to research policing in Chicago during the 1920s, for example, I found that the Chicago Police Department's infamously abusive "Red Squad" had destroyed its files after disbanding the unit to avoid public accountability. For more, see Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). Guariglia, "The Dirty Truth about Police Departments? They're Lying to Us"; Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017); Micol Seigel, *Violence Work*; David Correia and Tyler Wall, *Police: A Field Guide* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018).

[51] As recently as 2021, a group of codebreakers took a crack at the "340" Cipher: James Felton, "FBI Confirms Zodiac Killer's Infamous 340 Cipher Has Been Decoded, And His Message Finally Revealed," *IFL Science* (blog), December 28, 2021.

The ways in which the Zodiac and Tate-LaBianca murders taught us to imagine violence is perhaps their central contribution to the later development of the true crime genre. It was exactly because Charles Manson proved himself to be a fixture of the Hollywood scene that he became the scapegoat he did – it was as if, as the public learned more about the crime, they could identify more and more opportunities for Manson to have murdered a person they knew (even if this person was not known to them personally, but known through popular culture) – they felt one degree closer; both a thrilling and chilling prospect. This sense of proximity grew over time as people remembered and re-remembered the events, telling children and grandchildren, but memories of the actual people, places, and events involved faded, until they themselves were just characters; plot-points; sets; stories with endings we already know.[52]

More intriguing for many were the stories without an end, the ones that allow us not just to learn but to participate. While the Manson case created a boogeyman that spanned generations, birthed the "shorthand" discussed in the intro, and marked a turning point in American history, citizen sleuths keep the Zodiac case alive by searching for new clues, sharing information, and formulating new theories. Timelessly fascinating in its vague horror, the case never ceases to be interesting to those who did not live through it – and thus the true crime community that coalesced around the investigation can only grow as new enthusiasts gain notoriety and provide more fodder for discussion. [53]

Both the Zodiac and Tate-LaBianca murders pushed police to reframe investigations in their favor to cover their own mistakes, creating more violence on multiple registers across time and space. For all the problems and shortcomings of Manson's "ending" the sixties, perhaps it may be better to think about how these murders – as well as those of the Zodiac Killer – were the *start* of something new.

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[52] We will return to the Manson case in Chapter 6 and in the conclusion, but for another example of how it has been reproduced over time, see Sean Durkin, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, Thriller (Maybach Film Productions, Searchlight Pictures, Cunningham & Maybach Films, 2011).

[53] For an example of a recent theory, see Kief Davidson, *The Most Dangerous Animal of All*, Documentary (Campfire, FX Network, Hulu, 2020). In it, a man explores his own conviction that the Zodiac Killer was his father. For others, see: David Fincher, *Zodiac*; David Fincher, *Se7en*, Drama (Cecchi Gori Pictures, Juno Pix, New Line Cinema, 1995); David Prior, *This Is the Zodiac Speaking*, Documentary (Dreamlogic Pictures, 2008); Matthew Yglesias, "Ted Cruz and the Zodiac Killer, Explained," *Vox*, March 8, 2016; Joshua Rhett Miller, "Zodiac Killer Identified, Linked to Sixth Murder, Cold-Case Squad Claims," *New York Post*, October 6, 2021; Tom Hanson, *The Zodiac Killer* (American Genre Film Archive, 1971).

Manson historian Jeffrey Melnick has argued that rather than murder, the Family's most iconic and lasting crime in our collective imagination was "creepy crawling," or their habit of breaking into private homes for the sole purpose of moving things around.[54] In the aftermath of the murders, particularly at the urging of Bugliosi, this practice of creepy crawling came to be understood as a trial run for the much worse crime of murder, but this was not at all the case and is early evidence of how the "Helter Skelter" narrative and the Zodiac investigation both came to shape true crime culture: in the search for identifiable and digestible murder narratives, each detail becomes evidence of a murder to come, creating what historians refer to as a teleological argument devoid of alternate paths.

These stories helped people to construct mythical versions of history in which danger did not exist; a type of crime politics that allowed for those who did not understand themselves as politically conservative to align with calls for a "return to normalcy" because the scale at which they were consuming murder narratives was now unprecedented.

In the face of so many mistakes made by law enforcement, citizens like Bettye June Harden, Al Wiman, and Robert Graysmith took it upon themselves to help solve cases. In so doing, they helped produce popular narratives about the Zodiac and the Manson Family; but because of the efforts of the LAPD and SFPD to control these narratives in the press and in later depictions through film and television, divorcing them from larger conversations about the function of policing to their advantage, these stories ultimately came to demand that ordinary people help solve crimes themselves rather than calling further attention to what many political actors were already arguing: that the police were not solving them.

And if they didn't, *who would*?

[54] After I first read *Helter Skelter*, I lost sleep whenever I had to open my bedroom windows for fresh air at night, imagining I was hearing the Family in every rustle of the leaves.

2: They Were Women

On December **13,** 1977, members of the anti-rape group Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), under the direction of Los Angeles -area artists Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, staged a powerful demonstration called "In Mourning and Rage."

Ten women emerged one by one from a hearse. They made their way slowly and deliberately to the steps of Los Angeles City Hall in dead silence, holding two banners that read "In Memory of our Sisters," and "Women Fight Back." Nine of them wore all black with long capes, covering their faces and hair with a dark shroud to symbolize, in their words, "the power of women who have historically been mourners of their culture often in groups together." The tenth individual, who emerged last, wore crimson to represent rage and a woman's capacity to fight.[1]

Members of the Los Angeles City Council; the Rape Hotline Alliance; and the Los Angeles Women's Building, a feminist arts hub, sponsored and publicized the goals of their demonstration in the days preceding the event, hoping to get the word out about their collective efforts to address the onset of a persistent terror in the city and draw attention to further harm caused by sensational coverage of the precipitating crimes in the press. The women's neighbors, friends, and families braced themselves for violence from a nameless, faceless perpetrator who seemed to be hiding in their midst, but they still drew a crowd of at least fifty.

Even more Angelenos watched clips of this performance art broadcast on local television news or encountered photos the following day in the newspaper. But there is no telling how many could focus on this while distracted by the same spectacle the women had sought to critique in the first place: the image

[1] "Statement: Memorial Event," The Woman's Building. Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) Collection, Box 5, Folder 6, "Hillside Strangler." Special Collections, University of California Los Angeles.

of another nude, dead woman, who had appeared overnight on the grass outside a homeowner's driveway high in the scenic hills near Echo Park.[2]

Suzanne Lacy, however, had taken her place at the center of the display just hours prior: She began:

> "We are here today in memory of the ten women who have been slain in Los Angeles…and the women who are being, or have been, battered and raped throughout this country as a result of the pervasive and ongoing attitude of violence against women. We want you to know that we know that these ten women are not isolated cases of random, unexplained violence. That this violence wreaked upon them is not different, except perhaps in degree, than all of the daily real life reports, which make the news media, from those fictionalized mutilations shown in our entertainment industries, and from the countless unreported cases of brutalization of our relatives, friends, and loved ones who are women."

In single file, each of the nine shrouded women then stepped forward to the microphone to denounce a form of violence against women, reciting a statistic that illustrated how many others were in danger beyond just victims of the man the press had recently deemed the "Hillside Strangler," and whom the Los Angeles Police Department now suspected was responsible for up to ten murders of local women in the span of just seven weeks.[3]

After each spoke, the group chanted in unison: "In memory of our sisters, we fight back!" Singer-songwriter Holly Near performed an original song that spoke both to their feelings of panic and their desires to channel this nervous energy into building something that could better protect them: "By day I live in terror/By night I live in fright/For as long as I can remember/Ladies don't go out alone at night, no/But I don't accept that verdict/It's an old rule anyway/Cause nowadays a woman/Can't even go out in

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[2] Women's Video Center, "In Mourning and Rage," VHS tape. Long Beach Museum of Art Video Archive, Series IV. Woman's Building Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California. I watched a VHS tape recorded for a local station, but I am not sure to what degree this coverage reached audiences as I consulted the raw footage. For more information on the demonstration itself, please see organizer Suzanne Lacy's writeup of the event as a part of her larger ARIADNE project of anti-violence art: Suzanne Lacy, "ARIADNE:," https://www.againstviolence.art (last accessed October 2022). Descriptions here are based on my own observations combined with the handwritten notes in the Women Against Violence Against Women collection at UCLA. The Los Angeles Women's Building was founded in 1973 as a cultural center for women. It housed meetings for groups like the WAVAW, served as the headquarters of the local branch of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and housed a bookstore and art studio. Feminist artists pushed the bounds of both spectacle and violence by forcing audiences to confront the sublime aspects of femininity during the 1970s, often connecting at formal and informal institutions in California. For a personal favorite example, see Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro"s "Womanhouse," which required visitors to walk through an exhibit called "Menstruation Bathroom," strewn with toiletries and dozens of blood-soaked pads and tampons. You can view high resolution images of the exhibition on Judy Chicago's website: Judy Chicago, "Womanhouse," judychicago.com, 1972, https://www.judychicago.com/gallery/womanhouse/pr-artwork/. Original photographs and materials related to Womanhouse are housed at the Penn State University Archives in University Park, Pennsylvania.

[3] At this point in time, as had been the case with the Zodiac murders, the public was still misinformed on how many people the perpetrator had attacked.

the middle of the day/And so we're gonna fight back/In large numbers/Fight back/We cannot make it alone."

Lacy, Labowitz, and their fellow organizers were pointing to a key shift in social and political culture that had occurred between 1969 and their present – one facilitated by access to media exposure, and one that had also made many of their male counterparts profoundly uncomfortable. As more spectacles of violence against women entered the realm of public discussion through television news coverage throughout the '70s, feminist organizers attempted to use their voices to inform this conversation for the better. Handwritten notes from the planning meeting for their demonstration stressed the importance of attracting the press for a "media event" that was "visual, dramatic," even "theatrical" because of the "powerful images" they had all seen, which carried the immense potential to "affect [women]'s feelings." They argued that the way the local press had portrayed the victims – many of them sex workers – was undercutting the reality that women in Los Angeles were fearing for their lives.[4] Councilmember Joy Picus submitted their demands (which included advertising rape and crisis center hotlines, more city funding for rape prevention projects, and public, city-wide courses in self-defense), reporting fervently that the crimes had caused women to "become credibly apprehensive and fearful of becoming victims."[5]

Prior to the serial murders of women in the 1970s, the advice had been to do the opposite of what the demonstrators proposed. As "boys will be boys," the safest option, many women had learned, was to *avoid* fighting back against a sexual attack and let your rapist finish. Otherwise, you might just make him angry and provoke your own death. Murder cases like those of the Hillside Stranglers (there were two

[4] "Statement: Memorial Event," and handwritten meeting notes. WAVAW collection, Box 5, Folder 6, "Hillside Strangler," In brackets on page 2 of these handwritten notes, I have written that "women's" refer to "women's feelings," but the notes actually show a "female" symbol rather than the word "women," pointing to the centrality of arguments about sex difference to this era of feminist thought. For more, see: Katherine Turk, *Equality on Trial: Gender and Rights in the Modern American Workplace*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75; Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (New York: Modern Library, 2010); Judith Levine and Erica R. Meiners, *The Feminist and the Sex Offender: Confronting Sexual Harm, Ending State Violence* (London: Verso, 2020); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2017), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12394191.

[5] For an account of Joy Picus presenting these demands to City Council, see Los Angeles City Public Records, Los Angeles City Council Meeting Minutes, December 1977, file 75-5098-S4, Box #B666, Los Angeles, California.

perpetrators, as it turned out) demonstrated not only the wanton brutality of misogyny but also the clear social disposability of an entire group of women who had been brought up to accept their vulnerability to male violence as a natural – even biological – part of life.

This moment of solidarity and collective consciousness about violence among women was *not* unique to Los Angeles, or even to California. Jane Caputi later declared that these spectacular murder cases could be described as a wave of male "gynocide" – a type of sex crime inspired by the hatred and degradation of women at a moment when they claimed newfound liberation and autonomy over their bodies. Young women across college campuses and beyond began arguing loudly and rightly that rape was a violent and political expression of power rather than an expression of the desire for sex and, without shifting that power dynamic, they knew that they would remain vulnerable to the violent impulses and reactions of unstable men. California *did*, however, provide quite a few opportunities for men looking to escape detection from authorities to do so without question, and the violent havoc they wreaked across the state during the '70s literally rewrote the cultural script of what "murder," "murderer," and "murder victim" came to mean.[6]

Some proponents of the anti-rape movement thus saw the Hillside murders as an opportunity to push their urgent, life-saving message into the mainstream. While a "difficulty" with finding corroborating evidence throughout history had long been cited to deny rape survivors the truth of their own experiences, a dead body that everyone could see was irrefutable evidence to support their

[6] Since the apprehension of the "Golden State Killer" in 2018, who had begun his years-long crime spree with dozens of rapes in and around the Bay Area during the '70s, recent true crime practitioners have begun to include more historical context about gender violence and the backlash to women's liberation in documentaries. For examples, see Patton Oswalt, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* (HBO Documentary Films, 2020). See also, Jane Caputi, "The Sexual Politics of Murder," *Gender and Society* 3, no. 4 (1989): 437–56; Rebecca Whisnant and Christine Stark, eds., *Not for Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography* (North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 2004); Miriam Schneir, ed., *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Frederic Storaska, *How to Say No to a Rapist and Survive* (Random House, 1975); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press, 1978); Joanna Bourke, *Rape: Sex, Violence, History* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard : Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2007); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*.

testimony.[7] To drive home this point, organizers of "In Mourning and Rage" insisted upon framing their demands around the concept of *violence*, rather than rape or murder. The latter had been spectacularized repeatedly since Tate-LaBianca in both fiction and the nascent genre of documentary film, which began to combine investigative storytelling with visual evidence, eyewitness accounts, and on-location footage, bringing more textured narrative accounts of violence to audiences than ever before.[8] Journalists like Geraldo Rivera, who covered the Hillside case, rose to a new level of public recognition during these years through controversial new spectacles like the first-ever airing of the Zapruder film (otherwise known as the only footage taken of the President John F. Kennedy assassination in 1963) on ABC's *Good Night America* in 1970; or his long-form visual exposé of abuse at New York's Willowbrook State School in 1972. The entrance of real violent footage into mainstream television rendered an expansive liberatory message key because, as the WAVAW reasoned, this problem would not just disappear once the Hillside Strangler had been caught. In fact, they recognized that women faced these experiences all over the globe.[9] In this tradition – like the exhibiting of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark's crime scene – naming harm and bearing witness to its consequences were themselves radical acts.

A formal statement clarified the importance of engaging one's emotions during the protest, as the atmosphere should reflect "not only grief but tremendous anger!!!!!! WE WANT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN STOPPED!!!!!" Hearing so many others testify to the reality of what men in their lives flatly denied seems to have been cathartic for those who experienced the demonstration. One told reporters that though he wielded "a perverted power over us," the Strangler would never make her leave Los Angeles: "This is my home – my space – and to flee would mean that I have given the murderer even more

[7] Of the scope of the protest, they wrote: "Make it global." WAVAW collection, Box 5, Folder 6, "Hillside Strangler," Handwritten notes, page 4. The issue was an international one in a direct, not abstract, way, as the London chapter of Women Against Violence Against Women also organized to protect one another from a serial murderer of sex workers deemed the "Yorkshire Ripper," invoking Jack the Ripper. Alan Whitehouse, *The Ripper*, Documentary (Netflix, 2020).

[8] Handwritten notes, page 4: "Use word violence." WAVAW collection.

[9] Handwritten notes, unnumbered page: "Just because killer caught not mean go away." WAVAW collection.

control over my life than he already has."[10] One young woman, clearly moved, told them that she "got this feeling, like, of power welling up inside of me." It felt like they were making a difference.[11]

Bodies, Bodies, Bodies

But the next morning, around 5 a.m., a man found 17-year-old Kimberly Diane Martin splayed out for the whole neighborhood to see.

There is no telling how many people have seen Martin's dead body since a local news station obtained helicopter footage of the crime scene off the residential street where she lay, high in the hills of East Los Angeles on the morning of December 14, 1977. For me, it was a radicalizing experience – and one I was not at all expecting. While I had not yet discovered the "In Mourning and Rage" demonstration, I had read and seen enough about the case to know that many people who remembered it in the years that followed repeated clearly they could still recall images of the victims' bodies. The immensity of this collective experience did not hit me until, hunched over a computer screen, I peered from above through grainy black-and-white video footage at Martin's frail, bright body against a dull sea of gray. She lay there like a tiny, broken doll left lying in the grass.

As the camera zoomed in, I could see a group of people gathered in the nearby driveway looking on as at least a dozen plainclothes officers – including legendary LAPD homicide detective Frank Salerno – stood over her. No one bothered to cover her up. While I cannot say for sure that a national news segment had never aired footage like this before, I can say that at the time of writing I had not seen any – and this was a marked difference from the ghostly but modest footage of the Cielo Drive house, where two of the victims had been filmed covered in sheets. It was the repetition of the Martin video night after night for weeks on end across multiple networks that really shocked me.[12]

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[10] Dierdre Blackstone, "I Want to Scream Out 'Enough! Enough!'" *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1977.

[11] "In Mourning and Rage," VHS, 1977.

[12] You can review this footage yourself at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive by searching "Strangler" for the period between November 1977 and February 1978. Most of the coverage is in December, after the death of Kimberly Diane

I consumed a large portion of the visual source material for Chapters 1 and 2 in a short two-week period at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee. Despite the reading and theorizing I had already done about spectacular violence and its effects; it was here that I first began to recognize the sheer density of real violence that had begun to confront the American public through the nightly news for the first time during these years. Though many of the same scripts were there, this did not remind me of the romanticized violence of *Dragnet* but the ugly, bloody coverage of the war in Vietnam. I found weeks of news segments stacked on top of one another; coverage of foreign massacre after domestic murder after political assassination; brutality after horror after tragedy; sometimes three or more in just thirty minutes.

In Los Angeles, dozens of people (a modest estimate) had also encountered the bodies of Martin and the other women murdered by the Hillside Stranglers *in person*. Rumor has it that commuters driving to work saw the first victim on a hill above a major freeway; a couple of second-grade boys stumbled upon the bodies of two young girls while innocently" hunting for buried treasure" near Dodger Stadium; on Halloween morning, Charles Keoch of La Crescenta found the nude body of a 14-year-old girl at the end of his driveway. Horrified, he threw a tarp over her to prevent nearby schoolchildren from seeing as they rode by on the bus.[13] Angelenos were finding so many women, it was even hard for police and the press to tell who had been killed by whom.[14]

Martin, and February, after the death of Cyndee Lee Hudspeth. To see it used in other work, see: Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*, Documentary (ABC News, Highway 41 Productions, Hulu, 2021); Steve Gethers, *The Case of the Hillside Stranglers*, Thriller (Fries Entertainment, Kenwood Productions, 1989); Alex Gibney, *Crazy, Not Insane*, Documentary (Jigsaw Productions, 2020); Kathy Preston, *Monsters Inside: The 24 Faces of Billy Milligan*, Documentary, (Upside Films, Netflix, 2021). Though I do not cover this here, you will find much of the existing content on Kenneth Bianchi has been recently reexamined in the context of multiple personality disorder, or dissociative identity disorder, which we will discuss briefly in Chapter 3.

[13] Darcy O'Brien, *Two of a Kind: The Hillside Stranglers* (New York, N.Y: New American Library, 1985), 5.

[14] One woman initially attributed to the Hillside Stranglers was later found to be a victim of a different serial killer operating at the same time. At the time that the WAVAW held their demonstration, they believed there to have been ten women killed by the Strangler. In reality, there had been eight, but the choice to stage the demonstration at City Hall may have been related to the fact that one of the two making up the difference had been found murdered just down the street. It seems likely that they were responding in part to that case, as Grace Davis pointed out during her speech that she and many of her colleagues in the mayor's office were afraid of the daily walk several blocks from their offices to cars alone at night. "We never complain," she explained, because their male employers communicated to them that if they didn't like the conditions of their position working for the public, they were welcome to quit.

Highways and interstates had become mobility boosters for liberated women during the '60s and '70s, but they also provided new opportunities for men looking to avoid accountability for their actions. The ability to move quickly from place to place insulated them from view, as they could easily abduct and dispose of women and then leave town – or even leave the state, where authorities were none the wiser. In the last chapter, Robert Graysmith discovered that in his Zodiac investigation that police departments within just a few miles of one another frequently refused to share evidence because of strong allegiances to their own organization and a desire to keep details in-house – as well as claim the glory when a suspect was caught. Throughout the '70s, the intentional turf wars of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies thus provided the conditions for men who sought to victimize women, children, and other vulnerable groups of people with impunity.

I have been to each of the Hillside crime scenes. Months after visiting them, I realized something while writing – Judy Lynn Miller, at just age 14, had been taken from a corner on Sunset Boulevard and left outside of a driveway. During one day in Los Angeles, entirely by chance, I had been to both locations in one day. Struck by the sense that I had been pulled there by divine intervention, it dawned on me that I had never put the two together because they had been so incredibly far apart that the scene where she was abducted and the scene where she was left felt like they existed in two separate worlds.

It was not until they began preying on women in suburban enclaves around Thanksgiving that either the press *or* police began to take Hillside Stranglers seriously. Lauren Wagner's father, in search of his missing teenager, felt forced to come up with a fictional scenario before police would allow him to report her missing. He finally told them he had witnessed his daughter physically being dragged away, even though he had already told police he had found her car abandoned a few blocks from their home. The keys had been left in the ignition, a clear sign to him that something was wrong. He told AP reporter Laurinda Keys that he felt in his bones that Lauren "wouldn't go with strangers" and the only way to get anyone to take him seriously was to pretend he had seen something he had not.[15] Before anything could

[15] The same article reported that officers assigned went from 29 to 42 after the snafu with Lauren Wagner. "$125,000 Reward Sought for L.A. Strangler," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1977. By December 14, there were 58 people assigned to the force. John Hurst, "Strangler Strikes Again," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 14, 1977.

be done, however, another homeowner found Lauren's body miles away, in an entirely different neighborhood.

Struggling to manage evidence, leads, and routine policework, the LAPD withheld details to protect key evidence from becoming public knowledge, just as they had claimed they were doing with the Tate-LaBianca murders in Chapter 1. There was speculation in the press about whether the women had been sexually assaulted but officers – still under the direction of Ed Davis, who would be replaced by Darryl Gates the following year – insisted in the first major press conference that there was "no need" for that type of prurient detail, even though "there may be public desire and public interest" in the information."[16] But many women knew these weren't sensational details – they were details that could save lives, like the fact that there were multiple perpetrators, or that they were abducting women by car.[17] In the meantime, however, women had other reasons not to trust the police, like the fact that Lauren Wagner had last been seen in a black and white cruiser; or the rumor going around that the Strangler was able to so easily abduct women because he impersonated a police officer. (This one was true.)[18]

Social worker Lois Lee, who founded an organization dedicated to decriminalizing sex work (the California Association for Trollops, or CAT for short) had reported Kimberly Diane Martin's disappearance to police just an hour after she was last seen, and now she was plastered all over national news. Lee had learned that Martin failed to return from a meeting she had arranged with a male client and attempted to report it immediately, as was protocol for the outcall service where she worked. For three and a half hours, Lee tried to file a report with Hollywood police but was shuffled from one

[16] Dale Fetherling, "Killings Strain Police-Media Ties: Disagreements Surface on Release of Information," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1977.

[17] Homicide Detective Frank Salerno has spoken frankly about his disdain for public accountability through the press during the homicide investigations of the '70s and '80s. See *City of Angels, City of Death*; O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*, and Paul Skolnick, *Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer*, Documentary (The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC), Netflix 2021). A quick google of the IPC reveals that it was formed in 2016 and has funded several other true crime documentaries, including work by Nancy Grace, whom we will meet in a later chapter.

[18] O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*.

department and telephone line to the next.[19] She described a frustration that officers seemed uninterested, telling reporters later that one had told her: "Oh, she probably just changed trick houses and she didn't tell you. You know how hookers are." Lee was persistent and camped out at the sheriff's station around 1:30 a.m., but at that point Martin was already dead. Though she had done everything right, Lee had failed to save her.[20]

As she put it, exasperatedly: "If I could have got one woman on the phone, she would have understood the urgency immediately and she would have got a car out to me right away. They don't take attacks on prostitutes seriously. If a man can kill a prostitute and get away with it, he can kill any woman."[21] Just as the WAVAW had recognized, Lee and the women she worked with knew that the only thing standing between any woman and a violent death was a man who knew he could *not* get away with it. If he could, then none of them was safe.

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[19] Within Los Angeles, each incorporated neighborhood also has its own police department, leading to confusion between agencies even within the same city, as we saw in the case of the Tate murder weapon in Chapter 1. Over the course of the following two decades, many reform efforts focused on communication and the centralization of standardized data and procedure. See Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg, *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021); Sarah Brayne, "Dye in the Cracks: The Limits of Legal Frameworks Governing Police Use of Big Data," *Saint Louis University Law Journal* 65, no. 4 (2021): 823–36; Jonathan Ben-Menachem, "2020 FBI Data Shows Spike in Murders across the Country.," *Slate*, October 1, 2021; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[20] John Hurst, "He Sounded 'Square': Strangler's Phone Call Wife Away, He Told Girl's Boss," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 15, 1977. There was much more offensive language in the coverage of Martin's murder that appeared in earlier drafts of this chapter. I chose, however, to include only Lee's testimony, as I found it representative of the attitudes I encountered in most of the coverage; namely that when women had already been identified as sex workers, men on the police force and in print and TV news understood them to have placed *themselves* in harm's way by virtue of their choice of profession. Being publicly identified by men as a "prostitute" or "whore" (both of which were ubiquitous in the coverage) was itself a dangerous designation that denoted a lack of value in society and thus a lack of need for protection from violence. I do not trust these men to have been able to speak about or translate the complexities of consent, sex, and violence as a worker under capitalism to audiences – but they made it very clear once co-eds started going missing that these were different types of victims called "nice girls." I am determined not to reproduce that dichotomy through my language here and have thus chosen the terms "sex work" and "sex worker," though I find both still lacking. I have attempted to write this chapter in such a way that makes clear to the reader that every woman who lost her life is, to me, exactly as valuable as the last and the next.

[21] Sharon McDonald, "L.A. Strangler: A Matter of Rape and Death," *Lesbian Tide*, Jan/Feb 1978, pages 6-7. Anne Gray Fischer has argued that the "sexual policing" that undergirded projects of criminalization in cities during the twentieth century was linked to the same institutionalized dehumanization that allowed for the policing, displacement, and warehousing of *all* bodies, regardless of race, gender, or class. See Anne Gray Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us: Sex, Race, and Police Power from Segregation to Gentrification*, Justice, Power, and Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Juno Mac and Molly Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (Verso Books, 2020); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

A group of more than twenty women picketed outside the LAPD headquarters to protest negligence in the face of Lee's calls. "Where were all the police and rewards earlier?" one asked in reference to the city posting a reward for information. "If there were similarities…on the third and fourth killings," as the papers were now describing, "why wouldn't they have a task force or an award then? He dropped them off in the same general areas. Why weren't there be people in the bushes waiting for him?" The police had been "everywhere," they complained, "But they're just watching." [22]

I even found evidence of police hostility toward the WAVAW demonstration at City Hall. The hearse originally intended to have a police escort, but the LAPD refused. A lesbian feminist magazine reported that an officer on scene had sneered at the women: "You're not a real funeral, there's no dead body!" An audience member retorted exasperatedly, "What do you mean, there are ten of them!"[23] Working within the underground economy, sex workers in Los Angeles were more than used to looking out for each other and steering clear of police. As one explained, "We have to come out here with straight razors to protect ourselves; we have to come out here with knives; then we get busted for having them."[24] Aside from fears of arrest, fines, or incarceration, they also knew that police officers frequently abused their power within these liminal spaces, even acting as sexual predators themselves.[25]

Since the turn of the twentieth century when moneyed Progressive reformers in cities began to push for the "uplift" of the urban poor – marking activities like smoking, drinking, dancing, and sex as "vices" to be monitored and ordered within urban space – sex workers had rarely looked to police for protection. Not only did the Progressives advocate for harmful forms of class control, but the absence of strong municipal governments also made the enforcement of vice laws functionally impossible (not to mention undesirable for most people who lived in cities). The result, as Kevin Mumford has shown, was the intentional construction of "interzones" where illegal activities could still exist; and the formal professionalization of policing to provide manpower to contain them. In major cities like Chicago,

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[22] Lynn Simross, "Women Watch… and Wonder," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1977.

[23] Quoted in MacDonald, "A Matter of Rape and Death."

[24] Mark Forster, "Prostitutes Still Roam Hollywood: Vice Drive Had Little Effect," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 12, 1977.

[25] Thuma, *All Our Trials*; Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us*; Reina Sultan, "Bloated Police Budgets Won't Stop Sexual Violence," *Truthout*, September 25, 2022.

officials simply zoned off entire neighborhoods – but police officers, who received no formal training for the job and often took payouts from local gangs, pimps, and even politicians – exercised complete discretion, making these areas into spaces where men willing to exercise force without upsetting the status quo could do so generally without consequence.[26] "The cops," one woman put it succinctly, "don't care about us."[27]

It was also within such liminal zones that police habitually terrorized and brutalized the patrons of gay bars – which were technically illegal – during the years preceding. Women like Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans sex worker in New York City who famously threw the first brick at the Stonewall uprising (and died under mysterious circumstances in 1992), were most at risk of violence from perpetrators like the Hillside Stranglers.[28] Yolanda Washington, the Strangler's first victim who was both Black and abducted while working on the street, did not receive any coverage until several white women considered "nice girls" were killed after her, for example. Aside from our present concept of injustice through silence, as Washington was denied the exposure of white victims, there were other material consequences to this lag: it provided the time and space for the perpetrators to actually *get better* at murdering women before they even attracted much attention. Serial killers," as they came to be called, claimed so many victims precisely because they were able to practice violence on members of society who would not raise police suspicion.

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[26] For more on sex workers, self-defense, and police, see Thuma, *All Our Trials*; Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us*; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016). On vice zones, see Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, Popular Cultures, Everyday Lives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Chad C. Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); George M. Johnson, *All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020); Croix A. Saffin, "Wounds of White Supremacy: Understanding the Epidemic of Violence Against Black and Brown Trans Women/Femmes," in Belew and Gutierrez, eds., *A Field Guide To White Supremacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Brandon Andrew Robinson, *Coming Out to the Streets: LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness* (University of California Press, 2020); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Joe Domanick, *To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

[27] Robert Lindsey, "Fear of the 'Hillside Strangler' Pervades Los Angeles Area," *New York Times*, Dec 21, 1977.

[28] CBS Evening News, February 23, 1978, "Los Angeles Hillside Strangler," Item# 256555," Vanderbilt TV News Archive.

As rape began to enter the constellation of sex crimes in the cultural imaginary during the women's liberation era, victims of spectacle murder – specifically white women and child victims – came to comprise a national "body" in burgeoning crime entertainment narratives reminiscent of that of the white woman after Reconstruction; one that needed to be protected from dangerous sexual deviants by strong, normative male actors working both within and outside of the state.[29] Between the 1890s and 1940s, the prevalence of spectacle lynching in and beyond the Southern United States had revealed the concept of rape to be an entirely social construct with little legal consequence. The endemic rape of Black women provoked no intervention from state actors (despite decades of calls), but the very specter of the raped white woman could get a Black person, or a Jewish, Mexican, or Italian one depending on where you were, beaten, mutilated, and set aflame. As much as victimization and criminalization are structural, social, and cultural projects at the macro level, it is important to recognize that they are also deeply personal, affective ones. As historian Thomas Holt has argued of the collection of lynching tokens, white supremacy and the legacies of slavery alone do not explain what could lead someone to display the body parts of a person they had seen lynched.[30] Such actions were intentional choices made by people whose concept of self relied heavily on a dichotomy of good and evil; the existence of one requiring the existence of the other. Through cases like Hillside, we see how the moral scripts we adopt from

[29] For a list of works on race and protection after Reconstruction, see Kali Nicole Gross, "African American Women, Mass Incarceration, and the Politics of Protection," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 25–33; Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012);; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997); Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Margot Canaday, Nancy F. Cott, and Robert O. Self, eds., *Intimate States: Gender, Sexuality, and Governance in Modern US History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021); Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Mac and Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes*; Timothy Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 61–72; Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (in)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, Queer Action/Queer Ideas (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011). *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, Documentary (Netflix; Public Square Films, 2017); Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[30] Thomas C Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, February 1995, 1–20.

historical patterns of racial violence can map onto "new" problems where violence manifests in ways that do not fall so cleanly into categories from the past.[31]

Male reporters and detectives, themselves often socially, culturally, and materially invested in relegating sex work to the realm of dehumanization, blamed the victims for their own precarity in the same breath that they warned viewers to be more wary of their surroundings. One national segment told viewers that victims were "friendly, gregarious people, prone to take risks" through a voiceover over a woman hitchhiking on Hollywood Boulevard.[32] Another reporter described two young women he had seen hitchhiking on Figueroa Boulevard as "mak[ing] it easy" for the Strangler.[33] It seems, to me, much easier to make such a comment from the comfort of a car than from the position of someone in need of a ride.

Leads in the case were slim for the LAPD, as physical evidence defied what police had come to "know" about violent crime over the course of the twentieth century – in other words, they lacked the framework to explain the serial murders of women to a wondering public.[34] This offender was thus immediately deemed an "extreme case" with an abnormal psychology.[35] As Geraldo Rivera – who would go on to become a prominent face in the movement for victims' rights – succinctly put it in a feature on the case: "From the self-defense classes in the suburbs to the prostitutes trying to protect themselves in the street, the Strangler case makes one thing vividly clear. People can never totally protect themselves from unknown killers, who choose their victims at random, leaving virtually no clues and even less

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[31] For more on how conversations about safety through women's liberation movements during this period pushed carceral solutions, see Aya Gruber, *The Feminist War on Crime: The Unexpected Role of Women's Liberation in Mass Incarceration* (University of California Press, 2020).

[32] ABC Evening News, Dec. 29, 1977, Item# 47084, "Los Angeles/Hillside Strangler." Vanderbilt TV News. See also Grahame Jones, "Special Metro Squad Joins Hunt for Hillside Strangler," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1977.

[33] William Overend, "The Southland's New Neighbor: Fear," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1977.

[34] At this point, murder cases involving more than one victim were called "mass murders," but there was not yet a term for an individual who commits mass murders (in other words, the act of mass murder had not yet been attached to an identity). I still found these men called "monsters" throughout the '70s. Leads were so slow that at one point, Barbara Walters reported that all the police knew of their suspect was that he had "a mustache and a limp." ABC Evening News for Thurs., Dec. 15, 1977, Vanderbilt TV News, Item# 46911, "Law and Law Enforcement/Cleveland/Los Angeles Murders/Arson." After Lauren Wagner's murder, the LAPD was so desperate that they even turned to hypnotizing witnesses in hopes of jogging their memories. See Jerry Belcher, "Kidnap Story Baffles Police: No Names, No Clues to Girls' Fate" *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1977; and Gene Blake, "Police Use of Hypnosis Under Attack: State High Court Asked to Limit Practice; Unreliability Cited," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1977.

[35] Betty Liddick, "Focusing on the Reasons for Rape," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1977.

understanding of their motives"[36] Lauren Wagner's mother, whose daughter was found just a few hours after police finally listened to her husband's fib, asked: "How much safer could a person be than driving in their own car, in their own neighborhood, on their own block?"[37] Parents who had flocked to quiet, residential areas to raise children now lamented that the violence of the city was making its way to their doorstep.[38]

"Whoever he is out there," wrote the author of a local opinion column calling herself Deirdre Blackstone, "he is stalking us where we live. These young women whom he rapes and strangles, then dumps naked in the ivy by the sides of our quiet streets – they could be ourselves."[39] These images and stories were undoubtedly triggering to many women, who described fears that affected both their bodies and minds. I found several who described being so afraid that it made them feel physically ill.[40] One of the victims' coworkers admitted she was so affected by her friend's death that she had dreamed about the Strangler choking her and woke up with a sore throat.[41] (I had quite a few haunting dreams about these women myself.) Another pointed out that it seemed there was less interest in helping rape survivors in Culver City than catching the Strangler because the victims had been left alive rather than dead. She explained: "Rape is a mental hurt, as well as physical, and even though a woman may survive, the mental hurt, sometimes, never goes away."[42] These women articulated a revelation for many facing this danger

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[36] CBS Evening News," Los Angeles Hillside Strangler." For more on Geraldo Rivera, see: *Geraldo Rivera's 1972 Expose of Willowbrook State School* (Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance, 1972); *Revisiting Willowbrook 50 Years Later* (ABC7 Eyewitness News New York, 2022); Jeremy Barr and Elahe Izadi, "How Geraldo Rivera, the Sensationalist Showman of '80s TV, Became the Voice of Election Reason on Fox News," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2020.

[37] ABC Evening News, Jan 31, 1978, Item# 50962, "Hillside Strangler," Vanderbilt TV News Archive.

[38] Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2006); Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975–2001* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); K. Mullen, *Dangerous Strangers: Minority Newcomers and Criminal Violence in the Urban West, 1850-2000* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

[39] Dierdre Blackstone, "I Want to Scream Out."

[40] John Hurst, "Strangler Strikes Again: 11th Girl's Nude Body Found on Silver Lake Hillside," Los Angeles Times, December 14, 1977. The same article quotes another woman saying, "I'm scared sick."

[41] Simross, "Women Watch."

[42] H. Vincent Price, "Rapist of Nine Still at Large," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 22, 1977. The same woman sardonically suggested the apartment building be renamed from "Lakeside Village" to "Rapeside Village."

for the first time; one that had lurked in the back of their heads for decades: they were worth more dead than they were alive.

The Strangler's final victim, Cindy Lee Hudspeth, was spotted by a Los Angeles Fire Department helicopter in the Angeles Forest, a much more remote area than the others, on the morning of February 17, 1978, four months to the day after the murder of Yolanda Washington. The same month, movie theaters debuted a film called *Pauly the Rapist*, which producers admitted they had rushed to release hoping to "capitalize on the headlines that are existing already."[43] The serial murders of women in the 1970s provided evidence of a pattern – not the pattern of male homicidal violence, which we already knew existed, but of neglect from those who claimed to protect women from it. Though this was not news to some, it often shocked those growing up in a world where mentors, parents, and teachers surprised them with tacit acceptance of cultures of violence against women.[44]

In 1980, one of these women, a student at the University of California-Santa Cruz ,continued to protest the wanton use of the imagery of violation, drawing on the same understanding of spectacles of brutality as her sisters in WAVAW and CAT. Staff at her university's library had chosen to display a set of satirical photographs depicting murdered women by photographer Les Krims. The series, the "Incredible Case of the Stack O' Wheat Murders," featured a nude model posed as ten different corpses, covered in "blood" that was actually chocolate sauce and lacked a "stack" of bodies to a stack of pancakes. While the exhibition was intended to be a transgressive joke, the photographer stated that there was also a genuine new interest in such images because they allowed the public an opportunity to engage with forensic photography while "police don't allow people to look at those kinds of photographs."[45] The police may not have, but footage had begun to reach the public nonetheless.

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[43] ABC Evening News, January 31, 1978, "Hillside Strangler" with field reporter Geraldo Rivera; Item #50962, Vanderbilt TV News Archive.

[44] Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Frederic Storaska, *How to Say No to a Rapist and Survive* (Random House, 1975); Brandi Grissom, "Thousands of Rape Kits Sit Untested for Decades, but Change Would Be Costly," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011.

[45] Joy Horowitz, "The Stack o' Wheat Photos Uproar: Pictures Spark Feminist Debate," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1980. See also, Kerry Ann Cobra, "When Protest Is a Crime," *City on a Hill Press*, April 3, 1980; Don Wilson, "UCSC student admits ruining library's sex-violence photos," *San Jose Mercury*, April 2, 1980. All found in WAVAW collection, Box 5, Folder 6, "Hillside Strangler," UCLA.

Nikki Craft, an active member of the local "Take Back the Night" chapter and longtime anti-rape activist, had balked at what she perceived as callousness on the part of the library staff for displaying the photos despite an active series of local rapes and murders by a perpetrator not unlike the Hillside Stranglers deemed the "Trailside Killer."[46] Later, the case would become spectacularized nationally through another Robert Graysmith paperback investigation (*The Sleeping Lady*, 1990), and through the testimony of Lois Rinna, who almost died at his hands before giving birth to soap opera actress Lisa Rinna. She even spoke about her experiences with her daughter on an episode of the *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. At the time of Craft's encounter with the photos, however, spectacle had done nothing to protect her or her fellow co-eds from violence; it had only thrust their pain into the spotlight. After spending weeks studying the photos in Special Collections, Craft destroyed them in an act of civil disobedience. Her statement is worth quoting at length because of how fluently she connected her viewing of the photos to her emotions about murders that had happened around her.

A full picture of her affective response deserves space here:

> "The day after I viewed these prints, I read on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle of the murder of Barbara Schwartz, who was stabbed to death while jogging on Mount Tamalpais. She was described as 'curled in the fetal position, the front of her blouse drenched in blood as she lay in the shadows under the redwoods—her dog's nose pressed against her lifeless arm.' I was reminded of another Chronicle story about another San Francisco area jogger, Mary Bennet, 23 years old, who died after a violent struggle defending herself against a 'frenzied killer' rapist. She was stabbed 25 times, with multiple stab wounds on her face, neck, and chest. Golfers stated they heard her 'long, agonized screams,' but did not investigate because they saw a police car in the area. As I continued reading the grisly account of Barbara Schwartz' death, I remembered the satirical pamphlet I had seen in the University library the day before: 'Of course, the epitome of the series' humor resides in all the Hershey's chocolate used as blood.' I remembered the description of 'arrays of utterly exquisite corpses.' In the same Chronicle article the chairman of the San Francisco Council on Physical Fitness warned all women of the 'extreme danger of jogging in any city during the day' and advised women to jog in groups, preferably on special jogging tracks. I went jogging that day – I wondered what beach I should go – which one was safe. As I jogged I was wrenched by the images of 'long, agonized scream and of Barbara Schwartz 'curled in a fetal position.' I felt Mary Bennet's screams, those 'long, agonized screams' that went unanswered, to be the screams of all women everywhere."[47]

[46] "Nikki Craft" was an activist persona – her given name is Deborah Spray.

[47] Deborah Spray (Nikki Craft), "In defense of civil disobedience," April 2, 1980. WAVAW collection, Box 5, Folder 6, "Hillside Strangler," UCLA.

Final Girls

National news segments began connecting the Hillside case to other serial murders across the country, contributing to an atmosphere of generalized anxiety about the possibility of being murdered that had not existed on the same scale prior. The *Los Angeles Times* had reported in late December of 1977 that the Strangler fit into a new "sexual pervert" category of mass murderers like the Boston Strangler, Son of Sam and Santa Cruz coed killer Ed Kemper, several other cases with which audiences were already familiar.[48] Taken together, the sheer density of these reports worked to collapse disparate murders into one dangerous category that had yet to be named. While there had been isolated incidences of similar violence in American history before, never so many at once, nor the technology to consume news of all of them at the same time. Many of the men committing these murders strategically chose to prey on women in semi-private areas where they gathered to enjoy themselves without the company of men, like nurse's dormitories and sorority houses.[49]

In the fall of 1978, teens and young adults flocked to movie theaters for director John Carpenter's revolutionary slasher film *Halloween*. This film typified the dominant tropes of slasher films that became cult hits over the decade that followed – Michael Myers as the slow, deliberate, and persistent villain who slips repeatedly through the cracks of a broken criminal-legal system unequipped to deal with mental illness; and the original "final girl," Laurie Strode, who survives his repeated attacks by keeping her wits about her and, above all, rejecting the advances of men. As the saying goes, the best way to survive a horror film is to stay a virgin.[50]

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[48] The article goes on: "Most psychiatrists interviewed said the Hillside Strangler appears to fit the psychopathic mold. He has left no bizarre messages, like Son of Sam, that would indicate the delusional thinking associated with schizophrenia. No ritualistic markings or symbols indicating the work of religious cultists. No savage mutilation characteristic of Jack-the-Ripper types out to ride the world of women they consider to be 'filthy,' such as prostitutes. Instead, strangling is the killer's primitive sexual kick." Lois Timnick, "CLASSIC PATTERN: The Strangler: Portrait of a Sex Killer," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1977.

[49] I am referring here specifically to Richard Speck, who killed eight nurses in one location in Chicago in 1966, and Ted Bundy, who attacked sorority houses and shared living spaces occupied by young women.

[50] You can find excellent satire of this trope throughout the 1990s, but I suggest starting with Wes Craven, *Scream* (Dimension Films, Woods Entertainment, 1996).

The murder narratives of the independent horror film drew on the morality tales of early gothic horror, often killing off characters who engaged in risky behavior (like having sex with your boyfriend).[51] While many understood slasher films to be uncritically reproducing the same violence that characterized the Strangler coverage (some groups aligned horror films with pornography), Amy Holden Jones, director of the 1982 *Slumber Party Massacre*, explained that this is a misunderstanding of the genre, which mostly killed off unhelpful men. The appeal of the final girl, she argues, was not in the audience's desire to see her hurt: "They want to see her in jeopardy and in triumph and in revenge." These independent, low-budget films employed record numbers of up-and-coming women actors and writers – many of whom, like Jamie Lee Curtis, the daughter of actors Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, who had starred in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 thriller *Psycho* – would go on to lead illustrious film careers as so-called "scream queens."[52] As in the case of *Halloween*, filmmakers often spent so little on making these that they became public domain, airing annually as a part of special holiday programming during the '80s and '90s.[53] Horror movies provided a "safe scare" in a world chock full of unsafe ones. John Carpenter remembered, for example, that people had been going to see his film in the context of having just seen coverage of the Jonestown massacre in Guyana in early November of 1978.[54] The thrill and catharsis or experiencing fictional violence collectively in a room full of people pushed the genre in new directions, as production

[51] I am borrowing "murder narratives" from Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*.

[52] Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*, Thriller (Paramount Pictures, 1960).

[53] The original *Halloween* films were funded by Moustapha Akkad. My knowledge of the rights of the film comes from interviews with friends who have screened it while working for an independent movie theater. For more, see Anthony D'Alessandro, "How Miramax & Blumhouse Brought 'Halloween' Back From The Dead," *Deadline*, October 22, 2018; Kyle Buchanan, "Under the Skin of Jamie Lee Curtis," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2022; Jeff McQueen, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*, Documentary (Starz, thinkfilm, Candy Heart Productions, 2006); Grady Hendrix, *The Final Girl Support Group* (New York: Berkley, 2021); Claire Holland C., *I Am Not Your Final Girl: Poems* (GlassPoet Press, 2018).

[54] The Jonestown massacre carried very specific political valences that are too complex to explore here, but for our purposes it is most important to know that helicopters took footage from the sky and LIFE magazine printed horrendous photos of the aftermath for public consumption. There are many harmful depictions of the Jonestown massacre in both true crime and fiction. I suggest starting any research with Rebecca Moore's online archive: Rebecca Moore, "Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple," https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/; Rebecca Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2009).

teams began to compete for bragging rights over having made "the scariest movie ever" and eliciting the loudest screams in the theater.[55]

Set designers like Tom Savini drew on the gore they had seen as soldiers in Vietnam to come up with creative, bloody scenes, ushering in a new era of special effects as well as a new generation of amateur filmmakers who built fandom cultures around Michael Myers and other horror villains like Freddy Kreuger from Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street*.[56] Savini recalled being instructed to "just start thinking of ways to kill people." A photographer in Vietnam, he drew on the things he recalled from the war, turning them into spectacles with new special effects technologies. He recalled watching the muscles of a severed arm continue to contract after it had been separated from a man's body, for example, which inspired him to get more technical with how he portrayed flesh, blood, and bone on set. Throughout the '80s, creators like Savini ruled the big screen with their spectacular displays in horror, war movies, and even family favorites like *Gremlins* (1984) and *E.T.* (1982). By the mid-90s, these artists were beginning to fall out of fashion in favor of digital effects like green screen, which – like photography of the Gulf War – presented a sanitized, cerebral version of the brutality that existed in the real world.[57] When asked where he got the ideas for his films, Wes Craven replied brazenly "I read the front page of the *New York Times*. Pick any day, you know?"[58]

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[55] Here, I am quoting a flier for *Friday the 13th* discussed in the documentary film *Going to Pieces*. I highly recommend this for anyone interested in researching horror, violence, or art during the 1980s. Interviews include Wes Craven, John Carpenter, Amy Holden Jones and many actors and set designers, including Robert Englund (Freddy Kreuger) and special effects pioneer Tom Savini. For more on the history of modern warfare and cultural depictions of violence, see W. Scott Poole, *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror* (Counterpoint Press, 2019); W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Baylor University Press, 2014); Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[56] While I have not heard Tom Savini speak about this directly, I would imagine his work process was one that involved attempting to safely access his memories of Vietnam. I take these observations from his own testimony in the *Going to Pieces* documentary, as well as Kathleen Belew's work in *Bring the War Home*, but I suggest consulting Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Mariner Books, 2009) and Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, New York: Viking, 2014) for more on how experiences from the Vietnam War carried forward into the daily lives and material realities of veterans during these decades.

[57] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1st Picador ed (New York: Picador, 2004).

[58] Wes Craven quoted in *Going to Pieces*.

The "every town" of "Haddonfield, Illinois," where Michael Myers has been killing off characters since 1978, is not in Illinois at all. It's in Pasadena, California, where the movie was filmed.[59] In fact, it's just a short ride from where a homeowner had found the body of a girl at the end of his driveway a year earlier – the morning before Halloween.

[59] I am using a specific concept of the "every town" here based on how I see it used by anti-gun violence organizers, many of whom are the parents of murdered children. Everytown is an organization, but it is also a true crime trope, even though – as Kathleen Belew shows in her work on Colorado in the decade preceding 9/11 – the details and effects of direct violence are not universal except insofar as how they are spectacularized and constructed through the narratives we've been taught in true crime. For an example, to read alongside her work on Colorado, see Lawrence Schiller, *Perfect Murder, Perfect Town: JonBenet and the City of Boulder* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999).

3. Strangers Beside Us

If you watched the Hillside coverage, you saw it: an interview with Edmund Kemper.

He had killed ten people in and around Santa Cruz between 1964 and 1973. At the age of just 15, he shot both of his grandparents to death and immediately turned himself into authorities. Dazed, he told them he had just wanted to know "what it would feel like" and was incarcerated in a psychiatric institution until the age of 21. Once the state determined that he had been sufficiently rehabilitated, he emerged from the institution to abduct, rape, and murder six more women before finally killing his own mother and her friend. Having known from the start that he had not gotten better before reentering society, he immediately turned himself in once again. During trial, Kemper asked the judge for the death penalty but was declared sane and legally committed to life at California Medical Facility in Vacaville in 1973.

Just four short years later in 1977, wearing a prison jumpsuit and speaking directly to agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the recreational area of the Vacaville facility, he warned women on live television that attempting to protect themselves from murderers like him was entirely useless:

> "These girls that thought they were protected [...], my first two victims, it's a waste of time. [...] They could have a .38 special in their purse, they could have it in their hand. It's not gonna do them a damn bit of good. That's not bragging. I had control of the situation, I had the gun, they didn't know it. I had the intent, they didn't know it. I had it planned out in my mind, they didn't know it. And I'm not gonna make them aware of it. People are so naïve. Everybody is naïve until they have been in that situation – and that situation, you're only in once."[1]

Agents of local, state, and federal law enforcement maintain a monopoly on the access to criminal information. Their coordination to compile centralized databases that would allow them to identify, find, and incriminate suspects on a broader scale throughout the 1970s represents a central function of

[1] ABC Evening News, January 31, 1978, Item# 50962, "Hillside Strangler," Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.

the logic of police reform as it is presented in crime entertainment: providing past evidence of the potential for future crimes.

Because nearly all the historical actors with access to that information – both willing and able to speak to the press – were men, the genre Americans formerly understood as "true crime" had focused on exactly that: the stories of male state agents. Precedents to Jack Webb's *Dragnet*, which had begun as a radio program, narrated investigations based on real case files from the perspective of the romanticized figure of the detective, like that portrayed in noir films. He (always he) represented a fantasy of how the FBI imagined its own role in American life; the brave warriors standing between everyone else and the triumph of true evil. Like war parables, these stories had obvious heroes, villains, and victims, but the spectacle murders of the '70s made this type of propaganda feel stilted and lazy, especially as detectives were so clearly making mistakes in public all the time – both while investigating these cases and while committing the civil- and human-rights violations that criminalized groups had finally been able to begin to turn into spectacles of their own. As the Bureau lost ground on its claim to moral authority, its directors began to shift resources and attention toward a ragtag team of agents who had begun to insist that the problem of what they termed "serial murder" was going to require a different kind of war story.[2]

Just as the Prohibition era expanded the popularity of vice districts and expanded municipal policing, as we saw in Chapter 2, it also made the FBI into the far-reaching, powerful institution it is today as administrative shifts during the 19-teens placed the enforcement of federal laws against illegal substances under the jurisdiction of 26-year-old J. Edgar Hoover in 1921. A vicious anti-communist, Hoover used Prohibition to justify massive federal investment in manpower for surveillance and built the

[2] David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacqui Shine, "The Moral Order of Perry Mason's Universe," *Judicature* 105, no. 2 (Summer 2021);Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacqui Shine, "The Moral Order of Perry Mason's Universe," *Judicature* 105, no. 2 (Summer 2021), https://judicature.duke.edu/articles/the-moral-order-of-perry-masons-universe/; John Buntin, *L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City*, 1st edition (New York: Crown, 2010); David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*, New Ed edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, First edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021); David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); W. Scott Poole, *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror* (Counterpoint Press, 2019).

crime lab in Langley, Virginia, which now leads the world in educating law enforcement on forensic investigative methods. As anyone familiar with the term "roaring '20s" well knows, Hoover's efforts did next-to-nothing to reduce alcohol consumption, but they did dramatically expand the power of federal agents to surveil, arrest, and brutalize anyone they thought deserved it.[3]

Marshalling the FBI through a period of rapid transformation in federal infrastructure, Hoover dictated the Bureau's activities for more than fifty years. He was an astute student of propaganda and recognized that promoting the work of the FBI through stories and images in popular entertainment was a very effective way to promote demands for more federal resources, which required justifying his spending to the public. Hoover sat at the controls of some of the FBI's most violent and invasive surveillance programs, including COINTELPRO, whose agents readers will remember murdered Mark Clark and Fred Hampton in Chapter 1 just a few weeks after the Tate-LaBianca murders. From the mid-50s to his retirement, Hoover oversaw the widespread surveillance, coordinated harassment, and assassinations of multiple civil rights leaders and sent agents on covert counterintelligence missions to infiltrate, radicalize, and bust activists organizing in support of a wide range of social movements.[4] The Nixon administration, which developed the National Crime Information Center and Project SEARCH, further advanced Hoover's projects to centralize and collect data after he retired. Both received large grants from the Law Enforcement Assistance Act and were housed within the FBI by the time of the Kemper interview.[5]

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[3]Rachel Hall, *Wanted: The Outlaw in American Culture* (University of Virginia Press, 2009); Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*, First edition (New York: W.W. NORTON & Company, Independent Publishers Since 1923, 2016); David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Stephen Milligen, *Better to Reign in Hell: Serial Killers, Media Panics and the FBI*, 1st ed. edition (Critical Vision, 2006); David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*, New Ed edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[4]William J. Maxwell, ed., *James Baldwin: The FBI File* (New York, NY: Arcade Publishing, 2017); Aelya Ehtasham, "Prof Beverly Gage Recasts Legacy of FBI Founder in Carl Becker Lecture Series," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, March 17, 2016; Matthew Guariglia, "'A Jekyll-Hyde Existence:' Inside the CIA's 1980 Manual for Ferreting out Homosexuals," *MuckRock*, March 3, 2017; Simone Browne, "The Feds Are Watching: A History of Resisting Anti-Black Surveillance," *LEVEL* (blog), October 6, 2020; Simone Browne, *Dark Matters on the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (New York, NY: Scribner, 2010); McGirr, *The War on Alcohol*.

[5] Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), 156; William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015); Browne, "The Feds Are Watching"; Shoshana

Hoover also pioneered the true crime radio show *Gangbusters* in the 1940s, famously based on "real" federal case files. These detective characters were portrayed by professional voice actors and relied heavily on hunches and gut feelings – things they had learned on the job that gave them a sixth sense that no one else could fully understand. As legal scholar Josie Duffy Rice has put it, they taught both police officers and members of the public to put faith in a detective's "supernatural knowledge" of the feelings and actions of a person who has committed a crime.[6] This mythic, intimate dialectic between the hero and the villain reproduced very basic narrative fables that entertainers have used repeatedly over the course of U.S. history, especially to provide moral order at moments of radical renegotiation between the individual, the community, and the administrative state. But FBI-sponsored true crime content was also heavily influenced by Hoover's own tendency to steal, embellish, and rewrite the stories of his agents and claim them as his own.[7]

For a generation of young homicide detectives like Dave Toschi of the Zodiac case and Frank Salerno of the Hillside task force, who had grown up on *Gangbusters* and *True Crime Magazine*, it tortured them to feel so helpless to protect women and children from the "monsters" who terrorized their communities, leaving behind bizarre, tantalizing clues. Toschi later told Robert Graysmith that the letters made him feel as though the Zodiac Killer had been directly challenging *him*: "I'm better than you,' he taunted us. 'Smarter than you,' he said. 'Catch me if you can.'"[8]

Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019); Matthew Guariglia, "Too Much Surveillance Makes Us Less Free. It Also Makes Us Less Safe.," *Washington Post*, July 18, 2017; Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Orisanmi Burton, "Diluting Radical History: Blood in the Water and the Politics of Erasure," *Abolition Journal*, January 26, 2017; Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017).

[6] Sarah Marshall, "You're Wrong About CSI: Junk Science with Josie Duffy Rice," You're Wrong About Podcast. Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*; Murley, *The Rise of True Crime*; Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Myth America: Historians Take on the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past* (New York: Basic Books, forthcoming).

[7] For discussions of Hoover's obsession with his own self-image as the biggest, baddest lawman of the land, see: Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*; Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*; Brian de Palma, *The Untouchables*, Thriller (Paramount Pictures, 1987); Hall, *Wanted: The Outlaw in American Culture*. Clint Eastwood has also participated in the making of a film about J. Edgar Hoover, but I am choosing not to cite it here because I do not recommend it to researchers or even amateur historians with an interest in the FBI.

[8] Robert Graysmith, *Zodiac: The Shocking True Story of the Hunt for the Nation's Most Elusive Serial Killer* (Berkley, 2007), 2.

With Hoover on his way out, Special Agent Robert Ressler, who coined the term "serial killer," knew that officers were going to have to get smarter facing foes like these. Ressler himself had grown up in Chicago playing detective with his school friends ("trying to look like FBI men, who were heroes to the country, back then") and became a murder obsessive in 1946, at just the age of nine when local sixteen-year-old University of Chicago student William Heirens was convicted for the local "Lipstick Killer" murders. Ressler was drawn in by the bizarre details of the crimes he had read in the *Chicago Tribune*, for which his father was a delivery driver. At one scene, the perpetrator had written hasty block letters in bright red lipstick: "for heavens sake catch me before I kill more I cannot control myself"; at another, they left a ransom note reminiscent of what had been the crime of the century prior to displacement by the Manson case: the Lindbergh baby kidnapping.[9] Even more fascinating to Ressler was Heirens himself, who he felt did not *seem* like a killer, but a normal person like himself.[10]

Ressler tried to join the Chicago Police Department after high school but was told they did not hire educated officers because they make "too much trouble." He joined the Army instead, serving in both Japan and Germany, and joined the FBI in 1962. The Bureau offered to pay for him to complete a master's degree in Criminology and Police Administration at Michigan State University as long as he would also spy on "various New Left" organizations on campus – which he did ("painting myself as a disgruntled veteran").[11] He found anti-war activism within the Students for a Democratic Society (or SDS, founded at the University of Chicago where Heirens had also been a student) to be particularly insidious. Like many other Americans, he actually used the term "crazy" to describe them, interpreting the rejection of traditional institutions like the military and marriage on college campuses as a direct attack on the

[9] Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); K. Mullen, *Dangerous Strangers: Minority Newcomers and Criminal Violence in the Urban West, 1850-2000* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016); Ted Patrick and Tom Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!* (New York: Dutton, 1976); Erica R. Meiners, *For the Children?: Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[10] Ressler succinctly covers this period of his life in the first chapter of his memoir. Robert K. Ressler & Tom Schactman, *Whoever Fights Monsters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). Quotes about playing FBI are on page 35.

[11] Ressler, 39-40. "I thought these 'radical' protestors," he wrote, "didn't know what they were talking about; they hadn't been in the military, didn't know what the military was doing, but were determined that the military was their enemy."

nation and its building block, the imagined nuclear family.[12] After Hoover's exit from the Bureau, Ressler began working with the Behavioral Science Unit – at the time a team of just two agents – and pioneered the method of psychological profiling, helping also to develop California's new Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) into a formidable federal agency. At the BSU, he and colleague John Douglas began working to attach theories of violence within psychology to the physical apprehension of active perpetrators. To catch them, they believed, you had to get *inside their minds*.

This new generation of villains, for Ressler and Douglas, were different from your run-of-the-mill criminal because they did not kill for "reasons" the FBI understood – like money, revenge, political motive, or even anger. They killed because they liked it; or, as the Zodiac had put it, "because it is so much fun." As we saw in Chapter 2, women fought hard to associate serial murders with an existing problem of gendered sexual violence during this period, and now the BSU further linked perceived "sexual deviants" (an incredibly malleable category much like "communist," "victim," or "monster") to the pathology of an individual who commits multiple murders. Murder as pleasure was a terrifying concept and, over the course of the following decades, these agents and others used the authority and credibility of the Bureau to expand theories that essentially criminalized sexual fantasy as a potential murder fantasy; collapsing desire and criminality.[13]

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[12] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Jennifer Mittelstadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015); Paul M. Renfro, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012); Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975–2001* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020). Kruse and Zelizer, *Myth America*; Kathleen Belew and Ramon A. Gutierrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), see especially "From Pat Buchanan to Donald Trump: The Nativist Turn in Right-Wing Populism" by Joseph Lowndes..

[13] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*; Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Michael Bellefountaine, *A Lavender Look at the Temple: A Gay Perspective of the Peoples Temple* (iUniverse Publishing, 2011); Estelle Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 83–106; George Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," in *True Stories from the American Past*, ed. William Graebner, vol. II (McGraw-Hill, 1993); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

Ressler and Douglas's version of profiling sprang from trauma theory, from which they gleaned that violent thoughts and actions are not endemic to an individual's person but arise after significant negative experiences in their lives, including abuse. This method required analysts (and now law enforcement officers) to build a history and personality dossier to find out what, when, and how the individual "went wrong."[14] By this logic, they came to "understand" how a person similar to themselves had become an "other:" either because of something their mother did (an accusation used throughout this period to discipline white women for bad parenting) or something their father did (an accusation used throughout this period to pathologize crime within Black communities lacking a "strong" father figure).[15]

Most official studies of trauma in the twentieth century revolved around war. This makes basic sense, as the return from foreign conflict required massive social and economic changes to accommodate transformations undergone during the exceptional state of war. The first and second world wars led to volumes of young men returning to a relatively stable homeland (by stable, here, I mean not actively in combat) that was populated by people they once knew, who could not and would not ever understand the horrors they had seen and even caused. Though we should never make the mistake of assuming trauma to be the same across time or between people, particularly as our methods and instruments of violence evolve over time and the experience of trauma is entirely subjective, many who returned home from both wars exhibited symptoms that their loved ones described in similar terms. They were withdrawn, disconnected, and unable to discuss but also unable to step outside of the experiences they

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[14] Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Mariner Books, 2009); Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*; John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Rev. ed (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2009); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*; Robert R. Hazelwood and John E. Douglas, "The Lust Murderer" (FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 1980); Self, *All in the Family*; Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States"; Chrysanthi S. Leon, *Sex Fiends, Perverts, and Pedophiles : Understanding Sex Crime Policy in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Canaday, *The Straight State*; Canaday, Cott, and Self, *Intimate States*; Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).; Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic"; Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath"; Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (in)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, Queer Action/Queer Ideas (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

[15] Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic"; Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960"; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Women in Culture and Society Ser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*; Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

had in the past. They lashed out at loved ones, who described them as different people than they had been before they left.[16]

At long last, during the Vietnam War, the medical field began to address decades of ignorance (or, rather, intentional suppression) of the connection between the mind and body after a traumatic event.[17] Many of the most common symptoms of trauma were at the time listed as symptoms of psychosis, a direct legacy of the nineteenth-century diagnosis of hysteria.[18] Women testified for decades – going back to Sigmund Freud and even further – to the traumatic experiences of gender violence, violation, and sustained abuse. But it was not until after veterans from Vietnam, men with cultural and political power, began to speak out about their experiences as witnesses, participants, and agents of atrocities that the gatekeepers of these fields believed the experiences of abuse described by women could provide at least the same levels of trauma as those experienced by soldiers in battlefield experiencing "shell shock."[19] These combined to produce the official diagnosis we now know as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

Men like Kemper told the FBI that the brutality they unleashed on strangers was more about deep, repressed feelings of anger against people they were close to, who had caused them to develop certain attitudes and ideas that normalized the dehumanization and disposal of people. The BSU built also on the work of Dr. Henry Murray, a Harvard psychologist who had "profiled" Adolph Hitler (from

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[16] Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Mariner Books, 2009); Philip Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*, Reprint edition (Citadel, 2016); Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, New York: Viking, 2014); Ken Burns, *The Vietnam War* (PBS, 2017); Tom Hanks, *The Seventies*, Documentary (CNN, 2015); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home*; Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Rev. ed (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2009); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999); Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

[17] This was not new knowledge, but an embodied practice used to heal trauma for centuries.

[18] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*; Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*.

[19] All trauma is unique because it happens inside our unique minds; there is no use comparing traumas – either their origins or their results – because our body does not know the trauma of others, it only knows its own. Internal experiences of trauma require a level of self-knowledge as well as very advanced communication skills to relate these experiences to others, while official diagnoses may attempt to incorporate internal experiences but are primarily based on how they present externally to those around the individual. In other words, official studies of trauma focus on how these people made it harder for everyone else to be around them. When I refer to common symptoms described by others, I am thus describing the external perception of a traumatized individual. When I refer to common symptoms as a traumatized individual *themselves* describes them, I am speaking in very broad terms about the physical effect of a traumatic event on the body.

afar) for the Office of Strategic Services in 1943 to try to understand how a political leader becomes a dictator.[20]

Within the history of crime science, it has been quite common to use the fields of psychology and psychiatry irresponsibly for the purposes of "understanding" criminology and victimology, creating new problems to answer old questions (to which we usually also already have the answer). We learned about bystander theory in the introduction and, in 1969, Philip Zimbardo's wildly misrepresented car experiment became the basis for the broken windows theory of policing, which justified expanding police budgets in areas that already "looked like" they might need police because they were run down.[21] It was Zimbardo who also conducted the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, which came to define the answers to questions about fascism and popularized what Hanna Arendt has called "the banality of evil" in popular culture.[22] While the public learned from the experiment that "anyone" will become violent if given the option to do so without consequence (and could claim they were following rules), the entire ordeal of the experiment is actually evidence of our collective capacity to simplify and moralize complex processes of self-discovery, uncertainty, and the individual desire to keep ourselves and each other safe.[23]

Older criminologists had drawn directly from race science – a well-respected field at the time called phrenology – to develop typologies that purported to explain human behavior. Murray had also been an advocate of the use of psychotropic drugs, leading to the infamous MK-Ultra experiments that have puzzled and inspired conspiracy theorists for decades. These crossovers between those with the

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[20] You can find Murray's entire profile online in Cornell University's digital collections here: Henry A. Murray, "Analysis of The Personality of Adolph Hitler / With Predictions of His Future Behavior and Suggestions for Dealing With Him Now and After Germany's Surrender / O.S.S. Confidential," https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/nur01134, last accessed October 2022.

[21] Bench Ansfield, "The Broken Windows of the Bronx: Putting the Theory in Its Place," *American Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2020): 103–27; Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, eds., *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (London: Verso, 2016); Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, First edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

[22] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970); Bernard J. Bergen, *The Banality of Evil: Hannah Arendt and "The Final Solution,"* 1st edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); Judith Butler, "Hannah Arendt's Challenge to Adolf Eichmann," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2011.

[23] Ken Musen, *Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment*, Documentary, 1992; Kyle Patrick Alvarez, *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, Drama (Coup d'Etat Films, Sandbar Pictures, Abandon Pictures, 2015).

power to police and punish and those with the power to provide seemingly neutral evidence of the need for it led many law enforcement agencies to experiment with hypnosis, mind control, and torture techniques that U.S. soldiers had learned during foreign wars. These men continued to violate people in their custody in draconian ways throughout the following three decades (and beyond).[24]

It was not in Ressler's account of the Lipstick Killer, for example, but a clemency petition filed for William Heirens in 2002 that I learned there was no hard evidence against him upon conviction, though he spent sixty-five years in prison, the longest of anyone incarcerated in Illinois before him. A jury convicted him almost exclusively based on the confession that Chicago police had finally obtained after four straight days of around-the-clock interrogation, torture, forced ingestion of sodium pentathol, and no access to sustenance or to his parents (remember, he was sixteen).[25] It seems likely to me that Ressler knew at least part of this story. I don't think he left it out to trick us – he just believed that Heirens was evil enough to deserve what had happened to him, and that you don't confess if you are not guilty (a myth that torture methods are literally designed to disprove by activating our terror response).[26] BSU agents throughout the period would testify against the existence of diagnoses like dissociative identity disorder – which put a name to the process by which the brain separates itself into parts during a traumatic event, now standard knowledge within trauma studies – in order to shift the court's focus away from rehabilitation and toward incarceration, where they could study them.[27]

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[24] Annie Sweeney, "Burge Witness: Torture Charges 'Unprecedented,'" *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 2011; *Monsters Inside: The 24 Faces of Billy Milligan*, Documentary (Upside Films, Netflix, 2021); Darcy O'Brien, *Two of a Kind: The Hillside Stranglers* (New York, N.Y: New American Library, 1985). Though I need to do more research on this – and the historians of policing I've talked to knew less about it than I expected – I have confirmed the existence of a hypnosis unit within the Los Angeles Police Department through several sources including newspaper articles that mention it [cited in Chapter 2] and the personal testimony of several members of true crime research groups who are familiar with the landscape of the crime coverage archive in Southern California.

[25] Amended Petition for Executive Clemency: William Heirens, Northwestern University Law Center, April 2002. You can access the full petition as a part of the state record or printed online here: https://web.archive.org/web/20040618085916/http://www.law.northwestern.edu/depts/clinic/wrongful/documents/Heirenspetition.pdf

[26] Susana Rotker, ed., *Citizens of Fear: Urban Violence in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*; Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*; Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[27] Alex Gibney, *Crazy, Not Insane*, Documentary (Jigsaw Productions, 2020); Kathy Preston, *Monsters Inside: The 24 Faces of Billy Milligan*, Documentary, (Upside Films, Netflix, 2021); O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*; Bench Ansfield, "How a 50-Year-Old Study Was Misconstrued to Create Destructive Broken-Windows Policing," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2019; Maneka Sinha, "The Entrenched Carceralism of Forensics," *Inquest*, July 26, 2021; Brian Marriner, *On Death's Bloody Trail: Murder and the Art of Forensic*

Legal scholars have identified one of the resulting phenomena of this era as the "CSI effect," in which jurors anticipate a much higher standard of scientific evidence because of their familiarity with crime investigation television than courts require, or exhibit, in reality. This makes individuals harder to convict in theory, but the punitive desires of individual Americans in our present, as well as a broader system of racial capitalism, has allowed corporations and the tech industry to step in to fill this expectation void. These companies develop new technologies designed to convince juries by appealing to their knowledge of crime entertainment, as former crime scene investigator and FARO tech representative Alina Burroughs put it in 2019. Burroughs explained that FARO's 3D imaging technology produces a virtual crime scene, which keeps jurors awake and able to break down the prosecution's case against a defendant visually. (Burroughs herself draws much of her credentialing from her association with cases of spectacle violence like the trial of Casey Anthony, during which she remembers the jurors "falling asleep").[28] It is by design that we expect too much from these experts – it keeps us feeling vulnerable. And if we're vulnerable, we feel like we need them.

In the era of women's liberation and with so much exposure to the brutality of policing, the BSU still ultimately had to serve Hoover's more central purpose: preserving the public's investment in the existence and power of the FBI. Donna Schram, a psychologist and former acquaintance of a serial killer in college, explained this perfectly. "How would you feel," she asked, if you had received multiple warnings about an individual, met him, liked him, and cleared him; if you found out that he was the one you had been looking for the whole time? You would feel like a fool."[29]

Science (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Emily Thuma, "Against the 'Prison/Psychiatric State': Anti-Violence Feminisms and the Politics of Confinement in the 1970s," *Feminist Formations* 26, no. 2 (2014): 26–51.

[28] Alyssa Corinne Smith, "Evidence Written in Blood: Forensic Science and the True Crime Consumer," *Nursing Clio*, September 12, 2019; Peter Neufeld, *The Innocence Files*, Documentary (Jigsaw Productions, One Story Up Productions, Story Syndicate, 2020); Michele Byers and Van Marie Johnson, *The CSI Effect : Television, Crime, and Governance* (Lexington Books, 2009); Christopher J. Wright, *Tribal Warfare: Survivor and the Political Unconscious of Reality Television* (Lexington, 2006); Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (April 1, 1993): 9–21.

[29] Quoted in Alex Gibney's *Crazy, Not Insane*.

The Husband Did It

The business of crime solving in the United States essentially boils down to victimization, criminalization, and the collection of evidence to prove the existence and solidity of these categories; the easiest path to which is usually to narrativize and visualize arguments about when, where, why, and how a crime has occurred. In the mid-twentieth century, Progressive philanthropist and crime-solving enthusiast Frances Glessner Lee created a set of homicide scene miniatures known as "the Nutshells" for the purpose of teaching crime scene investigation techniques through murder cases plucked from the headlines, with which police officers in training would already be familiar. Lee, benefactor of the new Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard, which opened in 1936, spent years of her life meticulously constructing dozens of these scenes, ordering materials from far and wide to get every detail of the bite-sized furniture; tiny, mangled bodies; and miniscule flecks of high-velocity "blood" spatter exactly right.[30]

During the 1940s and '50s, Harvard invited detectives to study and attempt to construct narratives from their impressions of the scenes, explaining their reasoning to be critiqued by members of the Department familiar with her work – and sometimes even by Lee herself. Her method of study was based in a voracious desire for more information and the expectation that investigators could and should know *everything there was to know about an event*. Only then would they be a better and more humane enforcer of the law. Lee's labor and craftsmanship in aestheticizing these murder scenes helped to construct a "forensic imaginary," which journalist and critic Rachel Monroe identifies as an ideology and cultural practice based in the scientific belief that every touch leaves a trace; every trace, another clue.[31] Over the past fifty years, women have gravitated toward law enforcement jobs in forensics because of this

[30] Rachel Monroe, *Savage Appetites: Four True Stories of Women, Crime, and Obsession* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2019).

[31] For more on Frances Glessner Lee and the Nutshells, see Monroe, *Savage Appetites*, Chapter 1, "The Detective." I have never seen Lee's Nutshells in person – but I have viewed other miniatures in art galleries and seen photos of several of her scenes. Importantly, though I don't have space to include it here, Monroe's work on Lee revealed an obsession with crime scenes rooted in deep loneliness, frustration, and a search for meaning in her own life as a moneyed woman who had rejected the expectations of her class and found herself often ostracized from those who enjoyed looking at her models but did not want to spend time with her. See also Corinne May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* (The Monacelli Press, LLC, 2004).

aestheticization. The only thing that can make something more convincing than seeing it with your own eyes is hearing someone else corroborate what you have seen.[32]

One of the people writing for *True Detective* magazine in the mid-70s was Andy Stack, a pseudonym adopted by a mother of four in Normandy Park, Washington, named Ann Rule. Ann had briefly been employed as one of the first women police officers in the state of Washington but, when she divorced her husband in 1972, she could no longer work the same demanding schedule and turned to freelance writing to pay the bills. A highly active and connected person with a fierce dedication to helping people, she spent several nights a month at a Suicide Crisis hotline, writing stories as "Andy" and taking calls into the wee small hours, alone except for a young law student named Ted who frequently shared her shifts.[33] When they weren't fielding calls, Ann and Ted sometimes passed the time snacking, laughing, and talking – particularly about violence and the law, about which they were both deeply passionate – and became fast friends.

In 1977, Ann took on a story for a local publication covering a string of murders across the Pacific Northwest, which police had begun to believe were the work of a single person.[34] As reporting on the horrific crimes began to take over her mental space and free time, Ann spent fewer hours volunteering and instead put her energy into rebuilding her relationships with the police officers she had briefly

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[32] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*; Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II*, Studies in United States Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016). While there is a plethora of literature on this subject, it is worth pointing out that these are not my own evidence – they corroborate the evidence of my experience researching. I did not find anyone who said that speaking about it was not helpful at least in some way. Scientific literature on trauma unequivocally supports the argument that a traumatic episode changes the functioning of the brain. Historians and scholars of atrocity have also provided ample evidence for the necessity of truth and reconciliation for collective healing beyond the individual, as externalizing the experience of trauma is actually a crucial step to moving beyond it- otherwise we can convince ourselves that events did not hurt us as much as they did. See also Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan, *Fumbling towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators* (Chicago: Project NIA, 2019); Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, May 22, 2014; Nikole Hannah-Jones, "It Is Time for Reparations," *The New York Times*, June 24, 2020; Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount, and Kai Parker, "A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago," *AAIHS*, May 22, 2017.

[33] Ann began working at the suicide hotline after losing her own brother to suicide according to her daughter Leslie Rule, whom I saw speak at an event in 2019. You can find more about the event (Crime Con 2019) in my works cited section.

[34] The Ted Bundy case is so well-known that I have chosen not to include details of the violence itself in this chapter in hopes that it will allow the reader to focus on the less spectacularized moments of harm that reverberated beyond the events themselves. If you are not familiar with the crimes enough to know about the level of misogynist brutality Ted unleashed on women across the United States, please see Ann Rule's account and also *Falling for a Killer*, a documentary that uses the stories of women who knew Ted to construct a picture of broader political and personal context of the case. Elizabeth Kendall, *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer*, Documentary (Amazon Studios, Saloon Media, 2020).

worked with – and they benefited greatly from her perspective about the attacks. She helped them to realize, for example, that women were following the perpetrator to their deaths because he was able to rely on their kindness and inability to say (or fear of saying) no to a person who asked them for help, often feigning injuries to disarm women enough that they were willing to go somewhere unsafe with him.[35]

Unbeknownst to her at the time, Ann and investigators were looking for the very same man she had befriended overnight at the suicide hotline: Ted Bundy.[36] By 1978, Bundy had raped and murdered at least twenty women and when Rule realized that she already knew him, she felt both a compulsion and a duty to reach out to him. Along with her knowledge of the active investigation, she drew on several years of correspondence with Bundy during his incarceration to produce the definitive account his crime spree: *The Stranger Beside Me*, which she published in 1980. The only book to come close to *Helter Skelter* (still!) in true crime paperback sales, *Stranger* is representative of what became Rule's beloved signature style. She wrote from a place of vulnerability, exhaustively sharing details of the victims' lives and her reactions to them – particularly the hopes and dreams they had been unable to realize – and provided a frank but deeply empathetic outsider-on-the-inside look at the world of homicide investigation. As one true crime enthusiast wrote of her in 2021, she "focused on victims not perpetrators; lessons, not details; and loss, not violence," producing the first "feminist text of true crime."[37] Ann went on to write over 35 best-selling books and countless articles, befriending Ressler, Douglas, and many other agents, detectives, and officers with whom she frequently consulted on active cases.

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[35] For more on the theories that experiences like Ann's produced, see Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear* (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 2021).

[36] I thought a lot about whether to use the word "friend" here because the relationship between Ted and Ann made both of them famous and materially benefited them. She herself used the word "friend" but for a while, this was not enough for me. They did not "hang out" outside of the Center, and if Ted could manipulate people to get what he wanted from them, I wondered if he had done so with Ann. But Ann, too, knew how to get what she wanted from people, and I believe the two got along so well in part because of this shared knowledge; they were both students of other people, which is part of what so compelled Ann to process the experience publicly – she had not expected to be so wrong. Having researched Ann Rule for years and witnessed her own testimony about the interactions the two had prior to Ted's arrest, however, I eventually realized that I had a very limited understanding of both the social landscape of friendship during the '70s and my *own* concept of friendship, acceptance, and intimacy prevented me from accepting Ann's use of the word for many years. Now, I think that I, too, would describe Ted as a friend had I had the same experience with him as Ann.

[37] Ann Rule, *The Stranger Beside Me* (Estate of Ann Rule, originally WW Norton, 2018); Hilary Fitzgerald Campbell, "What About Ann Rule?," *CrimeReads*, November 10, 2021.

Ted Bundy was not just terrifying because of the acts he committed – he was terrifying because he was alive. His entire being came to be understood as a crime against women and, having escaped from jail two separate times, his ability to convince people to trust him seemed to many to be supernatural. During Bundy's first incarceration, jailers let him spend his days alone in the law library studying for his case until, one day, he just jumped out the window. Months later, he escaped a second time because he had convinced the guards not to routinely search his cell (a privilege they would not have afforded if they did not want to) and, one night, shimmied out through a tunnel he had dug behind a ceiling tile. During his trial in Florida (he represented himself, like Charles Manson, but only after managing to conceal his identity for quite some time despite a massive manhunt on the opposite coast) Judge Edward Cowart, a former police officer, called Ted a bright legal mind who had just made some poor choices. After his sentencing, addressing the convicted man directly, Cowart lamented that if things had been different, he would have loved to see Ted practice law in his courtroom.[38]

Women flocked to the trial and consumed coverage of the Bundy case in unprecedented volumes. They were ridiculed in the press (especially by men) for what seems, to me, an understandable impulse: trying to figure out what was different about this man that had put women like them in danger. Because while even *they* could see that he was just like most of the men they knew, the police, the FBI, and the media told them that he fundamentally was not. He was an entirely new type of person.

Ted Bundy was not a loner or a communist – in fact, he had quite a lot in common with Robert Ressler and other agents who interviewed him for the BSU. Having also conducted "New Left" counterintelligence missions on college campuses (though for the Republican Party, not the FBI, under direction of a governing hopeful); grown up reading *True Detective* magazine; and obsessing over the concepts of good and evil. Perhaps more importantly, Ted was one of the only people other than agents of the BSU who was just as preoccupied with the details of these crimes and the so-called "criminal

[38] There are many places where you can find video footage of this exchange, including with a quick YouTube search. The easiest to cite here is probably Joe Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (Netflix, 2019). I would not suggest viewing this without having read Rule or engaging with the testimonies of Bundy's partner, Elizabeth Kendall, whom I will discuss in a few pages. Elizabeth Kendall and Molly Kendall, *The Phantom Prince: My Life with Ted Bundy, Updated and Expanded Edition* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2020).

mind" as they were – and he was genuinely invested in their project of criminalization, describing himself as "anti-union" and "not too fond of criminal conduct" or "using movements" to create places where "delinquents liked to feel that they were immune from the law." He had worked for the Seattle Crime Prevention Advisory Committee and even a rape advisory task force in law school before meeting Ann at the Crisis Hotline. Law enforcement officers came to appreciate Ted for what he had done to "expose cracks" in the system.[39] In the '80s, he gave a televised interview to evangelical James Dobson explaining that his violence had come from the consumption of pornography.[40]

Ted was the one who thus convinced the Bureau that the BSU should not just be a research wing but a consulting wing for law enforcement agencies across the country – an *active* profiling unit. After interviewing him, Special Agent Bill Hagmaeier reported perpetrators like Ted required a specific set of crime-solving skills because they had grown up in the perfect family, with no history of abuse. This, combined with Ann Rule's shock that she had not noticed that the murderer had been her own friend seemed to prove to the world that killers had evolved, which was why it was important that to FBI evolve too

Born the same year that Robert Ressler became obsessed with the Lipstick Killer, Ted had endured an incredibly abusive childhood, his family keeping devastating secrets from him. He eventually found out that his parents were actually his grandparents – and that the young woman he had grown up knowing as his sister, Eleanor, was actually his mother. Eleanor's father had been irate when she appeared pregnant, claiming she had been abandoned by a war veteran. While her father came close to forcing her to give up her baby, he eventually made them come up with a new family story so that no one in their community would find out. Ted was born in Vermont at a home for unwed mothers. But this

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[39] Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*. Ted said these words about the left in a set of taped interviews before his execution. I have seen multiple people tell stories about Ted on campus in which they described older, disciplinarian professors to be especially fond of him. One professor mentioned in *Falling for a Killer* was considering abandoning grades (very common, I have done this) but Ted stood up and called for "law and order," which endeared him to conservatives on campus. Robert Ressler wrote of redbaiting a professor involved in anti-war protesting during his time at Michigan State. I don't have evidence to prove that they talked specifically about these subjects, but I do have evidence to prove that they had lot in common *to* talk about, which was the BSU's method of entry – so I do believe they bonded over this. While you might argue that Ted developed this later to manipulate the officers, the fact that he supported these policies publicly in front of many witnesses before anyone knew of his identity as the Co-Ed Killer is proof enough for me.

[40] Gibney, *Crazy, Not Insane*.

was not the story that would endear him to the FBI, which he knew, nor would it make him famous as one of the most bizarre, terrifying, and intelligent dastardly minds of the twentieth century. The new version of Ted's crimes worked to uphold the need for police even if a Republican "family values" utopia existed.[41]

Throughout most of his crime spree, Ted was in a committed relationship with a woman named Elizabeth. While Ann did interview her, she used a pseudonym to protect Elizabeth's identity, but recently she has begun speaking more about her experiences in public, publishing a memoir and participating in a documentary.[42] Ted's long-term girlfriend had not lived in fear of physical violence from him but the slower, quieter, hollow fear of disappointing him; of not being good enough for his love. Ted represented himself as the object of perfection and obsessed with image, he controlled what Elizabeth wore, making her deeply insecure. He disappeared for long stretches of time without telling her or her young daughter whether he was coming back. Elizabeth had survived childhood abuse in the Mormon Church and sexual violence as a young adult before she even met Ted. While he used her home as a base for his excursions, she drank heavily and often felt unable to emotionally care for her daughter. She was vulnerable to boundary-pushing and verbal abuse from Ted, and in no position to question his actions without fear of repercussion. While Elizabeth *did* report Ted multiple times after she learned more about the fugitive killing women (whose name was reportedly Ted, and who drove a cream-colored Volkswagen bug), it was *investigators* on the other end of the line who made her question her own suspicions when they told her they had already spoken with Ted and cleared him. The wife of another serial killer later told a documentary film crew that while she would now describe things he had done to her as abusive, she didn't have any frame at the time to understand it that way.[43] Elizabeth's experiences reaching out for help – or rather attempting to *offer* help to police – are a perfect illustration of how ill

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[41] Rule, *The Stranger Beside Me*; Kendall, *Falling for a Killer*; Berlinger, *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*.

[42] It seems to me that this has been a result of Joe Berlinger's involvement with the Bundy case, as he released both a multi-part documentary series and dramatized film about Bundy in 2019, with actress Lily Collins portraying Elizabeth Kendall. See Joe Berlinger, *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*, Be, Drama (COTA Films, Ninjas Runnin' Wild Productions, Voltage Pictures, 2019).

[43] You can find Golden State Killer Joseph DiAngelo's ex-wife speaking about her experiences with him in the final episode of Patton Oswalt, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*, Documentary (HBO Documentary Films, 2020).

prepared police officers were to receive, process, and understand evidence of past abuse within the frame of an active homicide investigation.

This is to say nothing of the weight women like Elizabeth took on once they recognized that their silence about certain things that had felt wrong – but which others told them, and they chose to believe were normal – had led to the deaths of other women. Ted's vile acts thrust them into the public eye as well; and now they were blamed for not knowing, even though nobody else had known either. Such finger-pointing, as George Chauncey has written of the murder of young boys by men in the Midwest a decade earlier, worked to legitimize police and delegitimize the experiences of victims of violence of all kinds, who had to reintegrate themselves into society thinking they had been crazy; that it was their fault; that they were bad. They *had* seen signs. Those signs were just examples of normal behavior for many men.[44]

Kerri Rawson had not been an adult in the '70s and '80s, when Dennis Rader was killing entire families.[45] She had been a child. After finding out in 2004 that her father was the "BTK Killer," who had sent letters to the press claiming responsibility for ten lives between 1974 and 1991, her life became a blur for many years. She suffered from major memory loss and found ordinary tasks required Herculean effort. She watched the state auction off her childhood home while her mother struggled to cover legal fees and manage the fallout. In a support group recommended to her at church, Kerri almost had a nervous breakdown, running out of the room when asked to go around a circle and share the worst day of her life. A woman next to her had said it was when her dishwasher flooded the kitchen. Taking care of a new baby in the throes of a fierce PTSD episode, Kerri kept her struggles from her husband even though she knew he wanted to help: "I just carried on – one dragging foot in front of the other, one diaper, one bottle,

[44] Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic."

[45] BTK killed multiple women in front of their children, leaving them to survive with the trauma of seeing and hearing a stranger torture and kill a protector in their own home and then simply walk out the door. For more on this, including eyewitness interviews, see Marc Levitz, *Feast of the Assumption: The Otero Family Murders*, Documentary (Unsubfilms, 2011). If you have trouble finding it, try searching under the re-release titled *I Survived BTK*.

one day at a time. She needs me, and I need her, and I can't tell them – any of them – because they will think I'm a bad mother."[46]

When Kerri started EDMR therapy, a treatment that allows a person to revisit traumatic memories until they are no longer triggering, she began to have flashbacks, connecting memories from her childhood to what she now knew about her father. Though she had always described him as the best father she could have had – and believed so – she now remembered shaking in fear as he screamed at her mother in public; being punished for speaking about anything he didn't want her to talk about (including religion, sex, and politics); and watching him nearly choke her brother to death. This brought on an intense and painful identity crisis, as she wrote in her memoir: "He should have never gotten married or had children. I shouldn't be alive."[47]

The core memory troubling her – the one that had separated the world into "before dad's arrest" and "after dad's arrest," a common sign of a traumatic episode – was when an FBI agent came to tell her that her father was a serial killer, which they knew because they had illegally obtained her DNA from her medical records (a pap smear, no less) and matched it to the incriminating evidence against him. Not recognizing how invasive this had been – or her role in the situation – she provided the agents with as much evidence of her own as she could while in shock, attempting to process the information that had just changed her life. After this conversation, they left, and she never saw them again. Then the press reported that she had turned her own father in.[48] She maintained contact with Rader via letter for a few years – which I'll discuss more in Chapter 6 – but eventually cut ties to focus on healing and raising her own family. Writing a book about her experiences helped her come to terms with them – and also to pay

[46] Kerri Rawson, *A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming* (Thomas Nelson, 2019), 302-303.
[47] Rawson.
[48] Kerri learned how violent this was from her father, whose lawyers pointed it out to him. Because Kerri and her mother wanted to remain out of the press, they stayed as far as they could from the legal teams and were thus left in the dark about details, which they learned from watching the news.

the bills after losing years of income due to her debilitating complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or cPTSD.[49]

Before memoirs like Kerri's helped people to deal with these types of emotions, women read Ann Rule. They wrote thousands of letters thanking her for her work, telling her that they would be dead by now had it not been for her. She became a champion to women who had accepted that no one cared about their testimonies. In the '90s, she even wrote a book about the death of Sheila Blackthorne Bellush, who had been murdered by her husband but once told a friend "Promise you'll find Ann Rule and ask her to write my story." Each time these women cracked open Ann's paperbacks, they were struck by the same feeling: "this woman could have been me.'"[50]

I saw one of the survivors of a Ted Bundy attack speak at an Ann Rule tribute gathering in 2018, keynoted by her daughter Leslie Rule, now also a crime writer. The woman's testimony was brave, honest, and moving, and it challenged the way I had come to think about Ann as a writer. She said that the worst part of the whole ordeal was not the violence she experienced at the hands of a stranger but the abandonment she experienced from her closest friends – her sorority sisters, some of whom had experienced the attack as well – who never spoke to her again. She spent years recovering from physical injuries in her parents' house, but her friends kept going to college. They graduated and moved on with their lives. Ann's work piecing together the story, she told us, had helped her to heal; she finally felt affirmed that her experience had been unfair. She had not found this affirmation in her community, even as the entire nation condemned her killer on television. She found it instead in Ann's empathetic, measured writing; a person she trusted because she treated the events of her life exactly as they had been: random, traumatic, and unnecessary. These affirmation stories are just as appealing for women now as

[49] cPTSD, or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, was not a diagnosis that existed in the 1970s but takes into account longer, sustained periods of time living in a traumatic environment. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*. See also Annabel Rushforth, Yasuhiro Kotera, and Greta Kaluzeviciute, "Theory Paper: Suggesting Compassion-Based Approaches for Treating Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, July 11, 2022, 1–12.

[50] Hilary Fitzgerald Campbell, "What About Ann Rule?"

they were then and, in 2020, *Lifetime* announced a new initiative to turn five of her books into movies in a "ripped from the headlines" series.[51]

Criminal Minds

Spectacle murders allowed people to join in conversations about collective terror with something to offer – they became storytellers; murder ambassadors for the rest of the world, even if reluctantly. Most of the biggest true crime writers of this era gained popularity through their own stories, but then they also pivoted to writing fiction. Voracious readers knew they took their stories from personal experiences, which made them better – more real – and they became recognizable names in bookstores, though they often used ghostwriters. A "profile," after all, is just a character… and a character can be written into a script.

Ann Rule's ability to bridge the gap between the investigative procedural genre and the testimonial genre launched in earnest what we now recognize as true crime. It allowed men who had investigated similarly horrendous crimes to begin to use the venue as a safe space to challenge many of the same gender norms that had previously kept them from expressing their own emotional attachments to the things they had seen. Another reason police officers and detectives remain the primary sources of information in true crime is that they are the ones who obsess over these cases the most, studying and internalizing them, retelling again and again. The cop who uses a current investigation to resolve trauma from a case that haunts his past is not just a narrative trope in crime entertainment – it's a profile, created by the FBI, and based on the personal experiences of its agents.

The affective testimony of these new homicide detectives – the same figures who had been portrayed in the past as brusque, emotionally stunted, and morally superior men with an inner darkness they hid behind casual wit– were able to reel back in many who had begun to lose faith in their ability to

[51] Danielle, Turchiano, "Lifetime Expands 'Ripped from the Headlines' Slate with Five Movies Inspired by Ann Rule" *Variety*, March 12, 2020.

prevent murders. Even now, when I see them speak about how gruesome murders took over their worlds and structured the entire meaning behind their lives, I know they are telling the truth – but these are still truths based on experience, not science. Like a war veteran speaking about the battlefield, they give us pieces of the story, arranging them in a way that allows what they have seen to make sense. When we hear them say they "just knew," we believe them because we know what that feels like; it is akin to the intuitive, embodied knowledge used by women healers, witches, and psychics throughout history – collectors of stories with fierce pattern-recognition skills. This means it is also easy to recognize what people want to hear – and organize narratives alongside those intentions. John Douglas got so used to having to talk to random people about Charles Manson, for example, that he developed a script about the power dynamic he drew on from their height differential. I have witnessed him use it multiple times in print and video – I've also recognized it in fictional works on which he consulted.[52]

As these stories were also primarily about protecting women, male agents' vulnerability endeared them to women readers and viewers, who saw them as heroes doing the right thing in a system full of ignorant men. But their vulnerability also became a cover and justification for their behavior, even when it amounted to violence and brutality. It is now common to find detectives and police officers from this era remembering and testifying to their own misconduct because of how personally they had taken the cases they were investigating. In interviews, they admit they "lost their cool" with a suspect – but audiences accept this because they already know what the perpetrator has done.[53]

It was from the marriage of these two dominant storytelling modes – the thorough, victim-centered investigative reporting of Ann Rule and the raw, gritty testimonials of BSU agents – that our popular understanding of the "thin blue line" emerged in full: good and evil do exist, and the only thing that stands between them is a tiny group of brave heroes. As Robert Ressler himself put it, homicide

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[52] John E. Douglas and Mark Olshaker, *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* (Gallery Books, 2017); Joe Penhall, *Mindhunter*, Drama (Denver and Delilah Productions, Netflix, Panic Pictures (II), 2017); David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities:* Marcel Danesi, *The "Dexter Syndrome": The Serial Killer in Popular Culture* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2016).

[53] For examples of this involving a case discussed in this dissertation, see Paul Skolnick, *Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer*, Documentary (The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC), 2021).

detectives were protecting everyone else from what they had seen, reducing the spectacle for our own good. The media – in their quest for a scoop – were thus always in the way, even though it was police withholding and expectation of blind trust that produced panic in the first place. Ann helped women by providing them a venue to share their testimonies and by teaching them a very important lesson about violence: that they, as women, were often not able to recognize it when it arose because everyone around them refused to believe them. It was important for them to trust their instincts, even if it meant being less of a lady. This lesson alongside the newly available information about criminal profiling provided many with an actionable path toward trust in the system, as they supported through political activism but also consumption the expansion of policing and the prison system. They began to adopt the same dehumanizing language ("unsub," for "unidentified subject") used by the BSU, but these were not terms developed in the interest of precision but the removal of liability for false statements.[54]

By the 1990s, as a direct result of the FBI's participation in Jonathan Demme's Oscar-winning *Silence of the Lambs*, the clumsy Michael Myers of the slasher generation had become the penetrating Hannibal Lecter of a new serial killer thriller era. Our heroine was now Special Agent Clarice Starling, played by young movie star Jodie Foster who spent several weeks training with the FBI to prepare for her role as the first woman agent in the BSU. John Douglas explained that he thought it was important for Foster to "see the crime scene photographs" and "experience the stress of this job."[55] Martin Scorcese began sending his actors to them too, telling John in 1992 that Robert De Niro needed to "talk to some killers" for his role in Cape Fear.[56] As consultants, they focused on the difficulty of the work and the bizarre mind of the killer, and it was just fine with them that on television they worked with police officers on the ground to stop the perpetrators, which they did not do in real life. In movie after television show after paperback, criminal profilers busted in on psycho killers just in the nick of time. It seemed like every movie star of the era was in at least one serial killer blockbuster, and half of them had

[54] Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); David Correia and Tyler Wall, *Police: A Field Guide* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018).

[55] Maitland McDonagh, "Making 'Silence of the Lambs' authentic," *Entertainment Weekly*, February 15, 1991.

[56] Douglas and Olshaker, *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*.

played either the killer or the BSU agent, a complex role that got them nods and accolades at awards shows.[57]

These actors, as well as any officer who attended training seminars across the country over the last forty years, also became witnesses of the things BSU agents had seen; studying their dossiers, watching videos of their interviews, hearing their stories.[58] In the years following, the body of public knowledge about criminology and victimology grew exponentially through this content, contributing to a false sense of what historian Pablo Piccato has called "criminal literacy" in his work on crime fiction in post-revolution Mexico[59] Pop culture began to crystallize criminalization theory as something that was not about racism or sexism or homophobia or ableism. It was a story about men protecting women from other men; or, if the producers were feeling progressive, women protecting women from men – by becoming just as cutthroat as they were.[60]

The BSU agents witnessed horrible violence, but their influence caused hunting killers to become a dangerous revenge narrative for traumatized police officers, who continue to draw purpose and meaning from this war with evil. In fact, when describing their own experiences investigating murder cases, they often use the language of entertainment: that it was "just like on TV." Now, I hear a chilling nostalgia in their voices for the long-lost serial killer era, when it was – in their eyes – easier to tell who was an enemy and who was on your side.

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[57] For some examples of this legacy, see David Paulides, *Missing 411: The Hunted*, Documentary (NABS, 2019); Robert Keppel, William J. Birnes, and Ann Rule, *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer* (Pocket Books, 2010); Katherine M. Ramsland, *Confession of a Serial Killer: The Untold Story of Dennis Rader, the BTK Killer* (Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, an imprint of University Press of New England, 2016); Katherine M. Ramsland, *The Mind of a Murderer: Privileged Access to the Demons That Drive Extreme Violence* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2011).

[58] Jeff Davis, *Criminal Minds* (Touchstone Television, Paramount Network Television, The Mark Gordon Company, September 22, 2005); Jonathan Demme, *The Silence of the Lambs*, Thriller (Strong Heart/Demme Production, Orion Pictures, 1991); Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Michael Mann, *Manhunter*, Thriller (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG), Red Dragon Productions S.A., 1986); Gregg O. McCrary, *The Unknown Darkness: Profiling the Predators Among Us* (New York: Morrow, 2003); Brett Ratner, *Red Dragon*, Thriller (Universal Pictures, Dino De Laurentiis Company, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 2002); Milligen, *Better to Reign in Hell*. Maitland McDonagh, "Making 'Silence of the Lambs' authentic."

[59] Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico* (University of California Press, 2017).

[60] This is what we now call "girl boss" feminism, or a specifically neoliberal brand of empowerment that masquerades as feminism while doing nothing to challenge gender disparities in the workplace. See Alex Abad-Santos, "Girlboss Ended Not with a Bang, but a Meme," *Vox*, June 7, 2021; Amanda Mull, "The Girlboss Has Left the Building," *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2020; Amy Walsh, "The End of Girlboss Feminism," *We Are Restless* (blog), September 30, 2021.

The strange homicidal self that hides inside a person we know is a fantasy. There is no such thing as a criminal mind; but there is such a thing as a traumatized mind, and that can lead all of us to act in violent ways toward each other. This does not mean we are all like Ted Bundy – it means we are all likely traumatized by similar violence, which is why we can see ourselves so easily in every single character in these stories; the victim, the hero, the villain, the storyteller.[61] It is a strength, not a weakness, to be in this position. But we have been distracted from things that would have actually helped reduce the violence laid out here: education on abuse, how to recognize it, and how to know when you are participating in it so that you can stop, intervene, take account, and repair the harm you have caused. Ted Bundy could engage in abusive behaviors, kill people, and still support the criminalization of all the same things as the FBI. In a bizarre feedback loop, interest in serial killers (something that the agents themselves clearly shared) can now become evidence of a deranged mind and advanced planning of a crime. For those invested in criminalization, this new script was just as convenient as anti-communism, because it was the FBI itself that had made sure it was not just common to have true crime materials at home, *it was uncommon not too*. Hoover would have been proud.

[61] Monroe, *Savage Appetites*.

4. Nobody Knows Where This Individual Will Strike Next

In the summer of 1985, Angelenos – many of whom had already lived through several spectacle cases concentrated within a relatively small geographic area – once again found themselves terrorized by serial murder. The LAPD's Robbery and Homicide Unit, formed as a result of the manpower needs of the Hillside Strangler investigation, scrambled to stop the "Night Stalker," a perpetrator named so by a local photographer after *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, a supernatural crime show that would later inspire *The X Files*.[1]

The Night Stalker did indeed stalk the city at night, and he appeared to have no motive for selecting those he attacked. His victims were young, old, Mexican, Asian, and white. They were primarily working-class people, many of them members of communities in East Lost Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley, areas long left unprotected but overpoliced by the Los Angeles Police Department.[2] In the

[1] This chapter takes its title from Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block, who said this in a press conference I saw excerpted on an ABC Nightly News segment on August 26, 1985; item #545510, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee. For the original television show, see Darren McGavin, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, Mystery (Francy Productions, Universal Television, 1974). To hear the photojournalist who coined the term discuss his role in the case, see the Netflix documentary by Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*, Documentary (ABC News, Highway 41 Productions, 2021). It is also worth noting that, while I don't have time to discuss it here, *The X-Files*, created by Chris Carter, was also a supernatural crime-solving show but by the 1990s its hero was not a journalist like Kolchak but a former profiler for the BSU, which we covered in Chapter 3, who has branched out to the supernatural, causing a stir among superiors, but remaining a legend in the FBI because of his work with serial killers. While reading Robert Ressler's memoir, I was particularly struck by how certain accounts of his interactions with his bosses reminded me of the attitude of Fox Mulder. See Robert K. Ressler & Tom Schactman, *Whoever Fights Monsters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Chris Charter, *The X Files*, Mystery (Ten Thirteen Productions, 20th Century Fox Television, 20th Century Fox Television, 1993).

[2] Simon Balto and others have framed this as communities that have been "overpoliced and underserved," however, I have avoided that language here in response to changing historiographical discussions after 2020. "Overpoliced" denotes the potential for a "correct" amount of policing, which the history of police reform denies. See Corbin Page, "Review: Simon Balto, Occupied Territory," *Chicago Review*, April 30, 2020; Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Mariame Kaba; Andrea J. Richie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: The New Press, 2022); Mariame Kaba, Naomi Murakawa, and Tamara K. Nopper, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, The Abolitionist Papers Series (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021). For more on this case in particular, see Tim Marcia, *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*, Documentary, (Imagine Documentaries, RadicalMedia, Third Eye Motion Picture Company, Netflix 2021); Matt Murphy, *City of Angels, City of Death*; Emily Alford, "Remember When Dianne Feinstein Helped the Night Stalker Get Away," *Jezebel*, January 19, 2021; Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Philip Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*, Reprint edition (Citadel, 2016); Paul Skolnick, *Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer*, Documentary (The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC), 2021).

months leading up to the Night Stalker's capture, locals patrolled their blocks in makeshift neighborhood watch groups, installed flood lights, home security systems, and bought record numbers of guns.[3] Despite stifling heat, they kept their windows locked; whole families huddling together in the same room to keep watch over their lawns and backyards in shifts.[4] One man described his nightly activities that summer to reporters: "I would stand at my kitchen window, lean on the sink, listen to the radio and look out into the dark. Then I'd move to the south bedroom window and do the same."[5] On one Monday that August, the Orange County Sheriff's Office reported receiving 76 calls about "prowlers or suspicious circumstances" compared to a reported yearly average of 3-4 calls per day.[6] 13 year-old Tony Taber jammed broomsticks under all the doors of his house every night and his friend Chris Van Horn told a reporter that every time his dog barked, "he was scared."[7] As it became clear over the course of July that the Stalker seemed to be selecting corner houses with light gray, beige, or yellow paint, fathers set out to the hardware store to get supplies for renovations.[8]

The fear of someone invading the sacred space of the home has been used throughout U.S. history to support imperialist projects and restrict immigration, but the specific experience of home invasion took on a new valence in the city known for inventing the "safe suburb" after the figure of the serial killer entered into the cultural imaginary.[9] With homelessness a major problem in the city, it was unhoused

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[3] See Carol McGraw and David Freed, "STALKER: Public Aided Law Enforcement Agencies in Search," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1985. I am also taking these details from what I have seen of the national coverage of the case at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Some of the details in this paragraph – though I have confirmed them through other sources – first came to me through personal accounts that I heard on podcasts, from people I know, and on various online fora. Multiple people have told me directly that their parents remember the heat of that summer, as they feared an open window would be an invitation for the attacker. While you might imagine that most homes in Los Angeles are equipped with central air conditioning, it has been my experience that modest residential buildings in the area do not have temperature control. I originally expected to find this because of Elizabeth Tandy Shermer's work on Phoenix. See Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[4] Nancy Ride, "Random Auto Checks Held After Night Stalker Attack," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1985.

[5] McGraw and Freed, "STALKER."

[6] McGraw and Freed, "STALKER." As these are police reported numbers, we can assume they are at least slightly exaggerated, but even receiving twice as many calls, in my opinion, would have been significant evidence both of an explosion of interest in identifying the culprit by the public and of the public's feelings of insecurity about the ability of the LAPD to protect them from the attacker.

[7] McGraw and Freed "STALKER."

[8] Carlo, *Night Stalker*.

[9] Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012); May, *Fortress America*; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Fully revised and updated

people – particularly those living in the constructed area known as "Skid Row," as evidenced by the case of the Skid Row Slasher and countless other perpetrators in the area between the mid-60s and mid-80s – who were most likely to die from a violent attack, but the Night Stalker wanted to be inside people's homes.[10]

He entered through windows, side doors, back doors, front doors, cat doors, dog doors, and screens; and he used knives, guns, blunt objects, and his own hands to rape, beat, and murder seemingly without rhyme or reason. He also left most of his victims alive.

In mid-August, 76-year-old Mary Crawford became convinced she had seen the Stalker in the parking lot at a local Vons supermarket and, haunted by the memory of a man who had mugged and beaten her years earlier, she decided to buy a gun. While researching this chapter, I found an overwhelming number of testimonies from people whose memories of a past crime – most often mugging, gun violence, or rape – made the Night Stalker case into the impetus for doing something about their own safety. Al Martinez, documenting the restlessness of LA throughout the summer, wrote in the *LA*

20th anniversary edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2008); Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975–2001* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1996).

[10] We now know that one of the reasons the Night Stalker chose home invasion as a form of violence was due to his own homelessness. For several months during the summer of 1985, Richard Ramirez was staying at Skid Row's infamous Cecil Hotel, where it was common for boarders to pay by week because they did not know whether they would have the money to stay longer. These residents were also often on the run from the law or hoping to stay hidden from people who were out to get them; and they knew they could do so here, even as the area was crawling with police officers. The Cecil developed a spooky reputation in Los Angeles because of how often people died there, much more often by suicide or drug overdose than by violence at the hands of someone else. The building became a character in true crime lore for these reasons, even leading to the further spectacularization of deaths that happened there after the Night Stalker case, like that of Elisa Lam in 2014, which web sleuths followed through her Tumblr account. For more testimonies on the Cecil, see the Netflix documentary *Crime Scene: The Cecil Hotel*. In the first episode, a detective described Skid Row as one of "the most violent" places in the world, but most of the former residents interviewed described it as "tough" in a very familiar way for people who had grown up without resources or protection. Skid Row historian Doug Mungin explained that, much like the vice districts we discussed in Chapter 2, Skid Row was a constructed area to keep homelessness from view for the city's wealthier residents, and buses dropped off those who had just been released from prison, mental institutions, and hospitals, who had nowhere else to go: "This is a place where people are just allowed to suffer and this manifests on the street in crime and violence." Here, I am quoting Mungin in the documentary, but you can also find his academic work here: Douglas Mungin, "There's A Skid Row Everywhere, and This Is Just the Headquarters: Impacts of Urban Revitalization Policies in the Homeless Community of Skid Row" (Dissertation, Communication Studies, Louisiana State University, 2016). Ramirez, like many others, did not start out hurting people during his home invasions but escalated to physical attacks after he found out he could burgle homes without getting caught. While I considered moving this section to the body of this chapter, I have kept it in the footnotes because I would like the reader to be able to focus on the atmosphere of the crimes for those *other* than Ramirez himself. I hope to write more about him in a later piece, as it is clear to me that Ramirez's secondhand trauma from the Vietnam War (which he absorbed through an older cousin, who showed him photographs of corpses and also murdered his own wife in front of Ramirez when he was just a teenager) influenced both his method of violence and his choice of victims. See Carlo, *The Night Stalker*; Skolnick, *Night Stalker*; Marcia, *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*.

Times after interviewing Mary that the shotgun had cost her $129: "Mary lives on Social Security and on what her son and daughter send her occasionally. The shotgun is a sacrifice."[11] You can't put a price on peace of mind, but even those struggling to pay rent forked over whatever they could spare to defend themselves during the ongoing crisis of living in Los Angeles during the 1980s.

An alternative to weapons was home security systems, but these were far too expensive for most residents, and they proved to be ineffective as a method of deterrence for people who wanted to break in. Officers and police departments across the country also considered them to be a nuisance, insisting that they wasted precious manpower checking on homes in far-off suburban areas, where residents set off their own alarms by accident. Some cities even began fining for false alarms because, by police logic, they were costing the taxpayer money in wages that could better be put toward active investigation. By the 1990s, police officers would be suggesting that maybe it was actually the *presence* of an alarm that alerted a burglar to the fact that there was something worth stealing anyway. A man who survived a break-in at gunpoint spoke to reporters in 1982 about how the incident taught him that the importance of spending thousands on a good alarm system was not to alert the police, who he knew could never arrive in time to save them. That was another issue entirely. It was because "Now I feel at least if they get in downstairs in the house the noise would awaken me and give me the 5 seconds necessary to get to the top of the stairs with a shotgun."[12] His comments remind me of a t-shirt I once saw at a true crime convention. It read "gun rights: because I can't carry a cop in my pocket." In other words, when they lacked protection

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[11] Al Martinez, "A Faint and Eerie Rustling," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 15, 1985. "Los Angeles Killer," CBS Evening News, August 13, 1985, item #305273, Vanderbilt TV News.

[12] "Burglar Alarms," ABC Nightly News, July 4, 1982; item #525041, Vanderbilt TV News. Another told reporters they now slept with one hand on their shotgun "because if anybody comes in my house, they're not leaving." ABC Evening News August 26, 1985; item #305540. While I don't have enough space to properly discuss gun violence issues here without distracting the reader, it is worth pointing out that sleeping with your hand on a shotgun is an incredibly unsafe thing to do because of the potential for accidental injury or death. Having a gun in the home makes it more likely to be used by members of the home – on themselves or on one another – than on an intruder. For more on guns, see Rebecca Solnit "The Longest War," Kathleen Belew and Ramon A. Gutierrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Walter Johnson, "Guns in the Family," *Boston Review*, March 23, 2018; May, *Fortress America*; Karen Roush, "Gun Violence: The Carnage at Home," *AJN, American Journal of Nursing* 122, no. 8 (August 1, 2022): 7–7. I have also absorbed my own traumas from gun violence as a member of the "mass shooting generation," which I will discuss further in the conclusion. I have heard many bloody stories from my mother, who spent many years working as a triage nurse in an Emergency Room in Durham, North Carolina, and described the speed with which a patient can bleed out from a gunshot wound. If you are interested in the experience of health care workers with gun violence, I suggest Paul Austin, *Something for the Pain: Compassion and Burnout in the ER* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2008) and Megan L. Ranney, Marian E. Betz, and Cedric Dark, "#ThisIsOurLane — Firearm Safety as Health Care's Highway," *New England Journal of Medicine* 380, no. 5 (January 31, 2019): 405–7.

from those with the power to legally use guns against intruders on their behalf, the next best thing for many people was to assume that position of authority themselves. Whether it was legal mattered less than your life.

On CBS Nightly News, the neighbor of a Night Stalker victim said she felt it was either buy a gun "or be a sitting duck." She elaborated in a segment: "I have grandchildren, they come to stay, should I sit by and watch them get killed, or should I try to save them?"[13] The manager of a gun shop in Alhambra reported sales had increased by 75% since news of the attacks – and that women were overrepresented among new customers, who purchased rifles and shotguns because they did not require the same 15-day waiting period as handguns under California law.[14] While this difference in instrument may not seem significant while reading it in passing, it is worth pausing to consider. Handguns are smaller, more portable, and most often used by trained armed forces that we recognize in our daily lives (police officers, detectives, security guards, the Secret Service, etc.), and they also function differently than long-range weapons by inflicting different types of physical wounds on the human body. True crime fans will recognize this distinction as coming from our understanding of ballistics, most represented as the way that a shell moves through the barrel of a gun. I find it significant that because of laws intended to keep arms in the hands of those trained to use them (whether they had official capacity to use them is a different question), Angelenos responding to a lack of action from those very same institutional structures in 1985 had to come to terms with the possibility of inflicting even *more* severe physical harm on an intruder than their protectors might have. Rifles and shotguns, though they may have the capacity to kill and main, are primarily weapons developed for use by someone attempting to prevent a combatant from coming any closer – from gaining access to the physical body. People defending their own homes, families, and bodies from the Night Stalker thus *newly* adopted weapons of war to do so.[15]

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[13] ABC Evening News ,August 26, 1985, Item #305540, Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

[14] Chris Moore, manager of Corner Gunsmith store in suburban Alhambra reported that sales have picked up 75% in the last month, with women customers jumping 50 percent: "People say they are tired of all the violence that's happening, and they want to protect themselves" "San Gabriel Valley slayings spark fear" *San Bernadino County Sun*, August 15, 1985.

[15] For more on the use of weapons of war at home, see David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and*

Reminiscent of what Elaine Tyler May has called "self-incarceration" in the era of private security, one woman spoke to reporters from behind a closed screen door: "You feel like you have to lock yourself in a cage at this point."[16] Home, for many, constituted a woman's realm. As feminist theorist and rape survivor Susan Brison has so beautifully and courageously written, the experience of being raped produces the same emotional effect as a near-death experience, and so it is especially poignant that I found such overwhelming evidence of women applying metaphors of rape to their homes and even entire communities in the wake of a spectacle murder.[17] Said a neighbor of one of the Night Stalker's victims: "it's like having our neighborhood raped itself. Someone violated our sanctuary." [18] The anti-rape movement was foundational to the neighborhood watch movement – personnel-wise, but also ideologically. Both were responses to a marked lack of protection from violence, and they claimed the right to protect yourself.

It was not just the original act of violation and violence that hurt those left behind but the whole ordeal that followed, as the aftermath of a Night Stalker attack left victims feeling like "a piece of evidence in our own home," poked and prodded for information. The house felt "contaminated"

Paramilitary America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, Reprint edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014); Kimberley Phillips Boehm, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq*, Reprint edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999); John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, Iraq*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton : New Press, 2010); Mary L. Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Rev. ed (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2009); Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units," *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; J. J. Brent and P. B. Kraska, "'Fighting Is the Most Real and Honest Thing': Violence and the Civilization/Barbarism Dialectic," *British Journal of Criminology* 53, no. 3 (May 1, 2013): 357–77; Christopher Joseph Nicodemus Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[16] ABC Evening News, August 24, 1985; Item #97991, Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

[17] While I have chosen to include this evidence in the chapter on home invasion, I want to point out that I saw this language everywhere after doing beginning my formal research on the Hillside murders. It was their voluntary association of past experiences of sexual violation with present fears about home invasion that first led me to connect the anti-rape movement to anti-crime politics before I encountered work on the victims' rights movement by Paul Renfro, Carrie Rentschler, and Mariame Kaba. Prior to this, I primarily understood the pre-history of this chapter to be about the cultural conservatism of home ownership. While researching this case and that of the Golden State Killer, which I will discuss in a few pages, I realized that the owning of the home was *not* what was being violated here; but the physical protection a home offered, which could also be rented or even squatted in. As a result of many conversations with Nathalie Barton, whose work focuses on the politics of renting, and necessary prompting from Natalia Molina, who pressed me on the Stalker victims tending to be from lower income areas, I began to think about home differently.

[18] Carol McGraw "Walk-In Killer" and "Valley Intruder."

afterward, one woman said. "It never felt the same." No matter how kind individual officers might be during these hours following the initial shock, having strange men trample through rooms where childhood memories lingered as they hunted for the person who had killed or otherwise hurt a loved one was an inherently traumatizing experience. Many of the family members, friends, or neighbors who found the deceased were also immediately suspected of being involved in their murders. Most perpetrators were not strangers, after all, and these people were now forced to undergo harsh questioning while their brains attempted to sort through and make sense of an onslaught of violent and life-changing information. Many do not remember the testimonies they gave during these hours, as being investigated simply folded into their broader traumatic memory of the day they found a corpse that looked like someone they knew.[19]

The son of elderly victim Mary Louise Cannon, who had refused to lock her door because she didn't want to live in the kind of world where she had to, described the eerie experience of coming to terms with the tragedy while returning to the house where his mother had lived: "I saw all the fingerprint powder all over the walls and large chunks of her new carpeting dug up by police as evidence." [20] Peter Zazzaro, another victim, explained further: "It affected us more severely than it would have say if somebody had just came up and shot somebody, you know? I mean ok, that's one thing, right? But to go through all of this, you know, mutilation and so forth, it just kind of makes the whole thing worse." Prior to the '90s, there were no crime scene cleaning services, forcing people to see, touch, and interact with the bodily evidence after investigators left. I have seen many people describe this experience throughout my research. With more resources for forensic investigation beginning to flow into police departments because of events we discussed in Chapter 3, new Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) units began to seize control of the space for longer periods of time to gather and analyze evidence, also removing the expected responsibility for cleanup from the person who lived inside the home. While people in Los Angeles scraped pennies for expensive alarm systems and mopped blood off their hardwood floors, a man in

[19] Michelle McNamara, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark: One Woman's Obsessive Search for the Golden State Killer* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018); Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez.*

[20] McGraw, "The Valley Intruder"

Kansas used his position working for a security company to commit his own string of home-invasion murders by gaining access to the houses ahead of time.[21]

Operation Night Watch

The body produces a natural response to trauma: hypervigilance. Caused by a persistent, underlying terror that our body is vulnerable to danger, it is less a response to an acute experience of traumatic violence than one of abandonment in times of great need, which causes us to believe we cannot rely on others and must instead do everything ourselves.[22] By the mid-'80s – following the Reagan administration's commitment to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called "organized abandonment," or the deliberate withholding of lifegiving resources in favor of neoliberal spending models – it was obvious that individualization and criminalization were not doing much to proactively prevent violent crimes. Taking matters into their own hands seemed to many living through these events to be the only answer.[23]

The "law and order" era of crime policy was becoming what carceral historians (as well as the historical actors themselves) have deemed the "tough on crime" era.[24] From course videos that aired on network news, it appears that women of all races and ages enrolled in self-defense classes in the wake of both the Hillside and Night Stalker murders.[25] As one of the women covering the WAVAW protest had

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[21] Katherine M. Ramsland, *Confession of a Serial Killer: The Untold Story of Dennis Rader, the BTK Killer* (Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, an imprint of University Press of New England, 2016).

[22] Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

[23] In a recent interview, Ruth Wilson Gilmore said that for more than forty years, people living in suburban, urban, and even rural areas of the United States "have lost the ability to keep their individual selves, their households, and their communities together with adequate income, clean water, reasonable air, reliable shelter, and transportation and communication infrastructure…" June 10 2020, "Ruth Wilson Gilmore on Abolition," *Intercepted Pod*. See also Gilmore's work on the nonprofit industry, which she understands to function as part of a "shadow" state: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "In the Shadow of the Shadow State," *The Scholar & Feminist Online* 13, no. 2 (2016).

[24] Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*;" Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 703–34.

[25] I consulted both national news coverage and local newspaper coverage and saw a diverse group of women in terms of age and race. Unfortunately, I was not able to find information on the class distribution of these courses, but some deductive

written: "Consciousness among women has been rising in direct proportion to the rise of the death toll."[26] Neighbors and activist groups like the Gray Panthers (fighting for the rights of the elderly, whom the Night Stalker seemed at times to be targeting) organized neighborhood watch groups, stakeouts, and armed patrols.[27] Like the organizers of "In Mourning and Rage" in Chapter 2, they received funding through presenting their case to the Los Angeles City Council, which worked with the LAPD to create "Operation Night Watch." Shanna Campbell ran a tight ship in her home, where her five children made it easy to rotate "so that at least one observer is on duty between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m." every day. She told a reporter that getting up for her nightly watch shift was easier than it had ever been getting up to take care of her kids – "Maybe that is because I have a bunch of neighbors counting on me."[28]

The Night Stalker attacked so many people that I sometimes found it difficult to wrap my head around the scope of the harm he caused. While conversations afterward tended to focus on the death toll and (predictably) the pathology of the perpetrator as indicated by the form of his attacks, by my count Richard Ramirez left eighteen of the people he attacked alive. I do not offer this information here to diminish the experiences of those victims; on the contrary, I want to pause and call attention to the lack support for those left behind once the case reached new heights in the third phase of the spectacle, as I began to see some of these actors enter formal true crime spaces as what Carrie Rentschler has called "secondary victims" of a crime.[29] It was at this point that people with a story – including those attacked – had to decide whether they wanted to embrace their proximity or attempt to put it behind them, which

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reasoning can help us here. Wealthy Angelenos who had the money for private security would have been much less likely to take these courses, as would be any residents who feared police (many of whom would have likely been poor, involved in criminalized work, or a member of an otherwise criminalized identity group), as the LAPD required training from police officers themselves, who even forced women to spray themselves in the face with MACE so they would know what it felt like. For examples of contemporary coverage of such efforts from the Hillside case, see Beth Ann Krier, "Training Courses Proliferate: Mace as a Means of Self-Defense" *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1977; Lynn Simross, "Women Watch... and Wonder," L*os Angeles Times*, December 7, 1977; Grahame L. Jones, "Rewards Total $115,000 in 10 L.A. Stranglings: Council Expected to Add $25,000 More Today" *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1977.

[26] Sharon McDonald, "L.A. Strangler: A Matter of Rape and Death," *Lesbian Tide*, Jan/Feb 1978, pages 6-7.

[27] Mark I. Pinsky, "Stalker Case Sparks Renewed Interest in Crime-Watch Effort: CRIME: Neighborhood Watch Program," *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995)*, September 8, 1985.

[28] Sue Avery, "Night of Stalker Has a Thousand Eyes: Neighbors in Monterey Park Take Turns Keeping a Wary Watch" *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1985.

[29]Carrie A. Rentschler, *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011).

could be next to impossible because of how difficult it was to avoid coverage. Beyond those who survived a direct attack, there were children and grandchildren affected by attacks on their family members. These homes were often one-story with bedroom windows not far from the ground, and it was not just a fairy tale that the boogeyman could get you anymore. Like Kerri Rawson's father, whom we discussed briefly in the last chapter, Ramirez attacked people in front of their children. He also attacked children themselves, like sixteen-year-old Whitney Bennett, who survived a heinous beating inside her own bedroom in Sierra Madre just after the 4th of July. While Bennett did not enter the "body count," there is no doubt that this experience irrevocably altered her own life, as well as her interactions with other people. A dearth of formal recognition of *this* type of harm by the state, which criminal charges could not account for, is what led many toward testimonial venues like the victims' rights movement and true crime content. [30]

Through his wife, Lisa, Curtis Sliwa heard about the need for neighborhood watch training in Los Angeles and flew in from New York to help Operation Night Watch get off the ground.[31] Despite their clear fear of a strange intruder, Angelenos welcomed Sliwa and others they had never met into their living rooms to house-sit and to set "Night Stalker traps" in empty houses because they were already familiar with Sliwa's organization, the New York Guardian Angels.[32] Sliwa started the Angels' "safety patrols" in New York in 1979 as a supplemental organization to policing. Himself a victim of a shooting, he had seen firsthand the New York Police Department's failures to stop crime or violence in his city and banded together with friends, who wore red berets, to patrol the streets for nefarious potentials. The

[30] In response to a question about criminal charges that *do* exist for assault and battery, I want to clarify that I am talking specifically about survivors of attacks by those who went on to become known as serial killers, which invited different press attention than other crimes. After apprehension, investigative focus shifted to working with the prosecution to construct an airtight case against the defendant – and thus charges lesser than murder were often left out of the state's case against perpetrators like Ramirez. In my experience researching, I found that men who committed serial murders were rarely convicted of all the homicides they committed, much less of violence against victims they left alive. It is these people to whom I am referring here.

[31] "Guardian Angels Patrol area of 'Night Stalker,'" *Oroville Mercury Register*, August 19, 1985; Marcida Dodson, "News of Stalker's Identity Comes in Atmosphere of Fear," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1985.

[32] "Guardian Angels Patrol"

very existence of organizations like the Angels proved that civilians had begun to respond to a lack of protection since 1969, and vigilantism – in practice and in pop culture – increased during the '80s.[33]

In 1984, a man named Bernhardt Goetz was riding the subway in New York City when four men approached him and asked for money. Goetz, carrying a small pistol in the pocket of his jacket, acted quickly, shooting all of them and fleeing the station. Following the story of the "subway vigilante" while he was still on the run, many New Yorkers hoped future victims would at least all be "bad guys," like they imagined the young Black men in the Bronx subway to be.[34] A former New York University student, Goetz eventually turned himself in and confessed to the crime in full, but he did not apologize for his actions as he deemed them necessary. He soon became a spokesperson for the National Rifle Association (NRA), fitting neatly into a narrative about alienated white men exhausted by continually confronting the potential for danger in their daily lives. It worked to excuse men like Goetz – or, at the very least, provide an additional layer of fascination for men like Jeffrey Dahmer – for actions ultimately borne from intolerance, anger, or simple vulnerability on the part of their victims. President Ronald Reagan, for example, did not explicitly condone Goetz's shooting in the subway, but said he could "understand" his frustrations.[35] In her work on the nascent paramilitary wing of the white power movement in these years, Kathleen Belew has shown that public interest in and sympathy for white men who committed extreme acts was itself agentive in this era of spectacle violence, especially as the coming "punitive turn"

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[33] Belew, *Bring the War Home*; May, *Fortress America*; Lisa Arellano, *Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs: Narratives of Community and Nation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

[34] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017); Stanley Nelson, *Crack: Cocaine, Corruption & Conspiracy*, Documentary (Netflix, 2021); Doris Marie Provine, *Unequal under Law: Race in the War on Drugs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jeff Chang and D. J. Kool Herc, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005); Jonathan Abrams, *The Come Up: An Oral History of the Rise of Hip-Hop* (New York: Crown, 2022). See also Austin McCoy's syllabus on the history of hip hop, which he has made open-access through Google docs: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z1Q1MzVXXMNrV47F8pUbJHPENYqtZX_aijqaOavGQqo/edit

[35] For a great overview of the coverage in this case, see the "Subway Vigilante" episode of Rebecca Arzoian, *Trial By Media*, Documentary (Netflix, 2020). For a counterexample, see the "Central Park Five" case, about which much has already been written. The 1989 attack of a white jogger, after which Donald Trump famously placed a full-page advertisement in several local newspapers calling for the return of the death penalty, provides an illustrative example. In her article on the concept of intersectionality (which drew on the teachings of the Combahee River Collective and helped found the legal field of critical race theory) Kimberlé Crenshaw found that there were twenty-eight other first-degree rapes or attempted rapes reported in New York City during the same week, none of which received the same level of media attention and most of which were committed against women of color. See Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"; Ken Burns, *The Central Park Five*, Documentary (PBS, 2012); Mike Sheehan, *The Preppy Murder: Death in Central Park*, Documentary, Crime (Break Thru Films, Bungalow Media + Entertainment, 2019); Aisha Harris, "The Central Park Five: 'We Were Just Baby Boys,'" *The New York Times*, May 30, 2019.

in crime policy denied this empathy to nonwhite people involved in criminal activities. Coverage, interpretations, and reinterpretations of this evidence worked to both signal the acceptance of white male terrorism in our political culture *and* distance its perpetrators from broader ideological and political movements that remained active.[36]

As had been the case throughout the twentieth century, lines were never easily drawn between police, citizen, and vigilantes; and spectacular cases continued to provide cover for the negligence of the state.[37] In Atlanta, Democrat Maynard Jackson was elected the first Black mayor of any major Southern city in 1973. On shaky new ground, many in the Jackson administration hoped to carry on incumbent Ivan Allen's concept of the "city too busy to hate," an idyllic version of Atlanta where the Progressive spirit of the "New South" city could overpower the antiquated language, structures, and appearance of white supremacy. During his administration, Jackson expanded the police force and repressed labor efforts throughout the city, but he also dismissed the chief of police in an attempt to reinvent the city's relationship to safety without formally addressing the crime and violence that had become even more dire issues for some residents since the civil rights movement.[38] Heather Ann Thompson and others have written of similar trends in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, and elsewhere, as a new generation of Black leadership began to pursue the only option they could see to avoid the conflagrations of either an angry white mob *or* protests from Black residents. As historian James Foreman has put it, the strategy was to "lock up our own," to prove a dedication to anti-crime politics and maintain political legitimacy with majority-white leaders in the South.[39] Matt Lassiter has shown how white families were incentivized to

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[36] Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

[37] Judith Butler has argued that in collective responses to atrocity, some deaths become more "grievable" than others. She refers mostly to violence characterized by political conflict, arguing that nationalism plays a large role in allowing Americans to see those who look and act like them as "grievable" while foreign victims of (often American inflicted) violence are ignored or considered to have deserved their fates. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2004); Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2020).

[38] Renfro, *Stranger Danger*; Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Danielle Lee Wiggins, "Crime Capital: Public Safety, Urban Development, and Post-Civil Rights Black Politics in Atlanta" (Ph.D., United States -- Georgia, Emory University); Micah Herskind, "Cop City and the Prison Industrial Complex in Atlanta," *Mainline Zine*, February 8, 2022.

[39] James Forman, *Locking up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018); Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*; Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, First edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

abandon downtown Atlanta for self-contained suburban enclaves not that different from those in Los Angeles around the same time – so as Black residents were warehoused in unprecedented numbers without access to political power, white suburbanites used these incentives to lay claim to the language of homeownership and meritocracy, dictating urban policy from ex-urban political blocs.[40]

Through cases like the serial murders of Black children in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981, we see the failure of a Democratic-led local government sympathetic to Black interests more than ever before to provide for those interests given the tools of municipal governance and the limits of possibility in a state whose agents historically supported white supremacist causes and belonged to white supremacist organizations. In Atlanta, the Guardian Angels chapter was made up of primarily Black men, who organized against the mysterious serial murderer but did not necessarily believe him to be a civilian, as they knew that local Klan chapters had strong ties to law enforcement. A look at the history of self-defense within majority-Black neighborhoods in the South – like Hasan Kwame Jeffries' *Bloody Lowndes* about the formation of the first "Black Panther Party" in Alabama and Timothy Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie* on the teachings of Robert F. Williams – calls our attention to the stark differences between the stories we consume in popular culture about vigilantism during this era and the reality of its impetus, which could sometimes be protection from state actors.[41] These cases, along with the evidence of sex worker activism in Chapter 2, is proof that the idea and possibility of extralegal violence to protest the state in the

[40] Recently, I have been very interested in studies about capital flight that focus on police officers, who not only take their money with them when they leave but also bring violence into the city when they come back to work. I first remember hearing this discussed at the Urban History Association panels organized by my colleagues Charlotte Rosen and Matthew Guariglia in direct response to the uprisings of June 2020. I also remember my memory being sparked by discussions with Imani Jacqueline Brown, an artist and activist who tackles questions about race, violence, and geography through visual representation. Though I had encountered Ruth Wilson Gilmore's concept of abolition geography in writing, it was not isolated research but conversation that allowed me to incorporate this history into my understanding of spectacle murder cases. See *Urban History Association Panel Series*, Policing the City, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyLwQLqja2LhLlK8Gs87dCw ; Imani Jacqueline Brown, *Black Ecologies: An Opening, an Offering*, accessed October 4, 2022; Andrew Seltzer, "Commuting Cops," *Life of the Law*, September 8, 2015; Gilmore, Bhandar, and Toscano, *Abolition Geography*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

[41] Emily Thuma, "Lessons in Self-Defense: Gender Violence, Racial Criminalization, and Anticarceral Feminism," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2015): 52–71; Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Anne Gray Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us: Sex, Race, and Police Power from Segregation to Gentrification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie, Second Edition: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Keisha N. Blain, *Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer's Enduring Message to America* (New York: Random House, 2022).

abstract was one thing; taking action to protect your own life was another, and people of all stripes drew on networks that already existed to do so during these decades.[42]

Many discussions of violent crime revolve in some way around statistics, which seem to suggest that violence goes "up" or "down," but a crucial component of the history of spectacle murder is its ability to transcend data.[43] Statistics may be useful for some studies of violence, but reporting methods, as well as incentives to report (or not to report) make them largely unreliable. Ultimately, whether they can be relied upon to tell us how many of these events occurred is beside the point; statistics fail to provide us with the evidence we need to understand how people experienced the spectacle murder phenomenon. It was during the mid-80s (with a height in the '90s, when newspapers began printing massive, colorful charts and infographics to visually illustrate the problem) that we began to encounter so much reporting on statistical evidence in coverage of crime nationally.[44] These numbers often came from the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, or VICAP. Crime statistics, as we discussed in Chapter 3, were anything but neutral as federal funding for matériel, uniforms, and training, had been linked to self-

[42] As a spectacle case, the Atlanta murders produced a lot of true crime, but the FBI's involvement with the case and insistence on a Black suspect – Wayne Williams – has put the verdict in doubt for many who continue to recognize that the BSU's characterization of the suspect was based on research into white serial killers and did not account for histories of racial violence in the area. For a strong overview with varied testimonial evidence, I suggest the documentary *Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children* and James Baldwin's *The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Reissued Edition*, Anniversary edition (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1995).

[43] For more on the unreliability of crime formal crime statistics, see Jonathan Ben-Menachem, "2020 FBI Data Shows Spike in Murders across the Country.," *Slate*, October 1, 2021; Alec Karakatsanis, *Usual Cruelty: The Complicity of Lawyers in the Criminal Injustice System* (New York: The New Press, 2019); Daniel LaChance, *Crimesploitation: Crime, Punishment, and Pleasure on Reality Television*, 1st edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, First Edition (New York: Viking, 2011); Pagan Kennedy, "There Are Many Man-Made Objects. The Rape Kit Is Not One of Them.," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2020; Conor Friedersdorf, "Police Have a Much Bigger Domestic-Abuse Problem Than the NFL Does," *The Atlantic*, September 19, 2014; Reina Sultan, "Diversifying the Police Force Won't End Police Violence," *Truthout*, November 17, 2021; Reina Sultan et al., "#8toAbolition," last accessed October 4, 2022, https://www.8toabolition.com.

[44] I was born in 1991 and was too young to be consuming news in earnest during this period. Most of my memories of the political landscape of media and spectacle violence were a direct result of 9/11, but I do remember the colorful photos and charts in the paper. It took engagement with the Contra Costa County Crime Prevention Committee Collection, an unsorted set of clippings, to help me come to terms with this and relate it to the work I was doing on this chapter and the chapter on Polly Klaas. I found that the Crime Prevention committee was itself compiling statistical evidence through press clippings. In one article they found, investigative reporter Morgan Cartwright had warned against the perils of relying on stats as a consumer of news. She pointed out that statistical methods on violent crime vary by city and change over time, making them nearly impossible to reconcile beyond the local level; and even these numbers don't account for unreported violence like rape and domestic violence: "adding to the confusion, police agencies compute crime rates in different ways, and nationwide, some agencies have been accused of deliberately increasing or reducing crime numbers to suit their purposes. [...] But whether those numbers, or any other crime statistics, are meaningful is anyone's guess." Morgan Cartwright, "Statistical Noise Drowns out the Meaning of Crime Numbers; Press Clipping" (unknown local newspaper, January 16, 1994), unsorted collection, "California Crime," Contra Costa County Crime Prevention Committee Collection. Contra Costa County Historical Society, Martinez, California.

reported crime stats since the passage of the Law Enforcement Assistance Act under President Lyndon Johnson in 1965.[45] While *Dragnet* had incentivized the LAPD to tell good stories for television, the federal government also directly incentivized the over reporting of numbers throughout this period for departments in search of resources to hire new agents, pursue cold cases, purchase new and improved gear and weapons, and form special ops teams like SWAT.[46] An impulse to disseminate this information to the public was fairly new, as it now fit into common sense arguments to expand carceral institutions. Though information gathering on crime had been a federal interest since the Progressive era, what was once private state intelligence could now be used to construct narratives of counterintelligence that simply necessitated the expansion of information gathering institutions. Local police departments could share these numbers under the guise of accountability to the public to prove a need for even more funding. Reform projects like the introduction of use of force reports – which I have researched at length as part of a team investigating police brutality – rarely furnished material consequences for officers who did not follow procedure, as events simply became evidence of the need for clearer, and better resourced, procedural guidelines, which cost more money.[47]

Readers will already be familiar with many of the other like cases happening around the same time – "Co-Ed Killer" Ted Bundy; "Green River Killer" Gary Ridgeway; and even the "Trailside Killer" of Mount Tamalpais, whose crimes had terrified Nikki Craft while running off campus, causing her to

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[45] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*.

[46] For more on how these funds got used, see: P. B. Kraska, "Militarization and Policing--Its Relevance to 21st Century Police," *Policing* 1, no. 4 (November 7, 2007): 501–13; Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units," *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*; William Booth, "Exploding Number of SWAT Teams Sets Off Alarms," *Washington Post*, June 17, 1997; Austin McCoy, "'Detroit under STRESS': The Campaign to Stop Police Killings and the Criminal State in Detroit," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 1–34; Lindsey Norward, "The Day Philadelphia Bombed Its Own People," *Vox*, August 8, 2019; Stuart Schrader, "When Police Play Soldier, Everybody Loses," *LEVEL* (blog), October 7, 2020; Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*, American Crossroads 56 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019); Stuart Schrader, "More than Cosmetic Changes: The Challenges of Experiments with Police Demilitarization in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 5 (September 1, 2020): 1002–25; Alyssa Corinne Smith, Grigory Gorbun, Julia Mead, Kyra Schulman, Eman Elshaikh, and Natalie Smith, "Forensic Architecture and University of Chicago Report on Historical Use of Tear Gas," June 2021, personal collection. For an interactive look at the legacy of militarization in present police activities, see Forensic Architecture's online platform "Police Brutality at The Black Lives Matter Protests." I suggest exploring their investigations as well. For fictional representations that nodded to this shift, see John Carpenter, *Escape from New York* (AVCO Embassy Pictures, International Film Investors, Goldcrest Films International, 1981) and Paul Verhoeven, *RoboCop*, Action (Orion Pictures, 1987).

[47] In the Use of Force reports I consulted for my work with Forensic Architecture, I could not find a way to fill out the report properly and admit liability for wrongdoing. I am using this here as testimonial, rather than cited, evidence because the work has not yet been published.

destroy part of her library's photo archive. A tour guide once told me that Mount Tam is where mountain biking was invented, but it's better known by many by its relationship to murders. Not far from the peak, in Contra Costa and Sacramento Counties, folks lived in fear of a suspect called the "East Area Rapist" during these years. Starting around 1976, residents of neighborhoods in the area invented a joint buzzer system between their houses, established elaborate phone trees and car patrols, and worked with police to hunt a man whose home-invasions burglaries eventually escalated to home invasion-rapes.[48] After a terrifying few months, the suspect (or suspects, as no one connected these instances at the time) simply disappeared.

Soon, some of these residents went on to form the Contra Costa County Crime Prevention Committee to continue the efforts they had developed to protect themselves from EAR, offering workshops and resources on how to start your own Neighborhood Watch program to "combat crime in a neighborly way."[49] These groups were led by volunteers, who structured their chapters and decided on their activities according to their own priorities, but they received guidance from local police officers. Most groups had designated "block captains" whose job it was to learn about crime trends in the area and discuss them at group meetings that doubled as social gatherings, as neighbors also used them to gossip, share their feelings, air grievances, and work through interpersonal issues.[50]

Gesturing toward a festive approach to neighborhood watch, CCCPC member Lorraine Rivers suggested that the best way to fight crime in your neighborhood was to "throw a party."[51] Like Operation Night Watch, these events weren't all doom and gloom; they weren't supposed to be. They were hyperlocal attempts to be in community and enjoy one another's company – often with barbeque and a beer – instead of hiding inside alone. Contra Costa's nearly all-white watch groups were less

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[48] McNamara, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*; Patton Oswalt, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*, Documentary (HBO Documentary Films, 2020); Wesley Lowery, Hannah Knowles, and Mark Berman, "How America's Deadliest Serial Killer Went Undetected for More than 40 Years," *Washington Post*, December 2020.

[49] Jack Cheevers, "Combat Crime in a Neighborly Way" Jan 26, 1981. CCCCP Collection.

[50] David Frisk, "Neighbors say they are driving out crime," Jan 24, 1994, unsorted newspaper clippings listed under "crime prevention". CCCCP Collection.

[51]Cheevers, "Combat Crime in a Neighborly Way." When I began research for this dissertation, I misunderstood the term "community policing" to mean a form of self-directed neighborhood patrol. Community policing, however, was quite the opposite; a strategy developed under the Kennedy Administration to replace community services with police services. See Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*.

interested in preventing crime as a social phenomenon (which their elected officials seemed to be failing to do anyway) than they were in keeping it out of their neighborhoods specifically. In 1983, a member of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Watch program had explained that she wanted strangers to be "a little bit timid about driving into our neighborhood."[52] If these killers could scare them, they might as well try to scare them right back.

Detective Carol Daly – one of the first policewomen in Sacramento – started her career pursuing this same perpetrator, the East Area Rapist. She remembers that, at the time, her department was so clueless about rape as a potentially lethal violence that she had to switch out of the sex crimes unit to work the case; and homicide desperately needed her help. Women officers during the '70s and '80s were inherently considered experts on rape by their male colleagues because they could speak with survivors, who were often emotionally and mentally inaccessible to interrogating officers. As more of these cases gained spectacule status across the country, and police departments were forced to adapt as events shifted on the ground, elite homicide units that had formerly barred women officers now began letting them in. These women investigators – like Ann Rule, whom we will remember started as a police officer before her divorce, but still assisted while working as a journalist – drew on experiential knowledge of sexual violence to provide a personal connection that allowed survivors to feel safe opening up to police. It also made the experiences of these crime victims deeply personal for Daly and women like her, who came to see their roles as doubly important: protector *and* healer.[53] While women had been criminalized and even murdered throughout history for relying on feminine intuition, like the BSU, policing offered a venue for them to use embodied, gendered, intuitive knowledge in service of their local police

[52] Lauren Blau, "Neighborhoods preventing crimes" July 5, 1983; unsorted newspaper clippings listed under "crime prevention". CCCCP Collection.

[53] Dani Anguiano, "'I Knew the Victims' Pain': The Pioneering Detective Who Took on the Golden State Killer," *The Guardian*, August 16, 2020; McNamara, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*; Oswalt, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*; Elizabeth Kendall, *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer*, Documentary (Amazon Studios, Saloon Media, 2020).

departments. In the '90s, I found evidence of women who were comfortable with the body volunteering to assist with autopsies.[54]

The officers assigned to the Night Stalker task force took it just as personally as their neighbors – perhaps even more – agonizing over their inability to defend community members from the vicious attacks. Police officers not assigned to the task force might be assigned instead to the Night Watch efforts, which covered about 5,000 households and coordinated with a "Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service," made up of people in cars who radioed police with evidence of suspicious activity. More eyes on the streets were free labor for the police department, who assured the public that thanks to them, "more suspects" could be caught.[55] It is worth pausing here to note the shift in attitude since 1969 – or even 1977 – when the LAPD had rejected wholeheartedly any cooperation by civilians in spectacle investigations. From the evidence shown here, I see this not as an indication of having listened to public demands but rather as a reactive an attempt to contain and keep eyes on those determined to find the perpetrator with or without police help.

It was becoming more common for officers during the '80s to spend their time policing neighborhoods that looked nothing like their own, but Detective Gil Carillo was from East Los Angeles, still lived there with his family, and knew some of the victims. For Carillo, this experience was devastating but it also gave him a strong sense of self.[56] At one point that summer, the Night Stalker attacked ten times in five days. Detective Frank Salerno, who had worked the Hillside case (and earned

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[54] I first encountered the concept of intuitive knowledge in an undergraduate course on race and fantasy in Latin America. See: Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives & Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, 2nd ed, Contemporary Classics (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010); Alice Sparkly Kat, *Postcolonial Astrology: Reading the Planets through Capital, Power, and Labor* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2021); Gerald Brittle, Ed Warren, and Lorraine Warren, *The Demonologist: The Extraordinary Career of Ed and Lorraine Warren*, Reprint edition (Graymalkin Media, 2013); and Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*. I would also like to mention, though I wish I could spend more time on this, that the field of medical examination is largely unregulated at the local and state levels, and many coroners across the United States do not even hold medical degrees. Facilities can also be terrifyingly under-resourced, as one segment on *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver, prompted by spectacles of police brutality that brought questions about cause-of-death procedure into the realm of public discussion, found that some local morgues do not even have proper temperature control while storing remains. See: Sandra Bartlett, "Coroners Don't Need Degrees To Determine Death," *NPR*, February 2, 2011; Milton M. D. Helpern, *Autopsy: The Memoirs of Milton Helpern, the World's Greatest Medical Detective* (New York: St Martins Pr, 1977); "Death Investigations," *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, May 19, 2019.

[55] "Guardian Angels Patrol."

[56] *Night Stalker*.Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez.*

the reputation for "cracking" it, though I struggled to find a "crack" at all during my research as the tip that led to their arrest came from a department in Washington), was a "bigger than life murder cop" within the LAPD.[57] As heads of the largest task force since the Strangler with more than 200 officers and several different task forces, Salerno and his mentee Carillo worked around the clock that summer, returning to their homes drunk at the crack of dawn to sleep for forty minutes before driving bleary-eyed and angry to another grim crime scene. It helped that Frank had been through it before, but they both struggled to integrate the urgency and violence of the case into the fabric of their social lives. Frank advised Gil to deal with it the same way he had learned to deal with the Strangler case: "When I'd get to the driveway and shut the car engine, I'd shut it all off inside. I didn't want what I do to ever enter my family life."[58] Like many police officers, Frank and Gil thought it was part of their job to keep their pain from those on the other side of the blue line.

But it didn't work. The pressure left Gil short-tempered and meanspirited toward his wife, as he felt disconnected from her and perceived her calls for more time at home as a misunderstanding of the pressures he felt to provide justice for those he had interviewed. For her part, Gil's wife felt resentful that he had left her to be a single mom at a time when she, too, was afraid of the Night Stalker, and she took their kids to her mother's when she realized she could not rely on Gil to care for them until the case was over.[59] During the '80s, as police officers became more and more disillusioned with the prospect of public accountability – due often to the same feelings of insecurity and the need for acknowledgment of pain that we saw in Chapter 3 – they began to double down on the concept of the thin blue line. Seemingly always on defense with the press, officers relied on the internal protections the "blue" provided instead:

[57] Tony Valdez called Salerno this in the prologue to Carlo, *Night Stalker*.

[58] Marcia, *Crime Scene*; Skolnick, *Night Stalker*; Darcy O'Brien, *Two of a Kind: The Hillside Stranglers* (New York, N.Y: New American Library, 1985); Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974).

[59] Carlo, 25.

loyalty. It was within their own circles that detectives in spectacle cases felt the most comfortable commiserating and sharing war stories, which their families, they thought, could never understand.[60]

The only way out at the time seemed to be for another person to die, a feeling that Gil knew only Frank could understand, and they spent days on end marinating in this fantasy. As Gil told a documentary crew recently: "I needed more evidence. I needed him to screw up. And the only way he'd make a mistake was if there were more victims. I didn't want to see anybody die but I needed another piece of the puzzle to work it."[61] Both detectives had become so accustomed to operating in the register of crisis, like men at war, that they were unable to spend their energy connecting with the people they loved. They connected now only with each other – in the squad car, or at a scene, or in the Chinatown bar where they processed together each night, spending every ounce of energy hoping, wishing, dreaming that the Night Stalker was murdering someone somewhere at that very moment, and that this time they would find him.[62]

Your Calls Found Him

At the end of August, the Night Stalker left town to visit San Francisco. While he was there, he broke into the home of an elderly Asian couple and attacked both of them, leaving the woman dead and

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[60] Robert K. Ressler & Tom Schactman, *Whoever Fights Monsters*; Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, Reprint edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014); Belew and Gutierrez, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*; Errol Morris, *The Thin Blue Line*, Documentary (American Playhouse, Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), Program Development Company Productions Inc., 1988); Stuart Schrader, "When Police Play Soldier, Everybody Loses."

[61] Quoted in Skolnick, *Night Stalker*.

[62] I was not originally planning to include the testimonies of police officers in this chapter but Gil Carillo's experiences changed my mind once I had switched to understanding the cases through the lens of "harm," rather than violence and once I got better at using police evidence responsibly. I saw Carillo speak at Crime Con in 2021 and, though he repeated many of the same stories he used when interviewed for the Netflix documentary, I was fascinated by how the audience reacted to his stories about his wife (also interviewed) and how much they loved him (lots of people in the chat even called him "hot"). The Carillos' experiences weathering the Night Stalker case as a family felt to me like the type of violence that is especially important to acknowledge in this dissertation, even though I was careful not to include Carillo's testimony of the events as part of evidence about things that actually occurred – focusing, instead, on how he shared things and why. While I did not have time to do more research to include in this document, I am hoping to pursue further writing on true crime "crushes" on detectives, lawyers, victims, and perpetrators as I encountered this often. For more on Carillo, I do suggest the documentary. See also Gina Tron, "'I Just Want My Dad Back': How The 'Night Stalker' Case Affected Detective Gil Carrillo's Family Life," Oxygen Official Site, June 5, 2021. I have taken Frank Salerno's accounts, as well as my assertions that he opposed press intervention, from several sources; primarily the same documentary on the Stalker and Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*; as well as Matt Murphy's documentary *City of Angels, City of Death*.

man badly beaten. At the scene, as he had done at several others (and as the East Area Rapist had also done in the surrounding area, and was presently doing in Los Angeles), he left evidence that he had eaten and drank from the refrigerator and had spent at least enough time in the house to cryptically write "Jack the Knife" on the wall. The next morning, at the scene, one of the responding officers told a journalist in casual conversation that the house looked "just like those cases in LA. All that shit written all over the walls."

The only problem was that no one had told the public that there had been writing on the walls at other Night Stalker crime scenes. Unlike the shameless sensationalism of officer speculation at the house on Cielo Drive in 1969, the LAPD's officers had learned since Manson to withhold certain information, which they understood as serving two purposes: to avoid panic and to keep some evidence for corroboration purposes once the suspect was caught. But certain members of the San Francisco Police Department – at least some of whom probably remembered the Zodiac investigation – had clearly not gotten the memo. What was already a terrifying set of crimes was suddenly apocalyptic in its invocation of Jack the Ripper and Charles Manson. On a hunch, Los Angeles local television news reporter Laurel Erickson had flown to San Francisco that morning to check out the crime scene herself and, confirming her suspicions that the cases were related, she had run into Carillo and Salerno on the plane. Once officers let this new detail slip, she confronted them directly with the possibility that the serial killer had left Los Angeles, which would now justify a statewide manhunt and hundreds of thousands more outside eyes. Flustered, they stammered that they didn't know where she was getting her information and fled back to LA.[63]

Mayor Dianne Feinstein ("the only Democrat for the death penalty!"), eager to flex her tough-on-crime stance in public, immediately held a press conference linking the attack to the murders in Los Angeles. Showing the first publicly released forensic sketch of the suspect to the cameras, she implored on national news: "Everybody please, closely study this composite. He's someone that will go into a

[63] Skolnick, *Night Stalker*.

home at night and will kill. And it's a very serious situation. [...] Somewhere in the Bay Area, someone is renting a room, an apartment, or a home to this vicious killer. If you know who he is or have seen him, if you know anything, please contact the task force. We'll have him, and we'll have him soon."[64]

On August 30, Sheriff Block held a press conference of his own. "We went through an agonizing, soul-searching discussion as to whether to proceed on this identification (for the public)," the sheriff said. But after conferring with various law enforcement agency heads involved in the hunt, he decided to publicize the name of their primary suspect though he made it clear that these events had compromised their investigation. (His tone, in fact, suggested that Feinstein and those involved in publicizing the sketch should be ashamed of their actions.) Salerno and Carillo have both continued to insist since it happened that there had been no consultation to release this information, which had just come to them by way of a 13-year-old who had reported a muddy shoe print in his front yard and eventually led them to a friend of the suspect, who confirmed his identity. Feinstein had simply forced their hand. The sound byte that played on the news was William Booth (who had also been the press agent on the Hillside case): "We would like for everyone to think, especially one person, that wherever you go, and whatever you do, and whatever you need, and whatever you purchase, eventually somebody, sometime, is going to recognize you."[65]

The following day, the LAPD biffed an attempt to head off the suspect, Richard Ramirez, at a Greyhound Bus station – but, luckily for them, it didn't matter. The city of Los Angeles began recognizing him as soon as they saw his picture. After several people chased him from a corner store across the freeway, Ramirez "unknowingly stumbled into a neighborhood of heroes," reported Jerry Belcher of the *Los Angeles Times*. Manuel De La Torre, Jose Burgoin, and his sons Jamie and Julio captured Ramirez after he tried to steal their teenage neighbor's car. Manuel had yelled for his wife to get the gun:

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[64] Quote printed in full in Carlo, 112. You can also see portions of Feinstein's press conference in the Netflix documentary. I was not able to see it in person because I suspect the documentary crew had checked out this footage before I got to it based on a conversation with the archivist at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. I surely also would have been able to view this at the Paley Center archive, but they shuttered during COVID and I was unable to access their records beyond an exploratory visit in 2019. For more info, see works cited.

[65] ABC Evening News, August 29, 1985, item #305610, Vanderbilt TV News Archive.

"I'll waste him right here!" In the meantime, he beat Ramirez with a metal pole as a crowd began to gather. Bloodied, Ramirez begged for mercy.[66]

Eloise Cabral (whose car he tried to steal to escape men already chasing him), when interviewed, told the press that she and her friends had just been talking about how "if he got caught around here in East LA he'd probably get his butt beat up because all of the guys around here all know about him. They would love to get their hands on him. And now we wake up the next morning and find him across the street."[67] Later, at the police station, hundreds of people waited outside for a glimpse of the man they had feared for months. Ice cream trucks took advantage of the crowds that lined the curb. Said Linda Deutsch, the capture represented a sense of empowerment for the people of Los Angeles – that they were able to capture him, and that it was plain, ordinary people that did it." State-sponsored coverage portrayed the events as though, when called to the task to find the suspect, Angelenos had responded heroically. Once captured, Ramirez became one of the most famous people in the world and those who were there gained notoriety simply by proximity.[68]

In 1987, NBC premiered one of the most beloved nostalgia traps of all time: *Unsolved Mysteries*. Opening with a theme that sounded eerily familiar to John Carpenter's theme for *Halloween* (1978), the show aggregated cultural myths into one spooky genre – kidnappings, cults, unsolved murders; alongside ghost stories, alien abductions, and conspiracies. A pioneer in the participatory crime entertainment genre, over which *America's Most Wanted* would soon dominate, the show was one of the first to ask for help in "solving" crimes from people watching at home. Host Robert Stack provided frequent updates to active cases so that the audience felt involved and appreciated for their efforts, learning of advances as

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[66] Quote from Jerry Belcher, Nancy Skelton, "Neighbors Gang Up: Suspect Didn't Have a Chance Among Heroes" *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1985. For accounts of the capture, see Carlo, *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*; Alford, "Remember When Dianne Feinstein Helped the Night Stalker Get Away"; Skolnick, *Night Stalker*. The Los Angeles Public Library also has a searchable digital archive of photographs from the *Los Angeles Times* coverage of the case, which is free to access from home.

[67] Carol McGraw and David Freed, "Citizens Capture Stalker Fugitive," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1985.

[68] Ramirez is one of the serial killers with the most robust "fan base" in online spaces like Tumblr and Instagram. For an example of a fan account, see https://www.tumblr.com/deathrowrorry.

they happened. John Walsh did this too, beginning updates on apprehended individuals with the phrase "your calls found him."[69]

Combining crime news and entertainment, these showrunners used a first-person testimonial model but also employed actors to reenact the scenes described by witnesses. This allowed hosts, guests, and audiences to engage in much more speculation in the form of evidence, which could be based on what a person thought they saw, felt, or heard because it did not have to be proven in a court of law. Police officers gave interviews frequently but, more importantly, regular folks shared their own memories without media training (and well before the invention of glam teams!).[70] In early episodes, these people come off as quaint and genuine while their words were given relatively equal weight to doctors, journalists, and professional experts. In one of the first episodes, a man named Maury Terry spoke at length about how he believed the Son of Sam murders, which we will touch on in chapter 6, were the deeds of a Satanist cult even though they had already been solved and the perpetrator had provided ample evidence of his own guilt.[71] Terry's lifelong obsession with disproving the NYPD's Son of Sam theory, as a recent *Netflix* documentary shows, sprang from his own identification of the same gulf between police reports and the lived reality that led me to these historical questions – and that continues to lead many to the true crime genre seeking answers.

The great potential of shows like *Unsolved Mysteries* to platform amateur experts who veered into conspiracy theory territory did the work of getting other people interested in true crime too, and the community grew simply by being visible; no prerequisites necessary. In the '90s, spectacular trials entered the real of entertainment through the Court TV network, which we will discuss further in the next chapter. If anything can be a clue, anyone can theorize about a mystery and, in the coming age of the

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[69] I have not seen many original episodes of *America's Most Wanted*, as they are owned by FOX and can be difficult to find. I did, however, have the opportunity to watch one in full at UCLA's Film and Television Archive. I have seen the set of the 2012 reboot in person at the National Museum of Crime and Punishment (mentioned in the introduction) and have heard so many people talk about it that I feel that I know it well. For more on the show specifically, see John Walsh and Susan Schindehette, *Tears of Rage: From Grieving Father to Crusader for Justice: The Untold Story of the Adam Walsh Case* (Atria Books, 2009); Jack Breslin, *America's Most Wanted: How Television Catches Crooks*, First Special Markets Printing edition (HarperPaperbacks, 1990) and Paul Renfro, *Stranger Danger*.

[70] For more on glam teams, see Louis Staples, "The Great Real Housewives Glam-Squad Divide," *The Cut*, May 31, 2022.

[71] Joshua Zeman,*The Sons of Sam: A Descent into Darkness* (Netflix, 2021).

Internet, there were more ways than ever before to share and collaborate with other amateur investigators.[72] Focusing so much effort on figuring out what makes a man kill people combined with very little focus on what makes a person vulnerable to being killed, and responses to murder cases continued to be reactionary as Americans learned to expect violence even as large-scale responses by actors at the levels of state and federal law failed to predict them. Policing and prison construction as solutions further only accounted for the potential for *repeat* violence against those who were victims already, leaving them to do their healing and recovering alone. Rather than being understood as celebrities in the traditional sense, like perpetrators and heroic detectives were, true crime practitioners and consumers became expert witnesses and investigators by their own designation – and by the designation of their fellow true crimers, who saw their experiences as valuable.

Women's book clubs assigned self-help and self-defense literature alongside true crime, breeding a new generation of crime-informed moms whose children (like me!) devoured *Nancy Drew*, *Goosebumps*, and *Harriet the Spy*. As new consumers learned that anything could be a clue, they grew up playing detective just like Robert Ressler had – in part because of his influence on entertainment. Those without a personal connection to serial cases who were still touched by them found unprecedented access to testimonies about murder in true crime as well as in imagined stories like those of Stephen King and the horror films of Chapter 2.[73] They saw themselves in the interviews with survivors, witnesses, and even perpetrators as regular people became experts, web sleuths, and armchair detectives, amassing vast personal paperback libraries that could rival many institutional archives.

If you had asked me as a teenager or young adult what I found most interesting about the true crime paperbacks I read "for fun," I am not sure what I would have told you but I do know the right answer. It was the peculiar little booklet in the center of each book with glossy black and white pages; the section that contained the photos. I first encountered one of these in *Helter Skelter* at age sixteen, but

[72] Timothy Melley, *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[73] As comedian and true crime aficionado Georgia Hardstark wrote in her memoir, "I blame Stephen King for my addiction to fear." See "Georgia on Car Crashes and Meeting Karen" in Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark, *Stay Sexy & Don't Get Murdered: The Definitive How-to Guide*, First edition (New York: Forge, 2019).

they are nearly ubiquitous in the true crime paperback world, and I have spent hours looking at them over the years. I don't know what it was I was looking for, exactly, but now I understand *why* I was looking and why they held my attention for so long.

It was not the headshots and candid scenes depicting happy families or groups of detectives that fascinated me but the bizarre crime scene photos. In each one, editors had taken great care to remove the likeness of the victim, leaving a bright white vaguely human-shaped splotch wherever a body should be. I found it so strange that, if the decision had been made to remove these people, the editors would move forward with including their photographs at all.[74] After all, I could still see the havoc that had been wreaked in the area surrounding the splotch – blood, hair, instruments of brutality – and I had just read exactly what had supposedly happened in the preceding pages. It was not the presence of the crime scene image that drew me, then, but this great void in its center. Along with other readers, I had to imagine what they looked like by using the evidence of the surrounding scene and what I learned from the book. Once I finally *did* see the horror of the original Tate-LaBianca photos, they did not surprise me in the least. If anything, they were mild compared to what I had conjured all on my own, in my mind.

When Frank Salerno had arrived at the police station after residents of East LA caught the Night Stalker, he said it reminded him of "an Old West scene, where you've got the guy in jail and the crowd is there to lynch him."[75] His comment took me by surprise when I heard it, as it spoke to his understanding of the state's role in the Night Stalker case. In Frank's scene, those ready to lynch Ramirez were not calling for illegal violence, as readers might imagine a lynching to be. Quite the contrary; they were acting from the same impulse that Salerno was as a law enforcement officer to protect the public from danger.

More importantly for our purposes, however, Frank's comment helped me to recognize the appeal of whited-out photo booklets in the center of true crime paperbacks, which look strikingly similar

[74] While I also suspect that most crime scene photos made their way to the paperback industry directly through investigators and prosecuting attorneys, I have more research to do in this area. Outside of these sanitized paperback versions, there was a thriving black market for crime scene photographs that I am hoping to follow in another piece of writing. We will touch on this again briefly in Chapter 6.

[75] McGraw and Freed, "Citizens Capture Stalker Fugitive"; Salerno interviewed in Skolnick, *Night Stalker*.

to historian Ken Gonzalez-Day's "Erased Lynching" exhibit.[76] Gonzalez-Day's project from 2016 reimagines the photographs of spectacle lynchings in the West, in which spectators laugh, gape, and smile for the camera, without the showing the victim's body. In so doing, he draws attention away from this absence toward the evidence of how it made spectators look, act, and feel. While their intentions were likely opposite, the results of the Gonzalez-Day photos and the glossy sections of a true crime paperback are ultimately the same: they force the viewer to reckon with their own participation in the violent acts represented. While Gonzalez-Day pushes us toward evidence of cruelty on the faces of the perpetrators, paperbacks asked audiences to assess physical evidence in the surrounding scene. Publishing houses saved money on the cheap paper and ink of the mass market paperback industry, which allowed consumers to pay reasonable prices for books containing photographs that would have been much more expensive to print in the body of the text itself.

Even though readers may not have been able to see the crime scene photos in full, access to them through those close to the investigation allowed writers to witness the aftermath of the violence they attempted to chronicle. In-depth written accounts of spectacle murders can provide more gruesome details, sometimes narratively imagining events for the reader, than even a photograph is able to communicate.[77] I could not finish, for example, the definitive account of the Hillside murders, though I have cited it in this dissertation. The first scene of Darcy O'Brien's account *Two of a Kind*, which he wrote in consultation with LAPD Sergeant Bob Grogan, imagined the perpetrators killing Judy Lynn Miller, the details of which no one knew but Angelo Buono, Kenneth Bianchi, and Miller herself.[78] I found this

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[76] Ken Gonzalez-Day, *Erased Lynchings*, November 12, 2016, https://kengonzalesday.com/projects/erased-lynchings/; Ken Gonzalez-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For more on lynching, power, and the image, see Kathleen Belew, "Lynching and Power in the United States: Southern, Western, and National Vigilante Violence," *History Compass* 12 (January 10, 2014): 84–99; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Amy K. DeFalco Lippert, *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Alexander Edward Jania, "The Earth Still Shakes: A History of Disaster Memorials in Modern Japan" (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, The University of Chicago, 2022).

[77] O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*. See Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008); Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[78] O'Brien discusses the process by which he gained Grogan's trust in the preface to his book, calling him a "life-long friend" because of their conversations. O'Brien was himself a local Angeleno born to two film stars who was able to use his

expectation of imagination too great to bear after having already spent so much time thinking about Judy and did not return to the book after having mined it for the evidence I needed to write Chapter 2. These extensively narrated scenes were an evolved feature of the pulps that preceded the paperback era, in which illustrators had encouraged readers to imagine harm against the female body by crooks, monsters, and otherworldly creatures.[79]

In the winter of 2020-2021, my observations about expertise in true crime communities crystallized during time spent observing a group of researchers who met regularly to discuss the still unsolved murder of Elizabeth Short, LA's infamous "Black Dahlia." The group invited me into their virtual sessions (something I would not have had access to without changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic!) and allowed me an inside view at what their work looks like. I learned an immeasurable amount from this experience, though it became impossible to continue once I needed to return to my writing. Larry Harnisch, the ringleader of the group and foremost expert on case details, has more archival evidence on the Black Dahlia than I have ever seen any collector compile on their own, and he and his colleagues gave me many resources I might not have found without them. One of the attendees was a criminology professor, Anne Reading, who remembered taking classes with FBI agents in college and shared John Douglas's work on lust murder with me. It was from these amateur sleuths that I learned Elizabeth Short's case file – which included the crime scene photos that had been kept from the press at the time of the murder – had made their way into popular culture by the time I was born precisely because they had been teaching materials shared with students like Anne, who, upon first seeing them in that class, dedicated herself to the pursuit of a criminology degree.[80]

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knowledge of the crime entertainment landscape well in his analysis of the crimes. See O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*. Readers will find his portrayal of the Miller murder between pages 15-28, though I do not recommend reading them.

[79] Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008).

[80] You can see some of their work here: Larry Harnisch, "Heaven Is HERE! The Murder of Elizabeth Short, the Black Dahlia; Los Angeles' Most Famous Unsolved Killing," 1999, http://www.lmharnisch.com/; Larry Harnisch, "The LA Daily Mirror," https://ladailymirror.com/.

5. America's Child is Dead

On October 1, 1993, twelve-year-olds Gillian Pelham and Kate McLean were at their friend Polly Klaas's home in Petaluma, California, for one of the first slumber parties of the school year. Polly's mother Eve lived alone with her two daughters in a quiet one-story home across the street from a neighborhood park, just a few blocks from Petaluma's historic town center. She allowed Polly to invite the girls as a treat for good grades and keeping up with household chores. A fourth musketeer, Annette Schott, had been home sick from school that day and had to miss it last minute, though she promised the girls she would catch up with them later.

Polly was warm, energetic, laugh-out-loud funny, and she *loved* drama. The three preteens played the *Perfect Match* board game and tried on Halloween costumes in Polly's bedroom, shrieking and giggling for hours. Eve, nursing a fierce migraine, eventually said goodnight around ten. She asked them to keep it down so as not to wake Polly's younger sister, Annie, and shut her bedroom door.

Half an hour or so later, the girls decided to set up their sleeping bags in the living room but, upon opening the bedroom door, they found a strange man in the hallway. At first, both Kate and Gillian thought it had to be a prank. Polly had a great sense of humor and, stuffed to the gills with ice cream and pizza, they were both almost ready to burst out laughing – until they saw a knife and the look on Polly's face. The man, who had entered through an unlocked side screen door, asked which of them lived there. Too shocked to speak, Kate and Gillian remained petrified, but Polly spoke up: "I do."

Without wasting any time, the intruder proceeded to tie the girls by their wrists and ankles. He put pillowcases over their heads, but they could still hear a commotion as the stranger shepherded their best friend out of her childhood bedroom. "Count to a thousand," they heard him say, and Polly would be back by the time they were finished. If they spoke a word in the meantime, Kate and Gillian later recounted to national audiences, "he would slit our throats." The man was in and out of the house within ten minutes.

Once the girls figured out that Polly was in serious trouble, they worked together to shimmy themselves out of their bindings and ran to wake Eve, who called 9-1-1.[1] Considering the glacial law enforcement response times in most nearby areas, the Petaluma Police Department's arrival was lightning fast, with officers on scene within the hour. By midnight, the FBI had also arrived, offering forensic support from their new specialty "evidence response team." Kate and Gillian, exhausted and in shock, moved through the night like zombies in a trance watching stranger after stranger enter their friend's home, touch her things, and take pictures. They recounted the events of the evening again and again, both on scene and at the local police station. A few days later, they told it to the cameras on *America's Most Wanted*.[2]

At the end of October, after more than three weeks, they had to go through the whole process again in even more excruciating detail; this time with a forensic artist.

Because Polly was still missing.

Kate, Gillian, and Polly – as did all preteens in the early '90s – had grown up in a world built by kidnapping. Historian Paul Renfro has masterfully shown that by the late 1980s, child abduction was the single greatest shared fear among parents and children in the United States, outpacing even nuclear apocalypse.[3] Voters began supporting a burgeoning child safety movement in record numbers after six-

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[1] I want to note here that calling "9-1-1," which is a very normal concept to us now, was not even possible until the FCC created the Public Safety Answering Point system in 1968. It took even more time to publicize the initiative enough that people began to use it regularly. Before this, they called their local police station directly.

[2] I have pieced together this account of the Polly Klaas kidnapping (and much of the public reception that followed) from an array of sources, including contemporary newspaper coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and *People Magazine*; documentary films and podcasts; testimonies from several of the people at the scene; archival materials (which included a VHS tape of the Klaas memorial service); and many, many conversations with friends, family, and acquaintances who remembered this case. If you participated in any of those, thank you! For some examples of sources that will get a researcher started, see: Annie Klaas and Jess Nichol, "Op-Ed: Polly Klaas Was Our Sister. We Don't Want Unjust Laws to Be Her Legacy," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 2020; Susan Whitmore, "Interview With Marc Klaas, Founder KlaasKids," *GriefHaven* (blog), February 19, 2017; Barry Bortnick, *Polly Klaas: The Murder of America's Child* (Pinnacle, 1996); Elizabeth Gleick, "An Angel Named Polly," *People Magazine*, November 28, 1994; Elizabeth Gleick, "'America's Child,'" *People Magazine*, December 20, 1993; Elizabeth Gleick, "Taken in the Night," *People Magazine*, October 25, 1993; Josh Getlin, "Waiting, Hoping, Praying : In the City Where a Young Girl Was Kidnaped in the Night, They Still Talk of Finding Her. But Confidence Is Giving Way to Fear.," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1993; "Polly Klaas: Kidnapped," *The FBI Files*, Documentary (Discovery, 1998); Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff, "My Favorite Murder," last accessed October 3, 2022, https://myfavoritemurder.com/; Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark, *Stay Sexy & Don't Get Murdered: The Definitive How-to Guide*, First edition (New York: Forge, 2019).

[3] Paul M. Renfro, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State*, Oxford Scholarship Online (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). I also spent time consulting the *San Francisco Examiner's* photography of the Klaas kidnapping investigation and aftermath: See Fang Family, "San Francisco Examiner Photograph Archive Photographic Print Files," 1993-1994, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

year-old Etan Patz disappeared in 1979 while walking in New York City on a frustratingly short stretch of sidewalk from his home to the school bus stop. In the decade following, young white boys became poster children for "stranger danger" ideology, a concept that would saturate childrearing and education practices among middle- and upper-middle-class parents for years to come due in large part to perpetrators like John Wayne Gacy.

Etan Patz's father, a professional photographer, helped police to circulate a constant stream of high-quality photos of Etan. This became a model strategy for parents of missing children, who distributed an unprecedented volume of like images over the following decade. In 1985, an Iowa dairy farmer even began putting the photos and descriptions of missing children on milk cartons in response to the abduction of local paper boy Johnny Gosch; and farms adopted the practice nationwide for several years. The program failed to distinguish between children who had run away from home or been kidnapped by friends or family members from much rarer cases of "stranger danger," creating the illusion that stranger abduction was not only a grave national threat but was also actively getting worse.[4]

As we saw in previous chapters, self-defense emerged as a go-to crime prevention measure, including for children. Local initiatives like POLO (Protect Our Loved Ones) taught children how to say "no" to adults as well as fight them off with kicks, pinches, and projectile objects to the face; and martial arts studios soared in popularity. While I was not reading true crime yet by 1993 (at just age 2) my parents did try to make me take karate in North Carolina a few years later, as self-defense programs offered the added benefits of the youth fitness craze *and* providing working parents an extracurricular to offset childcare duties.[5] I refused to try at all in karate, but my cousin got a black belt!

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[4] Renfro, *Stranger Danger*; Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Elizabeth Gleick, "'America's Child,'" *People Magazine*, December 20, 1993; David Beilinson, *Who Took Johnny*, Documentary, (RumuR Inc., 2014).

[5] My brother and I, along with many of the children we grew up with, spent just as much time in afterschool programs, summer camps, and doing extracurricular activities as we spent in school. Both of our parents worked full time – frequently more than 40 hours a week – but still parented us full-time too, without hiring domestic help outside of occasional local babysitters. While her book on this has not yet been published, I suggest consulting Natalia Petrzela for more on childcare, fitness, and the '90s extracurricular landscape.

National programs like McGruff the Crime Dog incorporated child safety and crime prevention into local school curricula, while local shopping malls hosted "safety day" events where kids learned about police operations while being photographed and fingerprinted by uniformed officers, who compiled these materials into free "safety I.D. kits" for their parents. In the wake of Polly's abduction, parents could even sign their children up for a "kidnap game," in which they role played a pretend attack with a self-defense instructor. He claimed that he tried to present "real-life scenarios," but often wore the mask of Freddy Kreuger from Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), further blurring the line between an actual threat of violent crime and crime entertainment culture.[6] The presence of images of endangered children in the most mundane of spaces – at the breakfast table; in the grocery store; posted on the bulletin board at church – weaved fears of abduction and murder into the fabric of our daily lives. The ghostly faces of the missing haunted those left behind, who repeatedly imagined their own potential deaths at the hands of a stranger. As one writer recently put it in *Jezebel*: to be a child in this moment "was to be acutely aware of the possibility that you might be decapitated" like a little boy named Adam, whose father was John Walsh.[7]

Volunteer crime education programs in predominantly white suburban areas in Sonoma and Contra Costa Counties during the '90s served as mechanisms of solidarity formation between police and suburban children, who would go on to become parents themselves and wield immense influence on public opinion. Historian Elizabeth Hinton has shown that police officers began to take on more social service roles in urban areas after the Kennedy administration, and the expansion of this practice under the Johnson administration's Law Enforcement Assistance Act worked to criminalize and further harm Black, Indigenous, and Latinx children in cities. The fact that '80s and '90s kids grew up feeling

[6] Julian Guthrie, "Self-Defense for Kids: Kick, Scratch, Run!" *San Francisco Examiner*, October 5, 1993.

[7] Rich Juzwiak, "Half-True Crime: Why the Stranger-Danger Panic of the 1980s Refuses to Let Go," *Jezebel*, October 28, 2020. "The warnings were relentless and for a long stretch of my childhood, I feared leaving my house for any period of time. My bus stop was less than a block away from my house and I was terrified to make the trek. I attempted to time my arrival with the bus's so as to minimize the window in which someone could drive by and stuff me into their car. I worried about having to bite, scratch, and kick for my life. I never ended up getting anywhere close to it, but I remained fascinated by the potential of my demise. This intoxicating fear campaign primed my love of horror movies and it reminded '80s children routinely how precious they were. The world, it seemed, was full of people who wanted to own you."

habitually underprotected despite these education and training programs already existing on a massive scale in October 1993 (Polly's fingerprints were already on file, for example) points to the inefficacy of the individualized approach to crime prevention we discussed at length in Chapter 4.[8]

Kate and Gillian's interviews in October – their witness testimony – fueled the entire search effort and investigation into Polly's disappearance, and they also helped to disseminate the story of what had "gone wrong" to Petalumans, who stood on high alert with the perpetrator still unidentified. People began to focus on what they knew; the little mistakes that had combined to leave Polly so vulnerable to attack. The unlocked side door – proof that all it takes is one tiny mistake by a parent – recalled the fact that Etan Patz's parents, despite it being common practice, had never let him walk to the bus stop alone before the day he was taken. Parents complained that no one had intervened earlier, as it became clear that several neighborhood boys had seen the man lurking nearby Polly's home that evening and found him to be suspicious, even scary, but had not reported it to anyone.

One neighbor even lamented to the press that going with the intruder was "the worst thing" Polly could have done. "If the girls had started screaming and making a fuss, maybe he would've stabbed her, but maybe he would've freaked out and ran away."[9] Knowing what we do now about the abduction (as well as the fact that traumatic events cause us to act in unexpected ways), it seems quite reasonable to me that Kate and Gillian stayed silent and they later explained that as much as they were concerned with Polly, they also wanted to protect Eve and Annie, who were still asleep. It strikes me as a particularly gruesome feature of the individual-choice model of spectacle crime narratives that a member of her own community imagined bodily harm against Polly and then publicly judged this potential violence worth the risk – an assessment that is not only impossible to expect in a moment of crisis, but

[8]As I mentioned in a previous footnote, Simon Balto and others have framed this as communities that have been "overpoliced and underserved." I have avoided that language in response to changing historiographical discussions after 2020. See: Corbin Page, "Review: Simon Balto, Occupied Territory," *Chicago Review*, April 30, 2020; Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Mariame Kaba; Andrea J. Richie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: The New Press, 2022); Mariame Kaba, Naomi Murakawa, and Tamara K. Nopper, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, The Abolitionist Papers Series (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021).

[9] Julian Guthrie, "Self-defense for kids."

absurd to even *think* of expecting from a child. Gillian was vexed by how wantonly people made these accusations and, when asked by a reporter, she replied sardonically that of course it wasn't "weird" that they didn't scream – the weird part, she reminded him, "was that there was a guy in the house."[10] Now, however, my students, nieces, and nephews are already used to the concept of risk assessment in the form of active shooter drills, some of which even ask children to volunteer for more dangerous roles than their peers in an emergency situation.

Parents in Petaluma struggled to manage their children's emotional and psychosomatic responses to what they knew, saw, and heard about Polly's abduction. Many reported their kids were acting strange; putting off going to bed or being alone; waking up at all hours; and experiencing – or claiming to experience – severe stomachaches.[11] Children as young as nine were even asked to talk to the press and describe how they were feeling, or how they planned to protect themselves in response. In the *San Francisco Examiner* photographs of the Klaas case, I found dozens of photos of children that had been interviewed. While the directive to avoid strangers had clearly taken hold within the North Bay by 1993, it had not been enough to protect Polly and now her friends found themselves thrust into the spotlight; asked to articulate emotions that even adults around them had spent their whole lives avoiding.

Families in the area interrupted daily routines to try to keep themselves safer, sealing windows, bolting doors at night, setting up carpools to prevent traveling alone, and reporting suspicious activity." Some even outfitted their children with commercial body alarms.[12] Polly's peers were terrified by the thought of the bearded intruder and constructed elaborate booby traps to trip him up. Annie – who later showed her masterpiece to President Bill Clinton and the entire nation at a Children's Town Hall event in 1994 – strung a complex web of ropes, bells, and noisemakers across all the entrances in her bedroom, aware that the man who had taken her sister could just as easily have grabbed her.[13]

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[10] Robert Digitale "Polly's friends look for answers" *The Press Democrat*, October 5, 1993; Rob Lopez, "The search continues," *Petaluma Argus-Courtier* weekend edition, October 8, 1993.

[11] Ann Frantz, "Parents share their fears, hope" *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, weekend edition, Oct 8, 1993.

[12] Gregory Lewis, "Mom begs abductor to return daughter, *San Francisco Examiner*, October, 4, 1993.

[13] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2006); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

Few slept soundly that weekend but they did not stay inside. When local business owner Bill Rhodes learned of Polly's abduction, he decided to transform his print shop into an ad hoc search center. Less than 24 hours after the abduction and throughout the following weeks, Petalumans met here at the corner of Kentucky Street and Western Avenue to sign in and be assigned a job. At the makeshift "Polly Klaas Search Center," volunteers answered phones, reported investigative tips to police, processed donations, compiled mailing lists, and divided themselves into teams of four to explore seventeen "search zones," which they themselves designated and mapped. Joanne Gardner, who assumed the role of the Center's media coordinator, told a local reporter that she estimated about thirty people came in off the street every hour to aid the search during that first week.[14]

Rhodes, owner of PIP Printing, had learned from prior work as a volunteer ambulance technician that time was of the essence, so he closed his shop to customers indefinitely, telling reporters that if there was any hope of finding Polly, it was "clear that we needed to get a printing and distribution network set up."[15] Other local businesses donated printers, fax machines, and paper. They set to work designing and printing thousands of copies of the now infamous "kidnapped" flier bearing the composite sketch and Polly's 7th grade school picture. Her classmates took to their bikes, stapling them to telephone poles, fences, and storefronts across town. Their parents drove stacks further to emergency rooms, police departments, truck stops, Greyhound bus stations, social service agencies, car rental agencies, and copy

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University Press, 2007); Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, New York: Viking, 2014), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/10086464; Matthew Guariglia, "Policing Unpolicable Space: The Mulberry Bend," *The Metropole* (blog), May 10, 2018; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005): 1233–63; Kidada E. Williams, "Regarding the Aftermaths of Lynching," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 856–58; Matthew D. Lassiter, "Political History beyond the Red-Blue Divide," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 760–64; Jessie Daniels, *Nice White Ladies: The Truth about White Supremacy, Our Role in It, and How We Can Help Dismantle It*, First edition (New York, NY: Seal Press, 2021); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Judah Schept, *Progressive Punishment: Job Loss, Jail Growth, and the Neoliberal Logic of Carceral Expansion* (New York: NYU Press, 2015); Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006); Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[14] "Community rallies together" *Petaluma Argus-Courier* midweek edition, Oct 5-7.

[15] Greg Cahill, "Community gest involved," *Petaluma Argus-Courier* midweek edition, Oct 5-7.

stores across Northern California. An enterprising group of dads with tickets to that weekend's 49ers game took a stack to pass out to fans at Candlestick Park.[16] Beth Rowen sent a box of fliers with her husband, who worked in San Francisco, and she laminated copies for her friends to keep on their cars. A mother of two teenagers herself, she explained that it "feels better" to be doing something to find Polly.

Spectators of crime news had learned that wide distribution of information was important in abduction cases, as California's elaborate highway system may have made it easy for Polly's kidnapper to flee the state. One woman had the brilliant idea to hand out fliers at the airport bus station "so people destined to distant places can carry the posters with them."[17] Another couple planning a trip to New Orleans that week decided to drive along the coast of California instead to distribute fliers along the way, as they told a local reporter that Polly was "more important" than their vacation.[18] For the first time, this type of bulletin could also be shared on the "emerging information superhighway" known as the Internet, as a local computer salesman and tech columnist combined forces to digitize the flier, allowing Polly's image to be shared billions of times over the course of the '90s, all across the globe.

Petalumans also rallied to support Eve and Polly's father, Marc Klaas, directly, organizing meal trains and vigils so that they would not have to focus on cooking or entertaining guests. Mothers babysat each other's children at the center in large batches while fathers took on active search and rescue roles. Marc lived about thirty miles away in Sausalito, as he and Eve had amicably divorced before her move to Petaluma. While he did not know many of Polly's neighbors, their kindness "renewed" his "faith in humanity," he told reporters. "I'm not used to having random acts of kindness committed for me. I'm overwhelmed," he said the first weekend of the search.[19] Eve told reporters she felt that the town's residents "are reacting to this as if it was their own child."[20]

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[16] Lewis, "Mom begs."
[17] Eileen Klineman, "Town Rallies behind Search for Young Girl," *The Press Democrat*, October 6, 1993.
[18] Klineman, "Town rallies."
[19] Lewis, "Mom begs."
[20] NBC Nightly News, October 21, 1993 item, #347513, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee. In addition to quotes I have taken from specific sources in this section, I am also drawing much of this information from visual evidence of the investigation, search, and funeral documented by the *San Francisco Examiner*. See Fang Family, "San Francisco Examiner Photograph Archive Photographic Print Files," Bancroft Library.

Throughout October and November, the Center became "a community grieving center as much as an action center" according to a city councilman, as adults and teenagers alike used it as a space to comfort one another, make space for their pain, and watch news about Polly together. One reporter described the Center as an "emotion-laden" room full of "tears in the eyes" and "a lot of hugging."[21] As one volunteer explained, "The more I come here, the less I grieve."[22]

It was in this close-knit environment that actress Winona Ryder of *Edward Scissorhands* fame returned to her hometown to give a national press conference at the Center in mid-October, where she pledged a $200,000 reward for information that would lead to Polly's return and raise the case to an even higher profile. Interested residents (as well as spectators from across the country) could follow Ryder's lead by donating to the various funds housed at the Search Center and at the local bank.[23] Diane Feinstein, whom readers will remember from the Night Stalker press conference in Chapter 4, would later remark that this "uncommon solidarity" between the people of Petaluma could be attributed to something she called "Polly Power," and that it should serve as a model for other communities across the United States.[24] Many of Polly's classmates chose to continue volunteering at the Center to help manage their anxieties about their friend's absence, finding solace in this community space borne of their grief.[25]

While the flier *did* inspire thousands of tips and reported sightings throughout the next seven weeks, ultimately its distribution did more to cement the case in national memory – and to provide a visual and material archive for historians – than it did to find Polly. With more than 8 million paper copies distributed, it became a "constant and terrifying" reminder throughout the fall, as a TIME article

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[21] Eileen Klineman, "Town Rallies."

[22] Jill Smolowe, "A High-Tech Dragnet," *TIME* magazine, November 1, 1993.

[23] "Do You Feel Safe in Petaluma?" *Petaluma Argus-Courier* weekend edition, October 8, 1993. BioBottoms, the company Eve worked for, immediately donated $5,000 and challenged other local retailers to match it.

[24] "Memorial for Polly Klaas," December 9, 1993, VHS tape. Lynn Woolsey Congressional papers, Sonoma State University Special Collections. I would like to thank the archivists who digitized this for me – I mention them in further detail in the works cited section.

[25] Dianne Reber, "Coping with Fears and Anxieties," and "Do You Feel Safe in Petaluma?" *Petaluma Argus-Courtier* weekend edition.

read in November, that while "Polly has turned up in millions of houses, courtesy of the computer, [...] she's still not home."[26]

The Last Thing He'll See is My Eyes, I Hope

On December 4, Annette Schott celebrated her thirteenth birthday and Richard Allen Davis led investigators to Polly's remains in a field off Highway 101. The Search Center became a memorial overnight, as volunteers and community members revived the candlelight vigils they had held in early October and bathed the street with a warm, soft, sad glow. They handed out the little purple ribbons (Polly's favorite color) that have now come to represent the child safety cause, holding one another close and weeping. A week later, thousands gathered for Polly's nationally televised funeral, watching from portable televisions in the parking lot, or from the couch at home with their children.

Family friends, law enforcement, and elected officials alike used their allotted speaking time at the memorial service to encourage the community of Petaluma and the nation at large to remember Polly by going on the offensive to prevent future abductions like hers, urging that she not "die in vain."[27] California Governor Pete Wilson, a tough-on-crime Republican, asked Americans "to ensure that career criminals become career inmates so that the tragedy that brings us together here today is not suffered by other families." Speakers included Feinstein, who also read a note from the president, and Joan Baez, along with Detective Mike Meiss, who had arrested Davis and composed a poem in Polly's honor.

After such a vulnerable public display, Polly's immediate family chose to say goodbye to her in a separate ceremony, privately scattering her ashes in Carmel Bay, where she loved to play at the beach. "We wanted to put her body to rest in loving hands," her aunt Elizabeth explained. "She had been

[26] Smolowe, "A High-Tech Dragnet"; Ruha, "The Shiny, High-Tech Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *LEVEL* (blog), October 23, 2020.

[27] Governor Pete Wilson, Senator Diane Feinstein, and President Bill Clinton (via letter) all used this phrase at the memorial service.

touched with so many other hands."[28] For her part, Annette Schott decided to permanently change her birthday to match her dog's, knowing that she wouldn't want to celebrate aging on an anniversary that reminded her so much of a friend who would never get to age.[29]

Before long, in national news coverage, a narrative began to develop not only about Polly's abduction but about where it had occurred. Located about 30 miles north of San Francisco in Sonoma County, Petaluma is a farming community known for its well-preserved Victorian homes, being one of only a few Bay Area towns to have survived the 1906 earthquake. In previous chapters we discussed how a suburban landscape particular to Los Angeles shaped responses to serial murder cases during the '70s and '80s. Petaluma's "suburbs" were quieter, but this small town *was* like Los Angeles in one crucial way: it already looked familiar to a national audience, as Ronald Reagan's campaign team had chosen to film its infamous "morning again in America" advertisement there during the 1984 election. The ad showcased white Americans working and enjoying their families in churches and on the lawns of stately Petaluma homes while a voiceover stressed the possibility of upward mobility through home ownership, linking it to strong family values. Reagan, a candidate who relied on nostalgic symbolism to invoke a mythic small-town American past in danger of disappearing, had found a strategic choice in Petaluma. The director of the ad later explained that the 24-hour news cycle had "begun to have an impact on the American psyche" by the mid-1980s and the team wanted the short film to harness the "optimism that was still in most people, but they were starting to lose a grip on it."[30]

Petaluma was the perfect staging ground for this national fantasy with its picturesque homes, lush green fields, and winding river. The town had also been a filming location for several high-profile movies, including the nostalgia-fueled *American Graffiti* (1973), and Mayor Patty Hilligoss embraced this quaint reputation well into the '90s, calling her home "a small town – not in numbers, but in feelings."[31] By the time of the kidnapping, images of the rolling hills and wide streets of Petaluma were thus already

[28] Elizabeth Gleick, "An Angel Named Polly."
[29] Gleick, "An Angel Named Polly"; Gleick, "'America's Child'"; Gleick, "Taken in the Night."
[30] Retro Report, "Morning in America: Political Ads that Changed the Game," Season 1, Episode 3, YouTube, last accessed October 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGDGk0sNhFU
[31] "Community rallies together."

steeped in this sanguine political advertisement for the single-family home; a home that had now been violated by Polly's murderous intruder. Because of this visual history, and because Polly's community rallied so heroically in the days following her disappearance, the town of Petaluma became an unsuspecting character in the national story of her abduction. Polly had not only been "America's child," as her father once called her, but she had been kidnapped from her own bedroom in America's hometown.

Petaluma's reputation, and the actions and words of its residents and police officers, all contributed to a sense of the entire community having been victimized by Polly's abductor. Reports frequently described Petaluma as "safe," especially as a supposed refuge from California's cities, and the failure of policing to address violence there in the past seemed to confirm that crime had not been a problem there before 1993. The idea that crime was a *new* issue in Petaluma resonated with viewers elsewhere, as one national news segment declared it was just "a small town coming to grips with the idea that the problems of the world have come to the front door."[32] The mayor announced similarly that "the bad people have discovered us. They've seemed to skip by us before."[33]

This yearning for a nonexistent crime-free past, in which no one could penetrate the safe small town, was rooted in cultural myths about the suburb and in what George Lipsitz has called a "possessive investment in whiteness."[34] But it was also a trauma response, as we learned in the last chapter. Those who experience a lifechanging event like the Klaas abduction become hypervigilant afterward, fondly remembering a very real past in which they were a different person – one who was perhaps not safer, but less afraid.[35]

Importantly, the President of the PTSA described her experience of Polly's abduction as "a sense of rape," declaring that "the whole community has been raped."[36] This will remind us of the language

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[32] CBS Evening News, October 21, 1993, "Petaluma, California/Klaas Kidnapping," item #437513, Vanderbilt TV News Archive.

[33] "Community rallies together."

[34] George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White Problem,'" *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 369–85.

[35] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*.

[36] Reber, "Coping with fears and anxieties."

homeowners used during the Night Stalker murders in Chapter 4. Carrie Rentschler has argued that by the '90s, victims' rights advocates had developed a grammar centering the "secondary victim," a concept that finds genealogical roots in the feminist concept of the "second rape."[37] By this logic of secondary victimization, Polly's family, friends, and neighbors *all became victims of violent crime*, a characterization that many locals understood, though they more often used the language of "survival." The second rape also refers to the re-traumatization process associated with repeated witness testimony under scrutiny, of which there was plenty in the wake of Polly's disappearance even for those who would never have to testify in court. Just as activists in Chapters 2 and 4 understood rape to be a crime on behalf of all women, Marc's framing of Polly as "America's child" made her murder seem like a crime against the entire nation's children, harming those she had never even met, who agonized over miniscule and arbitrary events or actions that had intervened to separate their present from a better time – a time in the past when Polly was alive and they didn't even know her name.

"What makes Polly's story even more wrenching," read the cover story in December's *People Magazine*, "is the fact that she might have been saved."[38] With just 45 full-time officers, the Petaluma police had struggled to manage the search for Polly alongside other routine calls. Some Petalumans even resorted to calling the police chief personally at home to report potential leads as they saw them, a detail that contributed to a popular narrative about the PPD as a Podunk organization. They welcomed the help and resources of the FBI, but Police Chief Dennis DeWitt and his officers suggested that the case would "probably" be solved by the public, an attitude that went a long way to absolve them of resolving the case themselves (they also, however, stoked fears of a "crime wave" because of this labor shortage).[39] As time passed and the details came into view, it turned out that what had originally been small individual mistakes (an unlocked door) were much less to blame for Polly's death than largescale system failures. In the months that followed, Marc Klaas fomented widespread support for game-changing

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[37] Carrie A. Rentschler, *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011).

[38] Gleick, "An Angel Named Polly."

[39] "Greg Cahill, "Collins Hopeful About Polly," *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, midweek edition, October 5 ,1993.

legislation against the habitual offender, whose very definition, like that of the serial killer, denoted an immense potential for *future* violence because of a demonstrated record of past crimes.

The *People* feature explained how the abduction and investigation had played out in more detail, including the fact that two officers had encountered Polly's abductor that very same night in nearby Santa Rosa. Dana Jaffee's babysitter had noticed a strange car at the end of the driveway on her way out that night and reported it. Two officers from the Santa Rosa Police Department arrived shortly to find a bearded man in a black t-shirt drinking beer against the hood of his car, rear tires caught in the mud. Despite an all-points bulletin (what readers might now recognize as an "APB") that had gone out hours earlier, the officers did not know to look for a man by his description, as they were entirely unaware of a kidnapping. The APB had only reached one radio frequency, and they had been tuned to another. After running his driver's license and administering a sobriety test, they found no reason to detain him other than trespassing, but Jaffee declined to press charges and the officers simply towed him out. Even though local and federal agents had responded with freakish efficiency to preserve the scene, they had produced no more than a palm print and some fibers, both of which needed a pre-existing match to lead investigators anywhere. It would take another six weeks for corroborating physical evidence to show up – once again at the hands of Dana Jaffee, who found items on her property that she thought might belong to Polly.[40]

We will most likely never know what happened to Polly between the time she was abducted and the time she was found but CBS anchor Connie Chung relayed "unconfirmed reports" that "the girl was alive when police first questioned Davis on an unrelated matter and then let him go an hour after the kidnapping."[41] This story became a central pillar in the murder narrative that developed in the following weeks, and which Marc and others worked to make actionable at the local, state, and federal levels. They imagined that Polly had been alive in the trunk or the bushes, leaving the state responsible for her death

[40] "Polly Klaas: Kidnapped," *The FBI Files*; Marc Klaas, "The Klaas Act | Recover the Missing, Stop the Trafficking, and Punish the Perps!" accessed October 6, 2022, https://www.klaaskids.org/blog/.

[41] Gleick, "America's Child;" Barry Bortnick, *Polly Klaas: The Murder of America's Child* (Pinnacle, 1996).

through negligence.[42] Davis, who had been out on parole for an 8-year kidnapping sentence, received a pass from his parole officer to travel to visit his mother when he took a detour to abduct Polly. *TIME* magazine described him as the "poster boy for evil;"[43] *People* as "the kind of repeat offender" who has "slipped through the cracks in the criminal-justice system."[44] His rap sheet was long: burglary; assault with a deadly weapon; and several prior counts of kidnapping, and Marc and others argued he should never have been on the streets to begin with.

Most reports described Davis as a textbook "sexual psychopath" – despite no evidence of sex crimes in his past or in Polly's abduction – as popular knowledge about serial killers had begun to bleed into crime reporting and public opinion. California's Proposition 184, commonly known as the "three-strikes law" was supposed to address an individual like Davis, who commits multiple crimes. It was not technically the first but became a model for mandatory sentencing laws in more than 20 other states after it passed in 1994 and has since been cited by historians of the carceral state as a key architect of mass incarceration in the United States.[45] The compulsory law required mandatory minimum sentences for "serious" offenders, sentence enhancement for multiple convictions, and automatically delivered a 25-to-life sentence for a third-time offender. The campaign toward Prop 184 was long and contentious in California, as folks opposed it on a number of grounds, the most common being that it was unconstitutional (allowing some juvenile offenses to count as "strikes" though they were not considered crimes, for example) and that it was financially irresponsible by funneling billions into prison

[42] CBS Evening News, December 6, 1993, "Petaluma, California" item #348811, Vanderbilt Television News Archive.
[43] Elaine Lafferty, "Final Outrage" *TIME* magazine, October 7, 1996.
[44] Gleick, "America's Child"
[45] According to Elizabeth Hinton, the 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act resulted in an average prison sentence increase of 33% between 1980 and 1986, in large part due to the Armed Career Criminal Act, which required a mandatory minimum of five years for use of a firearm to commit a violent crime and 15-to-life for the third offense. Before this, she points out that the 1970 DC Court Reorganization Act "introduced an entirely new plane of punitive policy" through a five-year mandatory minimum for a second armed offense. See, Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 156; 312. A version of the "three-strikes law" first passed in 1993 in Washington; for more on its see – Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Michelle Alexander and Cornel West, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Tenth anniversary edition (New York: The New Press, 2020).

construction and draining the state of money better used toward education, transportation, and crime prevention.[46]

But it was always harder to argue against the three-strikes approach in the face of individual stories about repeat offenders, and white crime victims like Mike Reynolds, father of murdered Fresno teenager Kimber Reynolds, had been working with lawmakers for several years to link stories like Kimber's to the supposed logic of three strikes.[47] It was common for elected officials to work with crime victims like Reynolds during the '90s, as many participated in campaign ads and spoke publicly alongside candidates about how violence had changed their lives. A media analyst explained in 1994 that such content was an effective political strategy for tough-on-crime officials because it "reinforces your fear of crime and simultaneously gives you something to do about it." Polly's grandfather, Joe Klaas, participated in at least one campaign ad like this while standing at Polly's grave.[48]

While Marc would later claim that he had "shamelessly exploited the media," he himself felt exploited by champions of three strikes once he learned how it worked.[49] Under the new law, individuals convicted of a violent felony who had two prior convictions would be compulsorily sentenced to life, but these other two convictions did not have to be violent to qualify as a "serious" offense in the state of California. Moreover, offenses like drug possession, property destruction, and burglary could serve as the third "strike."[50] Using boogeymen like Davis to pass Prop 184 was similar, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has noted, to the 1988 Willie Horton ad: "the combination of white female victims and the random viciousness of the crimes threw into stark ideological relief the need, and indeed the ease, by

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[46] Editorials: "Flawed Crime Initiative"; "Prop 184 reaches too far to jail violent criminals," Oct 20, 1994; unsorted press clippings related to "California Crime," Contra Costa County Historical Society, Martinez, California.

[47] Ina Jaffe, "Two Torn Families Show Flip Side Of 3 Strikes Law," *NPR*, October 28, 2009; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

[48] I saw Joe Klaas in an ad on CBS Nightly News, Item #596529, Vanderbilt Television News Archive. See also the Polly Klaas Foundation's newsletter "Klaas Action Review," 1995, Lynn Woolsey Congressional papers, record Group 4, Sonoma State University Special Collections. President Clinton later became a supporter of the Foundation as well as Marc's solo organizing efforts, writing in the Klaas Action Review newsletter that: "The nation owes Marc a great deal for his outspoken efforts to help break six years of Congressional deadlock and bring about passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. He came to Washington on several occasions to push for the bill, and he stood by my side when I signed it into law. More commonly known as the "Crime Act," this legislation is the toughest and smartest anti-crime legislation ever enacted. The Crime Act places 100,000 new community policing officers on our streets, bans deadly assault weapons, and makes 'Three Strike and You're Out' the law of the land."

[49] Meg McConahey, "Captive of Rage," *The Press Democrat*, April 17, 1994.

[50] It is important to point out that burglary is a charge that can only be pursued by someone who already owns property – while property crimes and drug charges can be pursued on behalf of the state.

which society could separate the guilty from the innocent," a false distinction that was readily deployed in the following years to punish and torture violent and nonviolent offenders alike in the state of California.[51]

Marc felt that he had been dishonestly swindled into supporting and boosting a measure that would condemn many Californians to unfair sentences. "They told me it stood for one thing, and it stood for only part of that," he explained angrily in an interview "I would never do to a grieving father what was done to me and my family. They signed me up for a bill when I was at an emotional low point and I didn't have any defenses to speak of."[52] Jacob Wetterling's parents have similarly spoken out about being used for the tragedy of their son's death and exploited to support measures of which they were not entirely aware.[53] Marc soon split with the three-strikes crowd to work with Sheriff Mike Rainey in his home county of Contra Costa – the same that housed the Crime Prevention Committee we met in the last chapter – on an amended version of the law that would be more precise about punishing only violent offenses. It is important to note that Marc's issues with the law lay in its application, not its spirit, as he continued to testify on behalf of truth-in-sentencing legislation.

Though he kept his promise to stand next to President Clinton in the Rose Garden during the signing of the '94 Omnibus Crime Bill, the entire ordeal left him feeling empty. That night, he told his mother that he felt lower than he had since the funeral. "All this good stuff happened, but at the end there's no Polly. I can't see myself telling people how to get to 17 Mile Drive anymore. I've got to help kids."[54] Within a few months, Marc had quit his day job and become a nationally known figure in the movement for victims' rights because of his visibility in the press and his work with the Clinton administration.[55] Known as a bit of an energizer bunny, Marc worked hard but not necessarily well with others, as he disagreed loudly and often with organizers and cultivated a mercurial reputation. Over the

[51] Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 264.

[52] Whitmore, "Interview With Marc Klaas, Founder KlaasKids;" McConahey, "Captive of Rage," I also saw Marc talk about this on several national news segments.

[53] See APM Reports and Madeleine Barran, *In the Dark Podcast* "Season 1: Jacob Wetterling," 2016.

[54] McConahey, "Captive of Rage."

[55] Turn on the television or open a newspaper and there is [Marc] Klaas." McConahey, "Captive of rage."

next several years, he founded or joined and then left quite a few organizations, usually citing disagreements over urgency and time. He had received no media training and was known to lash out at reporters in interviews and press conferences, but spectators also trusted his frank, emotional style, making him an excellent spokesperson. Joanne Gardner explained that "his passion is both a strength and a liability" and described how he would become engulfed in, even obsessed with, his cause[56].

At times, Marc developed a hyper- focused, almost myopic agenda that had to do with preventing the very specific and unlikely events that had led to Polly's murder. After Davis' trial, for example, Marc vowed to be present at his execution: "The last thing Polly saw before she died was Richard Allen Davis' eyes. The last thing Richard Allen Davis will see is my eyes, I hope."[57] He would later push for federal legislation to make stranger abduction – not murder-abduction; just abduction – a capital offense and thus eligible for punishment by death penalty.[58]

But organizing was a productive and welcome distraction from grief that gave him a new sense of purpose, as losing Polly had hurt Marc severely, both mentally and physically. During the investigation, he lost more than 30 pounds and started chain-smoking. Leads that had failed to pan out had taken a toll on his nervous system. He continued to suffer from vivid nightmares that kept him from sleep; disturbing sequences in which Polly was "wrapped in a blanket" or "on the other side of the window," and he couldn't get to her no matter how hard he tried. Friends and organizing partners worried about his mental stability as he worked tirelessly in the months after her death, but he described being "afraid" to take days off: "It would give me too much time to think about Polly."[59] He experienced "extreme bouts of depression when I don't know what I'm doing and I just want to die," which he fought off by channeling all of his energy into work. "If I can get up in the morning and think I'm making a step toward doing something to benefit this cause that I've adopted, that's adopted me, then I can go to bed and sleep," he explained. Then he added: "with pills."[60]

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[56]Quoted in McConahey, "Captive of Rage."
[57] Elaine Lafferty, "Final Outrage"
[58] Jay Gamel, "New foundation a going concern," *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, February 21, 1995.
[59] Gamel, "New foundation a going concern."
[60] McConahey, "Captive of rage."

Marc learned almost immediately that other parents of missing and murdered children had been forced to create institutional support for themselves during the 1980s, a movement sprung less from a wealth of kidnapping cases than from a lack of support for the loved ones of those who had been kidnapped.[61] The morning after Polly disappeared, David Collins, father of 10-year-old Kevin who had been taken from a bus stop in San Francisco in 1984, began advising and consoling Marc, plugging him into an existing network of anti-crime activists. This support had been crucial for his survival during the investigation, as he told reporters that Collins was "the only one here who knows how I feel."[62] Through Collins, he also met John Walsh, who founded the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 1982 and worked closely with the Reagan administration to tie child abduction to urgent family protection issues. It was Walsh who told Marc that "action" was "better than paying a therapist."[63]

While manning the phones for leads on Polly, volunteers at the Search Center had received calls from other parents looking for advice and resources in the search for their own missing children, whom they felt had been neglected by law enforcement.[64] Marc thus followed in the footsteps of Collins and Walsh, forming the Polly Klaas Foundation to provide continued support to these parents. His visibility for the cause in turn made him a resource for others, with whom he spent hours providing advice and caring words on the phone and in person. Said a woman who relied on him after the disappearance of her own child: "He is never far away. He will call you in a moment if you need him for anything."[65] Some of these relationships between aggrieved parents would go on to support legislative efforts like the AMBER Alert. While Elaine Tyler May has discussed the trend of "memorial legislation" in the wake of child

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[61] Daniel LaChance, *Crimesploitation: Crime, Punishment, and Pleasure on Reality Television*, 1st edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022); Daniel LaChance and Paul Kaplan, "The Seductions of Crimesploitation: The Apprehension of Sex Offenders on Primetime Television," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 127–50; Associated Press, "Killer Makes Wild Claim That Klaas' Father Molested Her | The Spokesman-Review," September 27, 1996; Talia Kaplan, "Father of Murder Victim Slams CA Gov. Newsom for Giving Criminals 'Reprieve,'" *Fox News*, September 5, 2021; Klaas and Nichol, "Op-Ed"; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "In the Shadow of the Shadow State," *The Scholar & Feminist Online* 13, no. 2 (2016); Gould, *Moving Politics*; John Walsh and Susan Schindehette, *Tears of Rage: From Grieving Father to Crusader for Justice: The Untold Story of the Adam Walsh Case* (Atria Books, 2009).

[62] Cahill, "Collins hopeful."

[63] McConahey, "Captive of Rage."

[64] In the Foundation's own words: "There were very few resources to help parents of missing children in 1993. Law enforcement had no defined policy of quick response to child abductions, systems for notifying other agencies were not optimal, and the legal system let repeat offenders move back and forth between prison and civil society."

[65] "Polly's dad runs nonstop campaign," Lynn Woolsey Congressional papers.

murders as ineffective in stopping crimes against children, this kind of work clearly served an additional purpose: as a form of grief management for the parents of missing and murdered children, who understood it as an active memorial practice and path to healing.[66]

Obsessed with the failures of the system to recognize Davis as a threat before he took Polly, Marc also supported the FBI's mission to centralize state data. He boosted the Bureau's reputation by advertising and fundraising for California's Violent Crime Information Center and personally consulted with the director of the FBI about creating a unit "to study kidnappers in the same way it studies serial killers," which came to fruition in 1995 as "CASKU," or the Child Abduction Serial Killer Unit, formalizing the institutional link between the cultural categories of "serial killer" and "child abductor" once and for all.[67]

As historian Margaret O'Mara has argued, many of nearby Silicon Valley's founding tech entrepreneurs were progressive hippies with a healthy suspicion of federal surveillance technology, but people like Marc pushed the tech industry toward partnering with law enforcement during the '90s to create stronger communication networks between agencies and to compile shared criminal databases.[68] He lobbied for, and eventually achieved, connecting the national driver's license database to the national criminal database, because he reasoned that the Santa Rosa officers who helped tow Davis' car would have known that he had been out on parole for kidnapping had this existed in 1993.

[66] Elaine Tyler May has called the AMBER Alert legislation "crime control theater, similar to the symbolic value of civil defense drills" that had "negligible effect on child safety." May, *Fortress America*, 150.

[67] This was also an issue of David Collins': "There's not a lot of leadership in the criminal justice system. There are technical advances that would help greatly to find and identify predators, but we can't get funding for them." John Koopman, "Vicious killings cut dep into urban life throughout Bay Area" December 29, 1993, unsorted clippings related to "Crime Contra Costa County 1992 thru 1993." Contra Costa County Historical Society.

[68] Margaret O'Mara, *The Code: Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019).

Crimesploitation

In 1998, the FBI used Polly's story to premiere *The FBI Files* on the Discovery Channel. By focusing on the Bureau's forensic expertise and use of brand-new technology to identify Richard Allen Davis in court, the show's premiere episode largely erased the volunteer work done by the residents of Petaluma. The producers' reliance on police officers as the only source of information also produced a neat and tidy emphasis on the "unique partnership that was formed between local police and the FBI," a "precedent that continues to this day." Such framing did a lot to uphold the primacy of the FBI as a law enforcement agency and to create an illusion of objectivity, but it also suggested that small, local police departments like Petaluma's would – and should – be able to solve more crimes and save more lives if they had access to the best technologies.[69] A true crime imperative to "learn from" cases like Polly's since then has upheld the logic of police reform: that failures should result in *more* resources to prevent future failures.[70] The *FBI Files* taught spectators the importance of individual hypervigilance and police funding rather than the life-sustaining community work that had kept Kate, Gillian, Marc, Eve, and Annie going when nothing seemed to make sense.[71]

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[69] "Polly Klaas: Kidnapped" *The FBI Files*, 1998.

[70] For a roundup on reform, see Charlotte Rosen, "Abolition or Bust: Liberal Police Reform as an Engine of Carceral Violence," *Radical History Review*, June 25, 2020.

[71] For more on the violence of surveillance, see the following works: Chris Gilliard, "A Detroit Community College Professor Is Fighting Silicon Valley's Surveillance Machine. People Are Listening.," *Washington Post*, September 17, 2021; Sarah Brayne, "Dye in the Cracks: The Limits of Legal Frameworks Governing Police Use of Big Data," *Saint Louis University Law Journal* 65, no. 4 (2021): 823–36; James Kilgore, "Would You Like an Ankle Bracelet With That?: Winners and Losers in Electronic Monitoring," *Dissent* 59, no. 1 (2012): 66–71; Brian Dolinar, "Follow the Money: Invisible Investors Seek Big Bucks in Mass Incarceration," *Truthout*, April 8, 2015; Matthew Guariglia, "Surveying the Suburbs: How Amazon Ring and a Racialized Fear of Crime Is Ushering in a New Period of Mass Surveillance," *The Abusable Past*, March 16, 2020; James Kilgore, "The Terrifying World of Electronic Monitoring," *CounterPunch*, August 23, 2013; Simone Browne, *Dark Matters on the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Matthew Guariglia, "Too Much Surveillance Makes Us Less Free. It Also Makes Us Less Safe.," *Washington Post*, July 18, 2017; Sarah T. Hamid, "Community Defense: Sarah T. Hamid on Abolishing Carceral Technologies," *Logic*, August 31, 2020; Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019); Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg, *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform* (Oakland,California: University of California Press, 2021); Alondra Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016); Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001); Deborah E. McDowell, Claudrena N. Harold, and Juan Battle, eds., *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

It was stories like Polly's that lent themselves so perfectly to narrativization through *America's Most Wanted* and the crime shows that followed; *60 Minutes*; *Dateline*; *Law & Order*. Though John Walsh insisted that victims' rights was an apolitical cause and that he "never played partisan politics," we have seen how even the most progressive of anti-crime policies shored up the power of both the American right and the carceral state throughout this period, with Walsh using his show to encourage interpersonal surveillance, deputization, and cooperation with police. His orientation toward policing can be summed up in the first sentence of a chapter in his own memoir: "The cops meant well."[72] Having worked closely with officers during his son's investigation, Walsh and his fellows believed strongly in the power of the American criminal-legal system – and particularly in the power of local and federal policing – to put a stop to crime as long as they had access to more information and more resources. As host of *America's Most Wanted*, which began filming in 1988, he served as a liason between the show's producers and the FBI, stating firmly to the cameras at the start of each episode: "I became a victim of crime when my young son, Adam, was kidnapped and murdered. I decided not to be victimized by fear or revenge. But each of us can help and must help stop crime… I'm John Walsh. Remember – you can make a difference."[73]

While elected officials had been quick to use her story to support punitive quick-fix legislation, the measures enacted in Polly's name not only incarcerated many and disappointed her immediate family members. They also did very little to help save abducted children. In fact, just four years after Polly's death, a Black 12-year-old girl named Georgia Moses was kidnapped and murdered, her nude body found several days later near the same highway as Polly's had been. When investigators had found Polly, camera crews filmed from a helicopter as investigators worked on the scene. Under a large white tent, there was nothing to see from the sky – but that didn't stop them from filming.[74]

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[72] Walsh and Schindehette, *Tears of Rage*, 84.
[73] Walsh, and Schindehette, *Tears of Rage*, 193.
[74] LaChance, *Crimesploitation*; Bortnick, *Polly Klaas*.

A few hundred locals attended Georgia's funeral but there had been no coordinated effort to find her because none of the efforts instituted in Polly's memory addressed the root causes of the crime. At age 12, Georgia was the primary caretaker for her mentally ill mother and 7-year-old sister, neither of whom had known to report her missing. Polly's parents, on the contrary, as well as many of her neighbors, had been financially stable enough to stop working during the investigation, a key factor in bringing visibility to her case. Georgia's funeral leaflet read that her "needs, and the needs of her family" had gone "unrecognized and unmet by the world around her," and her murder remains unsolved.[75] Had I not spoken with an archivist about my work, I might never even have learned about Georgia.

Rather than push for legislation in her name, one of Georgia's neighbors, Jeannie Kelly, carried on her legacy by founding a support program called "A Time to Smile," designed to help adolescent girls develop a strong sense of self-worth, institute habits and practices of self-care, and learn "responsibility and accountability for the effects of behavior on the larger community." By providing emotional support and teaching them basic life skills, Jeannie hoped to "help prevent the at-risk behaviors that can result in addictions, abuse, rape and violent death" and to "expand their vision and extend their reach beyond the internalized limits imposed by poverty, family dysfunction, racism and sexism."[76] Georgia's friends and family also erected a memorial near the spot where she was found but it only lasted a few years, while a memorial to Polly still stands today in Petaluma.[77]

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[75] "Memorial pamphlet," assorted materials related to Georgia Moses and Polly Klaas, courtesy of David Walls. Sonoma State University Special Collections.

[76] "A Time to Smile pamphlet," courtesy of David Walls.

[77] For more on race, criminalization, and childhood, see: Irin Carmon, "Dorothy Roberts Tried to Warn Us," *Intelligencer*, September 6, 2022; Dorothy E. Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/4586861; Madison Feller, "Their Sister's Murder Was Used to Justify Tough On Crime Laws. Now They Want to Build Her a Different Legacy," *ELLE*, February 25, 2022; Tera Eva Agyepong, *The Criminalization of Black Children Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago's Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Caroline B. Cooney, *The Face on the Milk Carton* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990); Eve L. Ewing, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side* (University of Chicago Press, 2020); Jennifer L. Holland, *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement*, 2020; Anthony J. Nocella II, ed., *From Education to Incarceration* (Peter Lang US, 2014); Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Staff, "Bereaved Parents Are Leaders In Spread Of Restorative Justice Practices," *WFSU News*, January 14, 2019; Nick Estes, "Portraying the MAGA Teens as Victims Is an Extension of Native American Erasure," *The Intercept*, January 24, 2019; Claudia Garcia-Rojas and Charlotte Rosen, "Get Police Out of Schools -- Including University Campuses," *Truthout*, June 24, 2020; Nikole Hannah-Jones, "It Was Never About Busing," *The New York Times*, July 12, 2019; Kiese Laymon, "Losing My Son to Police Violence: A Conversation with Gwendolyn Woods," *LEVEL* (blog), October 6, 2020; Mallika Rao, "Three Bodies in Texas," *Believer Magazine*, March 7, 2022; William Doyle, *An American Insurrection: James Meredith and the Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962* (New York: Anchor, 2003); Ruby

Thirty or so minutes down the road from Polly's house sits San Quentin State Prison, the only institution in the state of California to carry out capital punishment.[78] Richard Allen Davis is far from its most infamous inmate, having also housed Manson, Angelo Buono (of the Hillside Stranglers), David Carpenter (the Trailside Killer), Richard Ramirez (the Night Stalker), and many others. Activists, human rights lawyers, and the wrongfully convicted have pushed for the abolition of the death penalty in California for decades but San Quentin's residents still haunt many from behind bars, which we will learn more about in the next chapter.[79]

With politicians entering the full swing of the get-tough era, more Americans found themselves conscripted into projects of surveillance, policing, and judgement than ever before, and discomfort with the punitive turn began to boil to the surface. New spectacles of police brutality in cities once again created a moment of opportunity for both opponents of and investors in policing during the '90s.[80] As inequality grew rapidly, private industry gutted public services and infrastructure and people became increasingly alienated from their elected officials, finding familiar faces like Walsh to be more trustworthy political actors than politicians. Reporters like Geraldo Rivera and Oprah Winfrey expanded the modern talk show, joining a new trend in the nascent reality television genre that intentionally platformed interpersonal drama. Building on the audience interaction of predecessors like Phil Donahue, hosts like Jerry Springer and Maury Povich became masters at provoking conflict while allowing the guests themselves to provide their own material. These shows soared to new heights of

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Hamad, *White Tears Brown Scars* (Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2019); Carl Suddler, *Presumed Criminal: Black Youth and the Justice System in Postwar New York*, (New York: NYU Press, 2019); Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

[78] Joe Domanick, "They Changed Their Minds on Three Strikes. Can They Change the Voters'?," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2004; Andrew Kaczynski, "Biden in 1993 Speech Pushing Crime Bill Warned of 'predators on Our Streets' Who Were 'beyond the Pale,'" *CNN*, March 7, 2019; Daniel LaChance, *Executing Freedom: The Cultural Life of Capital Punishment in the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Dean E. Murphy, "California Rethinking '3-Strikes' Sentencing," *The New York Times*, October 24, 2004; Joe Domanick, *Cruel Justice: Three Strikes and the Politics of Crime in America's Golden State* (University of California Press, 2005); Erwin Chemerinsky, "3 Strikes: Cruel, Unusual and Unfair," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2003..

[79] LaChance, *Executing Freedom*.

[80] Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021); Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action* (New York City, NY: Bold Type Books, 2020); Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

exploitation as they exposed previously anonymous people to studio audience feedback, broadcasting their most embarrassing moments to strangers everywhere.[81] These shows began to change the concept of modern celebrity, as one could now become famous for things they did while under media exposure, rather than having already done something to earn media attention.[82] They also expanded the dehumanization of celebrity by making participants recognizable in public, and thus vulnerable to an onslaught of criticism as well as reminders of a traumatic event that could trigger them without warning.[83]

Zoey Tur shaped the visual culture of the '90s more than she ever could have imagined – and she still struggles with the weight of responsibility that spectacle violence thrusts onto its witnesses.[84] Tur and then-wife Marika Gerrard started the Los Angeles News Service, where they captured some of the most iconic moments in Los Angeles history from an AStar helicopter. These machines were lighter and more versatile than the Vietnam War era copters that had taken images of Kimberly Diane Martin in Chapter 2, allowing Tur and her contemporaries to access the city from the only place where they could see past the barriers that celebrities and the wealthy had erected to keep audiences out: the sky.[85]

Still able to see and follow the highway (as they were supposed to according to air traffic law, but sometimes did not), Tur and Gerrard could find active scenes and film before anyone else, sometimes

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[81] Michael Barkun, *Chasing Phantoms: Reality, Imagination, & Homeland Security Since 9/11*, New edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Mark Fishman, *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs*, Social Problems and Social Issues; Variation: Social Problems and Social Issues. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1998); Vanessa Díaz, *Manufacturing Celebrity: Latino Paparazzi and Women Reporters in Hollywood* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2020); Sarah Marshall, "You're Wrong About: Tom Cruise on Oprah's Couch with Willa Paskin."

[82] David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*, New Ed edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Magdalena Riedl et al., "The Rise of Political Influencers—Perspectives on a Trend Towards Meaningful Content," *Frontiers in Communication* 6 (2021); Christopher J. Wright, *Tribal Warfare: Survivor and the Political Unconscious of Reality Television* (Lexington, 2006)..

[83] Kim Goldman and Tatsha Robertson, *Media Circus: A Look at Private Tragedy in the Public Eye* (BenBella Books, 2015).

[84] Details about Zoey Tur and her family have been taken primarily from Matt Yoka, *Whirlybird*, Documentary (Different by Design, Fishbowl Films, Steady Orbits, 2021).

[85] Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units," *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; P. B. Kraska, "Militarization and Policing--Its Relevance to 21st Century Police," *Policing* 1, no. 4 (November 7, 2007): 501–13; Stuart Schrader, "More than Cosmetic Changes: The Challenges of Experiments with Police Demilitarization in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 5 (September 1, 2020): 1002–25; Stuart Schrader, "When Police Play Soldier, Everybody Loses," *LEVEL* (blog), October 7, 2020; Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, Reprint edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

even participating in rescue efforts before police or paramedics arrived.[86] On occasion, they filmed live deaths – most often police shootings at the end of a high-speed car chase – though it was not their intention. Rather, they wanted to draw attention to the reality of violence in their home city – and they also had to pay the bills. The entire family did work for the Los Angeles News Service, including young daughter Katy, who later became a journalist herself.[87] As Tur remembered in a recent documentary, she and her family became "slaves to breaking news" seeking the most outrageous stories they could at all hours of the day and night.[88] Marika cannot remember a time when the police scanner in their home or car was switched to off.

When the LAPD officers who beat Black resident Rodney King within an inch of his life were acquitted in April of 1992 and South Central erupted in flames, it was the Los Angeles News Service that broadcast a live feed of four men pulling Reginald Denny out of his truck and beating him with fists and bricks.[89] Like King, Denny sustained life-altering injuries and images of the most traumatic moments of both their lives circulated freely. The excruciating footage, which you can find online, goes on for minutes while Zoey and Marika react; you can even hear producers tell them to return to the scene and keep filming because of "the viewers." Tur now recognizes that the testimony she later gave in the spectacular trial against the "L.A. Four" was anything but neutral (Police Chief Daryl Gates had called them "no good miserable sons of bitches that are plaguing the city") but, at the time, she was testifying about a traumatic event in her own life: watching a man nearly die but believing that the best thing she could do was create witnesses and get paid. As she understands it, it was no longer possible to cover what came to be known as "breaking news" without participating in the creation of new violent

[86] Sarah A. Seo, *Policing the Open Road: How Cars Transformed American Freedom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019); Charles R. Epp, Steven Maynard-Moody, and Donald P. Haider-Markel, *Pulled over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship*, The Chicago Series in Law and Society (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[87] You might recognize Katy as Katy Tur of MSNBC. In this documentary, she describes the feeling of heat on her bare shins as the helicopter soared over an especially troubling wildfire while she was just a kid..

[88] *Whirlybird*.

[89] Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Hinton, *America on Fire*; Davis, *City of Quartz*.

spectacles: "I started feeling like a racist," she admitted in a recent documentary.[90] But Tur was not seeing violence that had not existed before, she was simply seeing it from new heights.

The LA News Service hit their biggest break yet in 1994 as the first news copter to locate the white Chevrolet Bronco of superstar athlete and celebrity OJ Simpson, who was wanted for murdering his wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, Ron Goldman. Now, after telling his lawyer he planned to turn himself in, he threatened to shoot himself on live television from the backseat.[91] Gerrard remembered the familiar dissociation of filming an active story: "At this point, we're not really thinking of OJ as a person," she explained. "We're thinking of him as an element in the story." They followed the Bronco while millions of viewers gathered along the highways and overpasses and tuned in through live television, unsure of what they might see. Whenever I watch this footage, I am struck by the role of the spectacle itself in escalating the situation to potential violence. In the end, however, Simpson returned to his home, where Tur and Gerrard filmed his arrest. The Bronco made its way to the same place as Ted Bundy's car, Gacy's clown suit, and countless other objects, as we will see in the conclusion.

At age 35, Zoey Tur had a heart attack. Later, she realized that her nonstop pursuit of spectacles of violence kept her from getting to know herself as a trans woman, and from recognizing her own patterns of abusive behavior. As she now describes it, an abusive relationship with her father had combined with the pressures of gender conformity to produce a deeply insecure and unhappy person (formerly known as Bob Tur) and she lashed out in episodes of violence against her wife, often while filming news stories from the AStar.[92] While both Tur and Gerrard participated in a documentary film about their work in 2019, they no longer keep in close contact, and it is clear even from watching these interviews that hurt still remains between them. Their footage changed Los Angeles history, but it also

[90] *Whirlybird*.

[91] A friend was driving – I do not mean to suggest that he was driving from the backseat.

[92] This means that much of the footage of Zoey Tur abusing Marika Gerrard still exists within the Los Angeles News Service archive, which Marika runs.

changed the trajectory of their lives, as they and their children found it difficult to reconcile their traumatized selves with the parts of them that longed for family, care, and connection.[93]

Events like the OJ Simpson trial produced a slew of new celebrities by virtue of their proximity to spectacular murders – Marcia Clark; Johnny Cochran; Barry Scheck; Robert Kardashian and others became reality television stars. Expert witnesses like Henry Lee and Werner Spitz became household names as new programming like HBO's *Autopsy* allowed audiences to look beyond the legalese of the courtroom to narrative content about investigative science, technology, and the body. People who had known the Simpsons, like Kato Kaelin and Faye Reznick, wrote tell-all paperbacks and became Hollywood fixtures (Reznick is now an interior designer to the stars). OJ himself, acquitted after investigative missteps and evidence of racism on the part of the Los Angeles Police Department, wrote a book in which he chronicled how he "would" have committed the murder "had" he done it. In the years since Ann Rule and the BSU, consumers learned to turn embodied, subjective experiences like abuse into evidence to be judged for guilt or innocence. Ron Goldman's sister, Kim, continues to fight this injustice through wrongful death claims and civil suits, but while many assume she is "greedy" or should let her experiences with the Simpson trial go, she is not doing it for the money. She does it to have witnesses to her brother's death and the trauma it caused her family.[94]

In the wake of this influx of perspectives for interpretation by a public audience, writers like Katherine Ramsland (who had started out writing about Ann Rice in the early '90s until she was able to collaborate with John Douglas and others to make the switch to crime science) produced bestselling guidebooks into the "criminal mind," and on how to write about forensic pathology as a true crime

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[93] *Whirlybird*; Katy Tur, *Rough Draft: A Memoir* (Atria/One Signal Publishers, 2022); Know Your Value Staff, "How Katy Tur's Toxic Relationship with Parent Zoey Tur Prepared Her to Take on Trump," *MSNBC.Com*, June 13, 2022; *O.J.: Made in America*, Documentary, (ESPN Films, Laylow Films, 2016); Daniel Lindsay, *LA 92*, Documentary (National Geographic, Lightbox, 2017).

[94] For some examples of this case in other places, see: Marcia Clark, *Without a Doubt* (West 26th Street Press, 2016); Johnnie Cochran and David Fisher, *A Lawyer's Life* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2003); Christopher Darden, *In Contempt* (Graymalkin Media, 2016); Marc Eliot, *Kato Kaelin: The Whole Truth* (Harper Prism, 1995); Mike Gilbert, *How I Helped O.J. Get Away With Murder: The Shocking Inside Story of Violence, Loyalty, Regret, and Remorse* (Regnery Publishing, 2008); Kim Goldman, *His Name Is Ron: Our Search for Justice*, ed. William Hoffer (BenBella Books, 2014); Kim Goldman, *Can't Forgive: My 20-Year Battle with O.J. Simpson* (BenBella Books, 2014); Goldman and Robertson, *Media Circus*; Faye D. Resnick and Mike Walker, *Nicole Brown Simpson: The Private Diary of a Life Interrupted* (Beverly Hills, CA: Dove Books, 1994); Faye D. Resnick, Jeanne V. Bell, and Dominick Dunne, *Shattered: In the Eye of the Storm* (Beverly Hills, CA: Newstar Pr, 1996); O. J. Simpson, *If I Did It: Confessions of the Killer* (Beaufort Books, 2008); Vincent Bugliosi, *Outrage: The Five Reasons Why O. J. Simpson Got Away with Murder* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

author. Infotainment shows like *Medical Detectives* and *Forensic Files*, which argued that scientific evidence reigned supreme in court, even as the narratives in several episodes were later proven to be false, created unrealistic expectations for true crime consumers and jurors alike, who now wondered why real criminal trials did not function like those they saw on screen.

Crime lab after crime lab (including the FBI's) has been exposed for improper handling of evidence and fabrications that led to the conviction of many hundreds of thousands of people.[95] Today, companies like FARO Technology sell 3D crime scene scanners to police departments in order to create "lifelike" (TV-like) representations for juries while celebrity geneticist Dr. CeCe Moore and others use corporate-sponsored true crime gatherings to encourage Americans to sell their genetic information to private companies in the name of solving cold cases.

In the quest for more content to fill networks like *Investigation Discovery* and *Oxygen*, most murder stories over time have lost the glitz and glamour of Sharon Tate and Nicole Brown Simpson, whose Hollywood stardom made them exceptional. The stories that now fill hour after hour of programming primarily feature more representative stories than those that came before; tales of violence borne from poverty and neglect. At "Crime Con," an annual convention hosted by legendary anti-crime pundit Nancy Grace (who landed her big break co-hosting a talk show with Johnnie Cochran on Court TV), women born around the same time as Polly Klaas now flock to panel sessions featuring speakers from their favorite true crime documentaries.

These true crimers have already accepted that spectacle is the only way to get anyone to care about a murder. It has become one of the only avenues to seek accountability for crime victims, who use the convention to hold cold case sessions about the unsolved murders of loved ones.

[95] Maneka Sinha, "The Entrenched Carceralism of Forensics," *Inquest*, July 26, 2021; Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2017); Alyssa Corinne Smith, "Evidence Written in Blood: Forensic Science and the True Crime Consumer," *Nursing Clio*, September 12, 2019.

6. Death Hags

We end in the beginning: at Cielo Drive.

The house where Sharon Tate and her friends were murdered is no longer there, but the lot still boasts the best view I have seen in Los Angeles despite the addition of several neighboring houses that make it impossible to even make a 3-point-turn once the short drive dead-ends at the gates of 10050. I have been there three times, and every time it has felt uncomfortable. It is difficult to describe the area without having been there yourself but the drive in and around Benedict Canyon is strange and beautiful. While the streets wind impossibly high into the hills, they are cramped and intimate, creating a bizarre combined sense of vast open air and claustrophobia. As homes face outward for the view with garages and backdoors just inches from the road, it feels almost like you are intruding on the private space of the residents as you drive. I rarely saw cars pulling in and out of these driveways; others on the road might have been looky-loos like me.

The first time Scott Michaels of *Dearly Departed* tours took me there, I almost vomited. I had felt nauseous throughout his infamous "Helter Skelter" tour, and not just because of my lifelong penchant for motion sickness. I was now also confused, excited, and disgusted by own presence at the site of a crime that had fascinated me for nearly half of my life. I was unable to absorb much of what Scott said there, struggling to keep my composure and taking several days off to process the experience. But later, like a moth to the flame, I went back.

Since 1969, the Cielo Drive house has had almost as interesting a trajectory as the Tate-LaBianca case itself, housing musicians and movie stars like Cary Grant, Henry Fonda, and Candice Bergen. After the murders, Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails briefly lived there, where he recorded an album in the room where Sharon Tate and Jay Sebring had died. One woman even lived in the guest house during the '80s and became obsessed with the crimes, using her connection to the house to access people who otherwise

only traded collectibles like the original LAPD crime scene footage to people they knew well. When it was demolished in 1996, Scott scavenged bricks from the rubble.[1]

The classic trope of buying a new house only to find out it is haunted by something horrible that happened there speaks to our emotional investment in the domestic space, which we imagine holding memories within its walls, or even within the earth after its walls have been razed. I encountered these ghostly locations throughout my research – the Cecil Hotel mentioned in Chapter 4; legendary "murder houses" remodeled on the Roku channel's *Murder House Flip*; tours like Scott's and the Dahmer tours in Milwaukee, which mostly cover locations that no longer exist.[2]

While I had physically felt this many times and sensed it in the energy of those who shared my interest, I first saw the phenomenon put into words by Rachel Monroe in a section on her experiences researching school shootings for her phenomenal book *Savage Appetites*. While I had read about trauma in both academic and true crime literature, I faced the true weight of this research project for the first time: the trauma I had absorbed vicariously through my research subjects was beginning to affect my ability to separate my personal self from my research self. I recognized that consuming the contents of so much true crime had begun to manifest through symptoms that I recognized in them – detachment, withdrawal, substance abuse, and dissociation.

As if on a pilgrimage, I returned compulsively to the same places, the same content. Sometimes, I watched documentaries I had already seen and sobbed; other times I felt numb. It would be absurd to describe this compulsion as the same punitive one shared by carceral agents with a goal of banishing

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[1] Mikal Gilmore, "Rolling Stone Interviews Trent Reznor on David Lynch, The Downward Spiral, Hootie and the Blowfish – Rolling Stone," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, December 25, 2007; Rachel Monroe, *Savage Appetites: Four True Stories of Women, Crime, and Obsession* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2019); Jeffrey Melnick, *Creepy Crawling: Charles Manson and the Many Lives of America's Most Infamous Family* (New York, NY: Arcade, 2018); Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974); *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*, Documentary (Not a Hollywood Sign Production, Tenacity Entertainment, 2009).

[2] Mikel Welch, *Murder House Flip*, Short, Crime (Critical Content, Sony Pictures Television, 2020). In one recent example of this phenomenon, a house renovation show tackles famous crime scenes like the Jodi Arias house, where residents were still using the same sink she had used in the crime – deep cuts from the murder weapon still visible in its bowl. The showrunners' goal was to make the bathroom "feel" different for the home's inhabitants, who described having spent way too much time looking up the crime (this was after moving into the house, as they had not been informed by their realtor). From time to time, the hosts find "organic matter" remaining from a crime scene. Most of these homes happen to be in California, though the Arias house is in Arizona.

perpetrators from public view. In fact, it was quite the opposite. True crimers like me began to seek out information about past killers not only to learn more about them but also to connect with historical actors in the past, who could sometimes remind them more of themselves than the people who surrounded them in the present Tours like Scott's remind us that these people are still here, and getting into our "Manson feelings" every once in a while is not something to be ashamed of.[3]

I now understand Scott and his fellow collectors of murder stories and objects as having participated in a counterculture that, while often blamed for contributing to what historians have deemed the "punitive turn," is better described as a response to it. It acknowledged the hypocrisies of moral panic and recognized agents of a conservative backlash who claimed to care about reducing violent crime but also aired and discussed it constantly on television. As '90s suburban kids began to learn through hip hop and other cultural venues where unedited Black voices made art and music into testimonies about white supremacy, police violence, and poverty, they also saw the footage with their own eyes. After spectacle trials produced even more evidence and testimonials (also often the first public release of police files), as David Schmid has shown, Americans imagined, constructed, and consumed, the figure of the celebrity killer to cope with the violence they had inflicted. While state-sponsored true crime producers found identification with the killer to be a threat, these more transgressive products found it unifying and comforting, as it brought people closer to their own flaws and questions about human nature in the violent world they were trying desperately to survive.[4]

At dedicated institutions that display curated "murderabilia" collections, like *Dearly Departed* and Hollywood's nearby *Museum of Death*, you might find a lock of Charles Manson's hair; original artwork and crafts by Manson, Richard Ramirez, Kenneth Bianchi, and John Wayne Gacy; soil samples from hallowed grounds like the Cielo Drive house, or Nicole Simpson's home in Brentwood; rare crime scene and

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[3] Monroe, *Savage Appetites*; Zoé Samudzi, "Looking After," *Artforum* (blog), July 7, 2021; Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry"; Scott Michaels, *Dearly Departed Artifact Collection*, 2020, 2020, Los Angeles, California, Dearly Departed Museum, https://dearlydepartedtours.com/; Zak Bagans, *Historic, Reputedly-Haunted Landmark Featuring Zak Bagans' Personally Curated Cornucopia of the Macabre*, accessed October 3, 2022, https://thehauntedmuseum.com/; Rick Staton, *Psycho-Americana Collection*, accessed October 6, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/psychoamericana/; *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*; *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*.

[4] Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*.

autopsy photos; and limited edition collectible items like Hart Fisher's *Unauthorized Biography of a Serial Killer* series, Tobias Allen's "Serial Killer Board Game," *Eclipse* True Crime Trading Cards, and serial killer action figures and dolls. When considering the reach of this industry, we can think along the lines of how we might assess distribution networks: a series of concentric circles with collectors and producers at the center; then enthusiasts who do their own research and seek out ways to purchase collectibles; then people who consume collectibles intentionally; and, finally, those who consume them secondhand. (The first time I went to one of the museums, for example, I took my brother.)

Scott, a Detroit native who became obsessed with celebrity death as a teen, moved to Los Angeles in 1994 in part because of his existing fascination with the Manson Family. When he moved, he said, he felt "I was living in the set of this crime soap opera horror film, where it actually took place, and that is one of the many reasons why I love Los Angeles."[5] He began leading celebrity death tours, distinguishing himself within the tourism industry as less of a showman than a persistent researcher with endless knowledge, theories, and anecdotes about tracking down and talking to celebrities about crimes – and, particularly, about Charles Manson.

He started amassing murderabilia and collectibles on the side, learning of most opportunities through word of mouth. Eventually, people he met on tours also started to send him items, so he decided to open a museum and storefront in 2004. This is fulfilling work for Scott, who has become somewhat of a cult expert in the field of both LA tourism and true crime, and his bus tours provide him an opportunity to air new evidence, test ideas, and correct well-established falsities about the case. He presents an array of tidbits, rumors, and conspiracies – some more credible than others – but is intentionally open with audiences about his source material, encouraging visitors to do more research on their own. He also has a documentary available on YouTube called *Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*, a name that encapsulates his approach to the Manson crimes more broadly: that everything in Hollywood is connected to them

[5] Scott Michaels quoted in *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*.

somehow.[6] Since I heard him articulate this framing in person, I have come to recognize that all true crime functions this way; the more you consume, the closer you feel.

When I arrived at *Dearly Departed* in late February of 2020, it was the last day to ever visit Scott's collection, and he was emotional. He planned to continue giving tours (he has since shut down because of loss of revenue during COVID) but he had not been able to keep up with high rent and was closing his storefront. Twelve of us piled into a bulbous-looking tour van with massive windows for the first of three tours that day. All of us were white; one family with a high-school age kid; a couple; two women friends; one older man, by himself, who seemed to remember the crime. A small television at the front allowed Michaels to play clips and show evidence while he drove. We were grateful, to be quite honest, because there isn't that much to see anyway. As Monroe has written, it's a little like "taking a road trip through the parking lots and strip malls of central Los Angeles, accompanied by a group of strangers wearing various skull accessories. Many of the sites aren't visible or no longer exist."[7] Because it's Hollywood, some of the locations do double as other recognizable things, like the apartment building of one of the victim's daughter's, which is also the original apartment from *Melrose Place*. He shows us crime scene photos, warning us every time ("you've probably already seen 'em").

Scott was perhaps most excited to report that he had consulted on Quentin Tarantino's recent film *Once Upon a Time In Hollywood*, sharing bits and pieces of this experience with us by passing around photos of one of the shoots and even pointing out Tarantino's house ("don't ask me how I know!"). It was from Scott that I first learned how important the film industry can be for historic preservation of murder sites, as Tarantino apparently purchased the original movie theater across from El Coyote Mexican Restaurant, where Sharon Tate and her friends ate their last meal, as well as the original storefront of Jay Sebring's hair salon to renovate and use them while filming. After stopping by all the crime scenes, Scott also took us through Laurel Canyon where many of the era's rock stars lived and

[6] Michaels, *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter*; Rachel Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry," *Believer Magazine*, November 20, 2017. Scott has announced that the tours have officially closed as a result of COVID-19, but he is continuing to offer tours through his YouTube channel.

[7] Monroe, "Outside the Manson Pinkberry."

worked, which he assured us lent even more glamour to the panic surrounding the murders in '69. One of his most important arguments is to disavow us of any notion that Manson and his Family were abnormalities or exceptions of the Canyon scene during the late '60s. He suspects, for example, that they spent time at the party house of Mama Cass of The Mamas and the Papas.

Scott's narrative of the Tate-LaBianca case is a very intentional teleology about American history in which "people" "used to know" what "bad guys looked like" and the Manson Family changed that forever, thrusting people across the United States – but particularly celebrities in the Hollywood Hills – into a perpetual state of anxiety about their safety. Though he resists the prosecution's "Helter Skelter" narrative, because he finds it insufficient and has too many theories that seem to disprove it, he still upholds the argument that the Manson crimes "ended" the 60s.

"On Friday night people went to bed thinking they were safe," he explained to us from the driver's seat as soon as we pulled out of the driveway, "now you weren't safe in your bed. Abigail Folger was in bed – an hour later, she was on the lawn." Though he wasn't born until the '70s, Scott told us about the first time he watched *Helter Skelter*, the made-for-TV movie narrated by Vincent Bugliosi, in 1976. "I was afraid Manson was gonna climb up the wall and into my room like some spider person," he said. "And it was freaking scary. I'm telling you; it was."

We have already seen how the uprisings of the '60s and resulting policing crisis of the '70s and '80s enabled state actors – particularly police officers and prosecutors, with help from formal and informal media outlets – to rewrite the history of these criminal investigations for exactly this reason: so that instead of remembering police failures and civil rights violations, people like Scott Michaels, Rachel Monroe, and I can grow up having a "crush" on the '60s. As Monroe explains: "In the apocryphal, utopian 1960s of my imagination, young people had power, and weirdness was socially sanctioned. Even better, people felt as though they were a part of something bigger, something that gave their lives urgency and meaning. Then was different from now in some crucial, ineffable way. Now was disappointing. Then

was better."[8] The historical narrative presented on Scott's tour illustrates how successfully these spectacle murder stories reshaped events after they happened, creating less critical narratives for consumers who did not live through them.

Ultimately, Scott has succeeded at Dearly Departed because he offers people the opportunity to embody and occupy the same spaces as the heroes and villains of true crime stories; to feel the ghosts that still haunt Los Angeles. I left the *Dearly Departed* storefront on its last day on earth with a small piece of the Cielo Drive fireplace (allegedly picked by Scott himself) and a large black sticker with bold white block letters that read ***Death Hag***.[9]

Collectors

Creating, purchasing, selling, and displaying objects associated with spectacle murder comprises the "murderabilia" industry, a term coined by victims' rights advocate Andy Kahan in 1999. Collecting objects as a hobby began to gain popularity in the 19th century, but Wendy Woloson argues that it was not a robust industry until after World War II. She writes that an "encrappification" of American culture, or a turn toward cheaper, less durable goods during this period, freed Americans with disposable income from the burden of ownership and care for their things, allowing consumers to relish in the collection of more. A rising intentional collectibles market allowed collectors to "enjoy the thrill of the hunt, the satisfactions of acquisition and curation, the pride of display, the company and camaraderie of like-minded people and (normally) the economic benefits of investing." Collecting, then, became a way to maintain precious ownership over certain objects and to nurture relationships to the outside world and oneself through a hobby.[10]

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[8] Monroe; Melnick, *Creepy Crawling*; Melnick, Jeffrey Melnick, "'Charlie Says' and the Santa Cruz Prison Project," *Nursing Clio*, July 25, 2019.

[9] The use of "hag" here itself denotes a countercultural identity. See, for example, Victoria Noe, *Fag Hags, Divas and Moms: The Legacy of Straight Women in the AIDS Community* (Chicago, IL: King Company, 2019).

[10] Wendy A. Woloson, *Crap: A History of Cheap Stuff in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022). For more on the intentional collectibles market, see Part 4: "(No) Accounting for Good Taste."

On a murderabilia website, you might find a drawing or handwritten letter from Richard Ramirez or an original Polly Klaas "missing" poster. True crime communities are highly local but the Internet makes anywhere local. Like many in the collectibles market, dealers used a number of strategies, including scarcity, to manufacture their own value. After the horror movie and serial killer craze of the '80s, collectors developed an authentication system – the "TCA," or "True Crime Authenticators," a single service to prevent the sale of fraudulent objects and provide collectors with a seal of authenticity. Authenticators reportedly familiarize themselves with "locations various serial killers carry out or carried out their sentences in so they know what return addresses should be on the envelopes of these letters. They are familiar with the type of paper most used by inmates at those facilities, and specifically what type of paper certain serial killers have used in the past."[11] While the trade was largely done through catalogs and word-of-mouth transactions before the Internet, consumers gained much more access to items in the '90s once dealers could sell them on sites like EBay.

Unlike aesthetic efforts like the "nutshells" of Frances Glessner Lee, "murderabilia" is not about solving crimes, finding clues, or gaining access to new information. Often, items for purchase have nothing to do with crime at all: it is simply by virtue of their proximity to celebrity perpetrators and victims of violence that they become collectibles. Harold Schechter, a longtime collector and artist, described his habit as "a way of managing anxieties" by keeping all of them in one figurative "box."[12] Other collectors share a fascination with death and/or a suspicion of the outside world and other people. Their love of fashioning, purchasing, and displaying objects provides an opportunity to confront and overcome fears.[13] As with all true crime communities, collecting murderabilia introduces likeminded people, who relish in the opportunity to share their knowledge and display their prizes, forming strong friendships often based on shared traumatic experiences. Several collectors have died by suicide over the

[11] "Artem Mortis: Oddities, Curiosities & Murderabilia | Artem Mortis," artemmortis, accessed October 26, 2022, https://www.artemmortis.com.

[12] Harold Schecter interviewed in Julian P. Hobbs, *Collectors*, Documentary (Abject Films LLC, Magnet Media, 2000). I recently encountered a Harold Schecter comic for sale in my neighborhood, so he is still involved in the market as of 2022. See Eric Powell and Harold Schechter, *Did You Hear What Eddie Gein Done*? (Albatross Funnybooks, 2021), which I found in Logan Square, Chicago.

[13] As explained by Rick Staton and Harold Schecter in *Collectors*; See also John Borowski, *Serial Killer Culture*, Documentary (Waterfront Productions, 2014).

last several decades, as Michael Channels explained: "it can be a dark hobby for some, but they came to this hobby with their own set of problems that this hobby didn't create."[14]

Others use it as a way of safely fantasizing about violence. As Schechter put it, owning something about or owned by a serial killer is also "a way of dreaming about what a serial killer does." Collectors know that their hobby raises red flags to people who don't understand it, and they often intentionally avoid press and become alienated from family. Even so, they describe a universal experience of fascination with the items even from those who denounce the habit: "the minute they step into the room, they are glued to everything in here and they are asking questions and they are genuinely intrigued by it … So, it makes me wonder: Am I the one who is so abnormal, or am I pretty normal?"[15]

On Hollywood Boulevard, a few blocks east of the Walk of Fame, sits the *Museum of Death* (there is also a newer location in New Orleans), which opened in 1995. It is a busy tourist attraction, seeing visitors from across the globe every day, with robust gift shop sales. Gift shops arose along with the tourism industry at the turn of the twentieth century and are known for items that impart a sense of "faux authenticity," a representation of the buyer's personality through travel.[16] Long lines make this one especially profitable, as people shop while they wait and many have already purchased things before they get inside.

One of their most popular items is a Black Dahlia souvenir pin. Aside from its cringeworthy aestheticizing of Elizabeth Short's murder, blending illustration with real crime scene photos, the object itself troublingly implicates the consumer in the bisection of Short's body, requiring the pin to be attached in two pieces rather than one. It reminded me of the experience of walking through the *Museum of Death*: at once both witnessing and participating in violence.

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[14] Elizabeth Yuko, "Inside the Murderabilia Machine," *Rolling Stone*, August 9, 2019.

[15] I have taken this quote from Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. It was Schmid who first provided me academic work on the murderabilia industry, but most of my research in this chapter is based on my own observations and the interviews in Hobbs, *Collectors*, and Borowski, *Serial Killer Culture*.

[16] Woloson, *Crap*.

Healy's museum intentionally provides less of a narrative about violence than an onslaught. It is an overwhelming hodgepodge of objects and images, some of which, at least, make sense together. Leading exhibits on the death penalty, funerals and autopsy, cults, suicide, and celebrity death, the museum begins with its crown jewel: the "Serial Killer Archive" room. At first, I wondered why the curators led with their best material, but I understood why once I had gone all the way through: some people probably don't make it that much further, much less all the way to the end, where the "Theater of Death" plays snuff films while you sign a guest book by guessing how you will die.[17]

The most prized items in the Serial Killer Archive are several Gacy paintings, his original clown shoes, and a few of Richard Ramirez's personal effects and artworks. The second most-coveted room, the "California Death Room," sits in the dead center of the building, providing tons of evidence of popular understandings of spectacle murder as unique to Los Angeles. Poster-sized crime scene and autopsy photos from several high-profile murders adorn the walls, alongside David Rose's art, Charles Manson's own drawings, and victim death certificates. I suspect the photos of the Tate-LaBianca murders, which I have not seen displayed anywhere else publicly, come from LA's own Bill Nelson, a small-time conservative talk-radio show host and creator of a Republican newsletter in the '90s, who also self-published several books on the Manson crimes, became a true crime talking head, and ran the most notorious Manson memorabilia business in the country from inside his home in Los Angeles.[18] I suspect Nelson because the museum has one of Manson's guitars, a signed corrections uniform, and several of his handmade spiders and scorpions. There are Black Dahlia and OJ Simpson objects too, with very little information on the crimes presented at all; the room is a smorgasbord of visual evidence of gore and off-putting memorabilia that expects the viewer to know enough about it to put the pieces together themselves. On one wall, I wrote in my notes, "case of unnamed photos of dead bodies with no context."

It is one thing to collect for oneself, but to display murderabilia for public consumption is something else, as the act of curation inherently produces a narrative. Showing a private collection also

[17] Several people had written "suicide" in the entries on this page when I visited in 2019.
[18] Monroe, *Savage Appetites*.

means that Healy gets to make his own rules to create demand for the museum – for example, you can't take pictures while inside. Healy's museum has garnered a lot of negative attention, but collectors see violence in the news all the time and don't think this is all that different. For Healy, displaying these objects without context is ultimately a critique of harmful media narratives and is important in the project of preserving and remembering history: "If you think about Lincoln, he was murdered. Who has that stuff? The Smithsonian. [...] People want to look at it the way they want to look at it – they don't want to look at the big picture. And that's why the museum is great, because we throw everything out there, and we let you decide what you want to think. We don't tell you what to think."[19] Inevitably, his own curation has at least a little bit to do with marketing and shock value, as I could hear audible reactions to the material throughout both my visits.

Healy's public history justification for murderabilia, however, is one I have heard often. A woman in Texas who bought a painting at one of collector Rick Staton's art shows in the early 2000s explained: "even though it was almost $300 I think it's a good investment, it's part of history. I've lived all my life in Houston and whatever you feel about Houston's history, it happened and [Elmer Wayne Henley's] the only serial killer we have and... we can't change it now."[20]

Every spectacle murder produced cultural objects and the creation, sale, and purchase of murder objects defied the easy categories of perpetrator, victim, and hero that the BSU and other state actors worked hard to keep dominant in crime entertainment. Many young adults in the '90s and early 00s – those who had grown up under the shadow of stranger danger – began to seek out serial killer stories with new zeal, empathizing with men who had hurt others because they themselves had been misunderstood and grew up in hostile environments. A criminal-legal system that had made no space for freaks and weirdos meant that younger generations began to realize how the spectacle murder phenomenon had conditioned them to be insecure, unhappy, and afraid. As grunge icon Elliott Smith sang in 2000, "I'm a little like you, more like Son of Sam."

[19] Quoted in Yuko, "Inside the Murderabilia Machine."
[20] Quoted in *Collectors*.

The victims' rights crowd, which had become a strong lobbying group within media and electoral politics by the '90s, was incensed by the murderabilia industry. Said Andy Kahan, coiner of the term: "Everybody knows who a Jeffrey Dahmer is, who a John Wayne Gacy is, who a Ted Bundy is, but I doubt anybody – *anybody!* – can name one of their victims"[21] This backlash mirrored a conservative backlash against a number of practices associated with violence and role play during the '90s, as documented by Kyle Riismandel in *Neighborhood of Fear*, which many believed fostered an unhealthy reverence for violent material.[22] Serial killer art shows unsurprisingly raised the hackles of crusaders like Diane Clemens, who caught wind of the show in Houston. "Look past the art and look past the man creating the art and look past the crime," she said in an interview. "Look to the people whose lives were affected, look to the futures that were destroyed, think about those boys who were sucked into murder and terror, and think about the families who now live with that… think about the bones in the morgue and all the peripheral effects of this crime and realize that the art is nothing more than… it's…" she trailed off, frustrated. "Let Henley hang it in his cell."[23]

Victims' rights advocates had been fighting against individuals profiting from murder cases since at least 1977, when a rumor began circulating that David Berkowitz (also known as New York's "Son of Sam") planned to sell his story for a book deal, leading to the passage of notoriety-for-profit laws across the United States, including in California. Many of them have since been repealed for violating the first amendment. Berkowitz, for what it's worth, vocally supported Kahan's crusade, speaking in interviews and letters about how murderabilia, which he called an "all-American style entertainment," actually "causes my victims pain."[24] The laws, however, applied mostly to large-scale moneymakers like books and movies, allowing for the loophole of "nickel-and-dime profits from small handicrafts, like drawings

[21] Quoted in *Collectors*.

[22] Kyle Riismandel, *Neighborhood of Fear: The Suburban Crisis in American Culture, 1975–2001* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).

[23] Clemens quoted in *Collectors*.

[24] Berkowitz quoted in Neely Tucker, "The Dark Market of 'Murderabilia,'" *Washington Post*, March 6, 2008.

and poems, that killers put together after they have been incarcerated" and were sent to dealers like Rick Staton.[25]

Kahan and other activists sought throughout the decade to use federal legislation to limit the mail sent and received by incarcerated people. The "Stop the Sale of Murderabilia to Protect the Dignity of Crime Victims Act" – sponsored by Texas Republican John Cornyn and Washington Representative Dave Reichert, a former detective on the Green River Killer case and reintroduced as recently as 2013 – would further make it a federal crime for inmates to mail almost anything designated as "commerce," allowing for the seizure of profits. Most collectors argued this would not even do much to stop the trade. When Illinois banned him from receiving goods by mail, Rick Staton simply started going to visit in person to pick them up himself. "I would come visit him, I don't know once a month, once every couple of months and carry the paintings out – you know, the big mule or whatever."[26] Kahan did succeed at getting EBay to ban the sale of murderabilia in 2001, but this similarly did not stop its migration to other websites. The industry has never made anyone a ton of money but it is still based in the exploitation of perpetrators and victims of crime, as well as the labor and precarity of incarcerated people.

Despite this purposeful exploitation, collectors did sometimes formulate and maintain healing relationships with other people tangentially related to the crimes they profited from. Elmer Wayne Henley's mother, a good friend of Staton, told documentary filmmakers how she felt about his obsession with her son's crimes, and those of perpetrators like him:

> "I don't know why it fascinates him quite so much but it satisfies something in him and I raised four boys. I know they have their own thing and if they need it and it gives them what they want, I don't see any harm in it. Rick's like one of the family, when my mom died I called Rick to cry on his shoulder. He's not a kook, he's a very sweet man."

Staton doesn't trade anymore as far as I know, and in recent years he has described being haunted by the practice, though he is neither ashamed nor proud of his past.

[25] Tucker, "The Dark Market."
[26] Tucker, "The Dark Market."

The trade cannot be done in solitude, as access to murderabilia requires relationship building with people behind bars, and most objects are produced from inside prison walls. Staton, a funeral director based out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is credited within the industry as being essentially the godfather of murder collectibles. He became interested in movie monsters at a young age, nurturing a lifelong love of the terrifying and unexplained. Like many collectors, Staton began by simply writing letters to famous killers he had heard of – Charles Manson, Richard Ramirez, John Wayne Gacy – in the late 1980s. He developed relationships with several notorious men behind bars, with whom he would correspond regularly.[27] "It was really great for a while," he remembered in 2002, "Manson and Ramirez would call and leave messages on the answering machine." Over time, Staton and a few of his friends began encouraging their penpals to send poems, drawings, or other pieces of art, which they sold with permission. They then "gifted" the proceeds to the inmate through money order or commissary, taking a third of the cut.

Staton intentionally sought out people whose names alone would sell their art ("Manson's image, his name, is right up there with Coca-Cola and Hershey bars," he said) and took advantage of many of the perpetrators' own desires for infamy, stoking their egos in letters, phone calls, and visits.[28] Richard Ramirez was particularly easy to work with as he would send drawings and letters to anyone who asked. Staton took great pleasure in the trade and enjoyed receiving the letters and art even more than he did selling them. After a few years, he and some of his contemporaries began encouraging other incarcerated serial killers to tap into their artistic sides: if they could draw some "gorier" subject matter, like skeletons instead of stick figures, he told one correspondent, they would sell for more.[29]

If Rick Staton was the godfather of murderabilia, he would be nowhere without his most consistent supplier, John Wayne Gacy, whom we met in the introduction. Gacy's art has arguably made

[27]Yuko, "Inside the Murderabilia Machine."
[28] Yuko, "Inside the Muderabilia Machine."
[29] It was hyperlocal collectors like the Naperville Beanie Baby moms who pushed collecting online. These markets are entirely dependent on the collector community and are not regulated services – they are made up of people deciding whether or not it looks or seems real based on their own research. For a fantastic example of how this type of market functions, see Yemisi Brookes, *Beanie Mania*, Documentary (Home Box Office (HBO), 2021).

him even more famous than his crimes. Over the course of his trial, the media learned that Gacy had worked as a volunteer clown, performing at children's birthday parties, and had used a magic handcuff trick to incapacitate many of his victims. Gacy leaned into his ensuing media persona as the "killer clown," and (with a number of killer clown movies also hitting the horror movie scene around the same time, including Stephen King's *It*) he began selling portraits of himself as "Pogo the Clown" to pay legal fees while fighting for an appeal on death row. Pogo is one of the most common pieces of murderabilia I have seen throughout my research, and he would later adorn all kinds of other items. I once saw a man wearing a Pogo t-shirt while grabbing a beer in Wicker Park. "Pogo is a regular so … in stock always" read the inventory pages Gacy sent to his customers.[30]

To obtain a Pogo painting, or any of Gacy's other specialties, people inquired through Staton or wrote directly to Gacy, who would then send them a list of his inventory and prices. These flyers were detailed and clearly outlined the payment policy and process: "NO cash or personal checks: Money orders up to fifty dollars only, over the amount, break down the amount into several money orders which can be sent together. Certified checks accepted." All of his originals, because of this prison policy, sold for $50 or less. When the serial killer industry was at its height in the '90s, original artwork could cost a collector anywhere from $25 to $75, but these objects have unsurprisingly increased in value over time, particularly after the deaths of their producers. When he was not fighting for his appeal, Gacy seems to have spent the majority of his time in prison on his art business. He was very systematic in producing paintings and kept meticulous logs of the series number and recipient of each. He also enjoyed working with customers, always offering to personalize the art, and even taking commissions.[31] Staton commissioned from Gacy a painting of his own son, the same age as several of Gacy's victims (it's a good investment for his future, he explained).[32]

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[30] I saw an original copy of a Gacy letter in the V. Vale Collection at UCLA, but you can find them in John Wayne McClelland Gacy, *They Call Him Mr. Gacy: Selected Correspondence of John Wayne Gacy* (Brighton, CO: McClelland Associates, 1989) and through a quick Google search. See "John Wayne Gacy Correspondence to V. Vale," Box 203, Folder 7, V. Vale papers, University of California Los Angeles Special Collections, Los Angeles, California.

[31] Gacy wrote "am more than happy to write what you want" in his list of items for sale. "John Wayne Gacy Correspondence to V. Vale." See also Staton's discussion of Gacy in Borowski, *Serial Killer Culture*; and Hobbs, *Collectors*.

[32] Hobbs, *Collectors*.

In 1991, Staton and Tobias Allen, another collector whom he met through Gacy, put on the first ever serial killer art show with the help of independent publishers AMOK Books, a college student and punk rock promoter duo who eventually opened a storefront in Silver Lake, Los Angeles. Said the founders of AMOK: "It was a genre-busting idea. ...All these guys, from the UFO people to the rabid, right-wing Christians, just want their books distributed." The Gacy show unsurprisingly produced a lot of media outrage, but as one of the cofounders reasoned: "Although it might not be good to the naked eye if you didn't know that he was a murderer, the only people who got pissed off about that show were people who would never go to it. People who looked at that art got something out of it. It's a combination of honesty and mystification, and totally in its own way, as opposed to a lot of the art dross that's fashionable now." While these objects may now be hard to buy, they are certainly not hard to see. I was invited to a Gacy art show in Chicago as recently as 2018.

Though Staton was his primary dealer, Gacy knew he was in high demand and took it upon himself to look further for contacts. The collection I consulted at UCLA was that of culture critic and zine artist V. Vale of San Francisco, whom Gacy solicited to help distribute and promote a book of his correspondence (including letters from the likes of Truman Capote and Oprah), which was published in 1989 under the title *They Call Him Mr. Gacy.* You can buy a copy on EBay for about $800. Through his letters with Vale, I found that Gacy took quite a lot of pride and enjoyment from his relationships with collectors, sending them additional photographs, poems, and joke recipes with morbid ingredients and drawings. Vale even received a photo of a model of Gacy's home and crawlspace (where he hid the bodies of his victims) made from popsicle sticks. "Keep it," he had written generously.

Often, collectors and enthusiasts were serial killers' most consistent contact to the outside world during their incarcerations. Though Staton, Allen, and others did put time and effort into their correspondence with these men, they also called them evil inhuman monsters in documentaries, ads, and flers. Staton described this power dynamic well: "when you're looking at a death row inmate you're talking about a guy who really has nothing to do but sit in his cell all day and maybe watch TV, listen to the radio ... and you also have to realize they're always broke, they always need money for cigarettes or

shaving cream, or chocolate, or whatever, so this is just… they're not looking to get rich. They couldn't do anything but just sit right where they are."[33]

While most prisons disappear people, it seems that at least in the cases of Gacy, Dahmer, and Dennis Rader, the very existence of letter-writers on the outside made corrections officers less likely to mess with them, and forced them to follow procedure more closely while the press was actively covering trial.[34] Just as spectacle has become the only way to get a murder solved, it provides protection for incarcerated celebrities because the existence of witnesses is itself anathema to the total control of incarceration.

In 2017, comedians Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark started *My Favorite Murder*, the most successful true crime podcast to date, after bonding over their shared fascination with true crime and severe anxiety about – predictably – being murdered. The concept of the podcast was simple, and in its simplicity was also its strength: Karen and Georgia sat down and each told each other a story about one of their "favorite murders," including how it had affected them when they first heard about it, and what surprised them or felt difficult to cover when they put together the story. While they did the major serial killer cases, they also dug up forgotten ones they remembered from old *Unsolved Mysteries* episodes or paperbacks they had picked up at Goodwill. Over the course of several years, they developed a massive international fanbase, although most are in the United States, as are most of the murders the hosts cover on the show.

Soon, listeners began organizing their own "murderino meet ups" to find community like Karen and Georgia had found in each other. The murderinos sent in fan mail, crime theories, corrections of

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[33] Hobbs, *Collectors*

[34] Kerri Rawson, *A Serial Killer's Daughter: My Story of Faith, Love, and Overcoming* (Thomas Nelson, 2019). For an example of one of these letters, see page 238. While I don't have space to explore this here, there is also a long history of women marrying celebrity inmates. While many dismiss them as crazy, people like Damien Echols were able to drum up support to appeal a wrongful conviction because of the work of a woman who began writing him after she had seen the case covered in Joe Berlinger's HBO documentary. Monroe, *Savage Appetites*; Rachel Monroe, "Damien Echols and the Secrets of Magick," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2018; Joe Berlinger, *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, Documentary (Creative Thinking International Ltd., Home Box Office (HBO), 1996); Joe Berlinger, *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations*, Documentary, (Creative Thinking International Ltd., Hand to Mouth Productions, Home Box Office (HBO), 2001); Joe Berlinger, *Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory*, Documentary, Crime (RadicalMedia, HBO Documentary Films, Home Box Office (HBO), 2012); Amy Berg, *West of Memphis*, Documentary, Crime (Disarming Films, WingNut Films, 2012).

mistakes they had heard on a past episode, and art featuring the hosts' tagline "Stay Sexy and Don't Get Murdered" – the latest version of true crime's most enduring takeaway for women: that you should be able to wear whatever you want and act however you want without fear of violence – but you also have to be careful. Before long, the podcast had a second series: "My Hometown Murder," consisting almost entirely of the two of them reading emails from fans about weird murders that had shaped their lives.

When I first heard about MFM, I was repulsed by the concept and particularly miffed that it seemed like they didn't do proper research before telling these stories to millions of people – but over time, I realized that arriving at a more complete truth was not the point of their conversations. Like the women who had come before them, they used the genre to process and come to terms with things that were happening to *them*, not things that happened in history. A few weeks into lazily listening to them for dissertation "inspiration," I too felt that Karen and Georgia were old friends, and I began playing them in the background when I researched or wrote. Karen was born and raised in Petaluma and has attributed her interest in true crime at least partially to her personal connection to the community that lost Polly Klaas. I felt a little closer, a little more comforted, to have heard someone else speak about the things I was experiencing.

But things are different now. The novelty of the Internet, which allowed the Polly Klaas flier to reach international audiences for the first time, has worn off. Now, the problem is not that we have too little information but too much – and Karen and Georgia are far from the only comedians to tackle spectacle violence in their content In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Oscar-winning comedian and filmmaker Bo Burnham, one of the first of the YouTube celebrities of the mid-00s, spoke about the future of the Internet after the release of his film *8th Grade*. Burnham and I were born less than a year apart. While I had not begun to use YouTube until much later, my experiences growing up in the digital age were almost the same as those he described: the feeling of constant surveillance and of reckoning with the reality that those who provide you with most of your content do not care about your life. It reminded me of men like Harold Schechter, Tobias Allen, and Rick Staton who found the murderabilia panic rang hollow coming from the agents of empire.

In 2021, Burnham released my favorite piece of performance art in recent years, a Netflix special called *Inside*. In it, he shared songs and skits he had written about the experience of life during the pandemic. In the style of a carnival song, he described the chaotic, disparate feed of content he could consume in one sitting – a murder; a recipe for cookies; a kitten; a rape; "a little bit of everything all of the time." In the opening number, he grappled with the anxiety I saw many white people experience (including myself) about policing in 2020.[35] As a white male comedian, he poked fun at his relative power as a celebrity when it compared to his feeling of helplessness to realistically make a difference in how that power functioned – or even to keep himself and his loved ones alive. In an especially poignant moment, he sang quietly and thoughtfully into the camera: "If you wake up in a house full of smoke, don't panic; call me and I'll tell you a joke. If you see white men dressed in white cloaks, don't panic; call me and I'll tell you a joke."

Filmed over the course of more than a year – without knowledge of when his period of dedicated isolation would end – the special opens in earnest with a video of Burnham filming himself in the mirror. Though the special is laugh-out-loud funny and often draws its humor from a tension between pain and pleasure, this part is dead serious: "I hope [this special] can do for you what it has done for me the last few months," he told the audience, "which is distract me from putting a bullet into my head with a gun."[36] An epic artistic feat in many ways, Burnham filmed the entire special from his own home in Los Angeles, where he lived with his girlfriend, receiving widespread acclaim for his ability to use the space to project his own internal world using only lights, his keyboard, and the Internet. From inside his home, he put into words what we all had been feeling: that it isn't safe out there, but it isn't safe in here either. Watching the special, I felt an eerie, inexplicable familiarity.

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[35] Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Reprint edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Carol Anderson and Pamela Gibson, *White Rage*, Unabridged edition (Audible Studios on Brilliance Audio, 2017); Thomas J. Sugrue and Caitlin Zaloom, eds., *The Long Year: A 2020 Reader*, Public Books Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022); Brooke Marine, "Why You Should Think Twice Before Sharing Your 'Blackout Tuesday' Post on Instagram," *W Magazine*, June 2, 2020; Austin McCoy, "After Floyd," *The Baffler*, October 3, 2022; Staff, "After George Floyd's Death, 100 Days of Protest," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 4, 2020; Robin D. G. Kelley, "What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020; Simon Balto, "Perspective | What 'Defund the Police' Really Means," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2021.

[36] Bo Burnham, *Inside* (Netflix, 2021).

Later, I found out Burnham lived in the same house from Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a movie the horror legend had made after encountering a news story about a boy so afraid his nightmares would kill him that he refused to let himself sleep.[37]

[37] Ben Hooper, "'A Nightmare on Elm Street' House Sells for $2.8 Million," *UPI*, January 12, 2022; Wes Craven, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Horror (New Line Cinema, Media Home Entertainment, Smart Egg Pictures, 1984); Jeff McQueen, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*, Documentary (Starz, thinkfilm, Candy Heart Productions, 2006).

Conclusion

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, is a strange place. There is one main strip lined with family restaurants and attractions and driving it feels like driving through an amusement park. There are rollercoasters next to Golden Corrals; a wax museum next to a gun shop next to an old-fashioned candy store. When I was there in 2019, the streets were lined with trucks and SUVs sporting "Trump 2020" on the bumper, confederate flag license plates, and AR-15 windshield stickers. Most of these tourists were white and flocked to the area from nearby states for reunions and family vacations all summer long, choosing this area over further-away beaches or nearby cities. Several other local attractions, including Dolly Parton's Dollywood; the whiskey- and moonshine-tasting haven, Gatlinburg; and local hiking, camping, and water sports draw these tourists to eastern Tennessee year after year.

In the center of the strip, plopped between a Margaritaville and Paula Deen's novelty soul food restaurant, sits the Alcatraz East Crime Museum, a garish building designed to look like a castle with two imposing guard towers. As a tourist, you enter this medieval "prison" to see what awful things lie inside, comforted by the reminder that you are allowed to leave them behind when you go. While waiting for a ticket, you can scan the fake cells that line the walls above while you stand in a line created by stanchions and ropes made of interlocking metal handcuffs. Or, you can read the introduction by the door, which boasts an "in depth look at American crime history." You'll see a familiar name among the museum's founders: victims' rights advocate and *America's Most Wanted* host John Walsh. In fact, this is the same collection I viewed in 2012; but now it has been relegated to a different space.

Objects serve as evidence and, in the context of crime, they are usually associated with the truth. Within the logic of the crime museum, then, proof, historic preservation, and the commemoration of violence often take precedent over concerns about the sensationalism of display. Unlike the Museum of Death and the Dearly Departed Archive, Alcatraz East is more tasteful – and certainly less gory – as it is ultimately a tourist attraction aimed at families. Curations still guide you through the "history" of crime

and punishment by taking the viewer from torture artifacts to Wild Western gun culture, and then from Gangland and Prohibition to serial killers, mass shooters, and 9/11.

In each exhibit, visitors learn about past problems of violent crime alongside present "solutions," which are usually new equipment and technology, and there are several collection boxes for open investigations where visitors can donate to these efforts. The first floor ends with a tour through "prison," and a stern warning from the actual warden of a nearby institution, who berates you through a large kiosk screen to remind you that you are incarcerated purely as a result of your own actions.

The main difference between the old location (opened in 2008) and the new (in 2016) is its bottom floor, which I can only describe as a shrine to law enforcement. Leading with an exhibit on the FBI's current "most wanted," the museum proceeds with entire rooms full of weapons, matériel, uniforms, badges, cars, motorcycles, and police gear. While it presents almost no history of policing itself, the exhibit focuses on display and interaction with policing objects. This makes sense, as programs through the Law Enforcement Assistance Act and, later, the Department of Homeland Security, have allowed police departments to receive mass quantities of military equipment over the last few decades.[1]

These items are much less rare than a Pogo painting, I thought, while reading an explainer: "Police uniforms are critical to law and order. They are immediate indicators of someone in authority who can take control of a situation to help or protect someone in need."

The removal of the collection from Washington, D.C. to Pigeon Forge is in many ways representative of our entire story. True crime content has become more specialized over time, but the same actors still guide much of its manifestation in the mainstream. Walsh himself had aired a special opposing the murderabilia trade in the '90s, but now these items are historical evidence – evidence we

[1] Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019); Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units," *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

need if we are to remember why it's important to have a strong criminal-legal system in place. Blue Lives Matter (a marketing slogan) as the answer to Black Lives Matter (a revolutionary, grassroots protest movement) makes perfect sense once we accept how the spectacle murder phenomenon has functioned in recent U.S. history: those in power have responded throughout the preceding pages with images, symbols, narratives, and consumer products that shore up the public's sense of embattled law enforcement to undercut and undermine coalition activism that builds power outside of or in opposition to these structures. Through the collecting and displaying of these objects, investors in spectacle murder have made their memories even more powerful in retrospect, as true crime venues now serve as an unsuspecting source of information about these decades for those who do not remember them. These institutions and their objects are serving as public history, whether we like it or not.

Spectacle murder cases turned Americans into new witnesses of violence after 1969, which reproduced the impulse of many women speaking out against gender violence. Media interest in these cases produced retroactive proximity over time, as those who did not know they had had an encounter with "the killer," for example, were offered new platforms to share their stories in documentaries boasting "never before seen footage," or through books written by amateur crime solvers with an unstoppable dedication to the case. This feedback loop ensured that moments of violence would define the lives of those involved, who became known as survivors and got used to telling stories about their experience – because it interested people, sure, but also to confront and face their own traumas, left structurally unaddressed. Spectacle murders become touchpoints for everyone who experiences them, even from afar. Just as often as they were state actors, true crime practitioners could be journalists, activists, victims, or just ordinary people with feelings.

As we saw in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, the '70s mantra "if it bleeds it leads" created a new supply of crime content that could lead journalists to report unconfirmed accounts to have the story first, but police departments and public relations officers began to learn how to use this familiar cycle to their advantage. The stories of defense attorneys, prosecutors, investigating officers, and state officials were guided by morality tales and neat narrative structure just as much as they were guided by the "truth" of a

crime or its physical evidence. In this way, proper crime news, "true crime," crime-related infotainment, and even crime fiction often collapsed, blending the real and unreal, the facts with our imagination.

Different kinds of precision became a priority in my writing as I started to recognize how spectacle had functioned historically while I watched its legacy function in my own present to shift public attention away from the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic; the demonstrations against state violence that had been met with horrific police brutality after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor; or the attempted overthrow of democracy on January 6, 2021. I watched with friends and family as many of the same people who turned spectacle murders into parables to their own advantage over the last five decades now denied that things we could see with our own eyes – evidence that they had failed – were not actually there.

Over the course of my research, there were only two bodies of work that brought me true comfort: the accounts of true crime practitioners who opened up about how their mental health suffered as a result of their engagement with this material, which became the backbone of my archive; and the writings of those who called themselves "abolitionists" because they had seen for themselves what true crime tried so hard to deny; namely, that the criminal-legal system did not work to keep anyone safe, and it produced more harm on its own. Here, I found frameworks that sought explicitly to tell stories in ways that limited or prevented the violence that allowed these stories to flourish. I learned that at the center of the true crime genre, ostensibly built on the concept of testimony sits a (sometimes willful) ignorance of the theories and processes of trauma that produced the call for witnessing in the first place. These stories thus comprise a history without history.

When appealing to a public audience, historical argumentation is much less about content than it is about how you tell it. I have seen both historians and true crime writers use the same evidence to support a wide range of opposing things; and I have also seen them both use "new" evidence to make arguments that essentially tell the same story that existed without it. I used to think this was lazy, but I think it's a lot more than that now. It's about the limits of our imagination when we spend so much time fantasizing about the past instead of helping each other in the present. Each time we tell stories without

a history; presented in ways that do not do those who came before us justice, we contribute to the advancement of fascist projects in the United States and across the globe. This is not an exaggeration by any stretch; it might be an understatement.

I have not uncovered a social movement in this research, as I had originally thought, nor have I uncovered the repression of a social movement, which so many people already uncovered before me. What I found was a specific cycle of abuse mediated through entertainment that we have allowed to not only continue but grow exponentially; a cycle in which people who have experienced violence are told that it did not happen the way they remember it – and are directed back to their abuser for protection. Spectacle murders expose patterns of abuse that already exist, and we drew on the legacies of the civil rights movement to begin calling attention to them in 1969, producing new models of investigative journalism, storytelling, and political organizing. To maintain legitimacy in the face of new exposures to public accountability, state actors used their connections with the entertainment industry to turn our testimonies into weapons against us, demobilizing efforts to shift political power in the emerging information age. These opportunities to "listen and learn," which we have seen often since 2020, provided no concrete steps to account or correct for the original harm; in fact, they relied on the expectation that we would forget about it once the ordeal was over. To maintain cycles of abuse over time, it is crucial to hide the fact that it is a cycle so that each new generation encounters it alone, as if for the first time.

What we now have, however, is a rich archive of testimonies about this cycle that has, incredibly, been compiled for us by the very same agents who do not want us to use these testimonies to connect with one another. What began as a series of deep dives into individual cases thus became, over time, a deep dive into my own relationship to this history as a white woman who could imagine herself in every actor of the story, but whose access to power had only provided her the ability to politically align with one: the victim. There were *so many more* people affected by the spectacle murders of this era – and the victim is the only one whose story has a concrete ending.

Survivors, witnesses, bystanders, and police officers used media channels; local whisper networks; and their proximity to existing social movements to create and re-create these stories as they were happening, and again and again in their aftermath. Many found their lives newly defined by this proximity to violence, crucially experiencing the crimes as having happened personally to them. Discussions with parents, grandparents, neighbors, and even strangers on the internet created a form of solidarity against violence that could be wielded through collective, affective politics – but true crime often left out the grassroots organizing that I uncovered before officials pushed counternarratives into the mainstream.

While these simplistic morality tales provided a beginning, middle, and end, I found that the reality of these experiences aligned more often with a consistent feeling of anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion – a sense that the outcome was not at all fixed, but contingent upon their own thoughts, words, and actions. Many of the voices that have shaped public conversations about crime can trace their interest in violence to memories of a specific traumatic event, which inspired them to connect their own past experiences with things they witnessed in real time, and to revolt against the lies they had been told about danger, safety, and the value and purpose of their own lives.

To write about policing and incarceration from a place of empathy, we must thus first acknowledge them as a function of capitalism and recognize that anti-capitalist pursuits also require abolitionist pursuits. Scholarship that does not explicitly call for abolishing the harmful systems it critiques but *does* identify capitalism and its resulting racialization, sexualization, and dehumanization as the root of our violence problem have pointed us to an issue while ignoring its solutions, which many are already hard at work to realize. It is no wonder that police "reform" efforts have become the norm – they became the only solutions presented to the public by those in power despite ample evidence of alternatives. We must acknowledge, too, that in our efforts to protect ourselves, we have harmed others. Scholars of all stripes writing on the criminalization of sex, race, and class are leading the way by relying on the historical testimony of those harmed by police, but it is time for white women to witness these stories too – and to share our own. Policing and incarceration have not protected us either.

It was affective responses (and a perceived lack of answers from those around me) that brought me to the project in the first place, as mass shootings and spectacular violent events like 9/11 were so common in my childhood, teenage, and early adult years that I often wondered what it had been like for past generations *not* to know about all these horrible things. In college, I had briefly flirted with the idea of becoming a journalist, but even the history of journalism made me feel confused and uncomfortable as I learned of the violence reporters themselves caused. An especially sobering moment (which led to my switch from journalism to history) was being asked to watch a suicide by gun unfold on live television. Should the cameras have stopped recording? My professor asked. Instead, they had zoomed in on the blood pouring out of the man's mouth and nose; I watched his eyes continue to flutter until, eventually, he was still. I had learned about the yellow journalism wars of the nineteenth-century, and how media moguls like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst made spectacular, world-altering news stories out of mere scraps of information. During the twentieth century, Los Angeles replaced New York as the nation's cultural capital with new reporting methods shifting from print to screen. It was these same shifts that allowed me to witness Bud Dwyer die in my journalism class. I had never seen a person die before.

As Joe Masco has argued, fear came to mean something distinct during the Cold War years, in part because of an affective response to the potential for mass destruction that forced many Americans to confront the possibility of, and even to repeatedly imagine, their own violent deaths.[2] During the pandemic, we experienced a similar state of profound uncertainty. Through these new connections I made about how the past and present interact, I shifted back to the original approach: Why, with all the information right there in front of me, had I missed such basic answers to what true crime calls "violence"? Leaving perpetrator out of these stories – like the victims' rights movement had – excluded the conditions that produced them, and it did not give me a more ethical story but a less complete one, much more vulnerable to misuse by others.

[2] Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

I had to let go of what I had come to understand as "ethical" approaches once I realized that this very idea had been shaped by the processes I was actively critiquing in my writing. I abandoned the language of violence in favor of the more expansive term "harm." This was not just a shift in perspective; it required me to go back to basics and rebuild. Eventually, I developed a method that worked: absorb the academic histories; absorb the true crime histories; absorb people's memories and testimonies about these histories; retell the true crime stories by using my own experience; reintegrate the histories I now knew with the story I had produced, noting where and how it differed from the original; and, finally, make decisions about which actors to focus on and which pieces of the crime story to include. I drew primarily on testimonials and imagined how each actor might feel reading what I had written.

Seeing crime scenes, photos, and objects in person changed the project because it changed me. I often felt like the true crime authors I had read, finding new life as well as new problems in a personal experience that I could not explain. Once I introduced my own connection to the work, I was able to see myself in so many more of the actors I wrote about, including those I did not agree with. I could understand their choices because I allowed myself to recognize how difficult it can be to function after traumatic experiences, and especially how appealing a salve like booze, drugs, or even revenge can feel when you are desperate for relief.

In the introduction, I mentioned that I had often felt while researching and writing that I was attempting to reinvent the wheel. But I was not reinventing the wheel at all. I, like many before me, was just coming to terms with the history of the United States, always at risk of being forgotten.

While I began this journey wondering where our fascination with murder came from – locating it originally within the largely middle-class suburban world as a social movement led by women attempting to shift postwar anticommunist politics into women-centered organizing like the antirape movement – I now understand it differently. The drivers of the spectacle murder phenomenon were often white, but they came from working-class, middle-class, and even wealthy backgrounds. It was important for the genre to function this way for its agents to be able to offer solutions that increased the power of wealthy celebrities, who funded these projects and had done so since the Tate-LaBianca

murders, and funneled more resources into the systems designed to protect and maintain racial solidarity over class solidarity. Though I grew up learning that policing, the court system, and even prison were necessarily fallible because they govern, respond to, and are made up of human beings who are fallible too, I was taught this as a child in the '90s who grew up in the world built by Vincent Bugliosi, Robert Ressler, and Ronald Reagan. I did not learn about the Black Panther Party, which had recognized the patterns before me; I learned about Charles Manson, who had been connected to the Party not through a shared interest in dismantling systems of power but through a drug dealer called "Lotsapoppa." I didn't know about the widespread rebellions against police brutality because I learned of them as "riots" that destroyed beautiful cities.[3]

Nowhere in the general knowledge about the Hillside Strangler case had I found Suzanne Lacy or Nikki Craft. I did not learn about Skid Row or homelessness in Los Angeles, or histories of vigilantism in the absence of official action or the turf wars that led police officers to keep secrets. I learned about Richard Ramirez, who allegedly worshipped the devil, and the weird mystical aura of death that surrounded the Cecil Hotel and transformed it into a dark tourism destination rather than a monument to organized abandonment and the violence of individual impunity in the absence of community, resources, and accountability for harm caused.

It was not a sense of victimization – or, as Michelle Nickerson has called it "beleaguerment" – from *civilians* that produced this alternative history, it was that of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and elected officials at all levels of government who felt under attack by the public's calls to solve crimes better, more quickly, and more humanely because they *too* knew it was not possible. In their own ways, even as I often felt anger and disdain for their words, these people told us this then. What produced the spectacle surrounding these murders was that the things we had been told police do and the things that they *actually* do are very different. This realization produced a profound change on a personal level and radically shifted the worldview and sense of self of people like Ann Rule and Marc Klaas. It often led

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

them to the same destructive coping mechanisms I used to process this knowledge while researching and writing. Our fascination – this sustained obsession with the same stories over time – comes from a failure to change the conditions that produce violence. This is what the spectacle murder phenomenon does; it gives us so much information that we cannot consume it all and still maintain the cognitive dissonance required to avoid breaking down. We can't go too deep, because there is so much on the surface that still needs our attention; and we feel an obligation to witness violence in service of those who came before us. But witnessing has never been enough. We have to learn and to grow, because witnessing alone only keeps us in the cycle. When we waste our energy agonizing over the pain of those who are gone, we lose the energy we need to materially improve our pain, and the pain of our loved ones, in the present.

It hit me like a ton of bricks to recognize how severely every single person in this dissertation had been failed by the people, organizations, and institutions that were supposed to protect and care for them. People who brought up these problems were always, always, always brave. Speaking about your pain in public is not just politically powerful – and the history of law enforcement and administrative state responses to Black-led rebellions against white supremacist terror throughout this period are clearer evidence of how powerful these spectacles can be – it is also incredibly difficult and necessary for healing on a personal level. The people who shaped this world were often described as harsh. Many of them were not well-liked even as they were well-known, or they came to be known for creating interpersonal conflict and their inability to separate "work life" (which was supposed to heal them from their traumas) from the life they wanted to share with their friends and family.

The decisions they made directly shaped the development of what Jackie Wang has called "carceral capitalism," but it was never their individual responsibility to change anything alone.[4] Eventually, they sought refuge in their own increasingly insular communities. A central argument of the current abolitionist movement is the simple phrase "cops lie." Abolitionists approach the world through

[4] Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism*, Semiotext(e) Intervention Series (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018).

the lens of harm and are thus able to account for the structures that prevent us from acting without harming others. That means that when we say "cops lie," we don't mean "every cop is a liar," though that is often what others hear. "Liar" is not an action, it is an identity, and it can only be located in the individual. Individualization, the neoliberal impulse to turn us all into imprints of profiles of characters, allows us to tell these stories without seeing each other; without fully allowing ourselves to empathize with every person around us; to wonder what we might have done in their shoes. While the true crime accounts I drew on for this research project seemed on their face to be emancipatory testimonials, over time I came to understand them as something more like coerced confessions – admissions, outbursts, and even scripts developed over time to achieve the level of spectacle and public recognition that could advance a moral good: sharing their experiences with others. What many of them did not know (though some, of course, did) was that these could be used to uphold the same systems that harmed them by injecting new lexicon, policies, and reforms efforts that worked to hide the same things from future generations.

Of much more interest to me now than the clown suits at the Alcatraz East Crime Museum – or even the Pogo paintings, which have fascinated me for more than fifteen years – is John Wayne Gacy's own clear understanding of how all of this already worked. In fact, *all* the men we have met in these pages who were able to repeat the same violence over time (thus creating the pattern that produced "serial killers," the BSU, and the entire true crime genre as we now know it) did so because they knew that police would either not notice or not care about their crimes; and they had learned from their own engagements with the criminal-legal system how to make it work for them rather than against them. Gacy, like Manson, Richard Ramirez, and others, intentionally pursued vulnerable people. In his case, they were young men in need of money, whom police officers could easily dismiss as sex workers – just like the women murdered by the Hillside Stranglers in Chapter 2 – and thus undeserving of their attention until forced to shift focus by the spectacles their communities produced in their honor.

While you can find detectives agonizing in interviews over a lack of "rhyme or reason" to crimes like these, a focus on the "why" rather than the "how" allows them to remove themselves from the

equation of a larger structure that should have cared for and protected those who died, were injured, or traumatized by men like Gacy. These accounts gloss over how a history of police abuse of queer people, for example, contributed also to their ignorance of the missing boys; a lack of federal action that soon followed in the face of widespread death by the "silent killer" AIDS would not have been possible had these conditions of abandonment and abuse not already been present.[5]

Jeffrey Rignall, who died of AIDS-related complications in 2000, reported being chloroformed and raped by a man matching Gacy's description to Chicago police the morning after it happened, but they told him that his experience had not been a crime against him. Forced to do his own sleuthing, Rignall stalked and followed his attacker, putting himself through the horrors of reliving the experience, and eventually delivered Gacy's license plate number to the Chicago Police Department – to no avail. It took months of police negligence and a long trail of egregious mistakes on Gacy's part to arrest him, ultimately because of pressure from the parents of the missing. Amirante did not even realize the scope of the investigation at the time he signed onto Gacy's defense because there had not been enough coverage – even though there were already 33 bodies. As Gacy himself admitted: "After I got away with the first one, I just kept getting away with them. That's why I didn't stop."[6]

Earlier this year, I saw a TikTok circulating of video footage from the 1920s. The caption and comments touted the "old school feminist" woman's "strong, powerful" voice in the video, the likes of which they had rarely seen before. They marveled at how much she looked and sounded like them. But just as Rosa Parks had not been the "little old woman who refused to give up her seat," as I had learned in school, but a seasoned anti-rape and women's rights activists who had spent months organizing with others to decide on just the right moment to turn her own pain into a spectacle and launch the Montgomery bus boycott in 1954, this was not a TikTok depicting a little old woman with a strong feminist message. It was a video of Rebecca Latimer Felton, the pro-lynching orator whose "strong voice"

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[5] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States"; Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (in)Justice*; Gould, *Moving Politics*; Dan Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

[6] *John Wayne Gacy*; *Conversations with a Killer*

at the turn of the century had not been fighting for women at all, but for the maintenance of patriarchal white supremacy through both institutional and extralegal violence.

When we cannot see ourselves in the past, we grab onto incomplete stories and fill in the gaps ourselves, especially in the absence of spaces in which to process and share how the past makes us feel. The good news is that those who have begun to revive the true crime genre since 2020 are not reinventing the wheel either – they are using the same playbook they did then.

And this time, we have it too.

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Archival Collections

Bancroft Library Special Collections
University of California, Berkeley, California
Collections:

Fang Family *San Francisco Examiner* Photograph Archive
Collection # BANC PIC 2006.029

Contra Costa County Historical Society
724 Escobar Street, Martinez, California
Collections:

Crime Prevention Committee Collection
Collection # 2015.32
*included unsorted items and news clippings, 1975-1995.

While exploring the Committee collection, archivists directed me also to these files, which they had not yet properly incorporated into the Historical Society Archive. They were primarily clippings from local and national newspapers gathered by the Committee and items varied widely except insofar as they contained some content relating to crime. I was able to use this collection to better understand the shifting public perception of issues of violence, safety, danger, and protection in urban and suburban space through a group of people organizing against crime in the North Bay Area. The Committee's work seems to have been driven by women, whose volunteer profiles dominated their monthly newsletter, which began as far as I can tell in 1976. A scrapbook of Committee material included these newsletters, press mentions of the Committee's work – usually at a local event or as mentioned by members of local law enforcement – and a beautiful set of original photographs of Committee gatherings.

Getty Research Institute
1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California
Collections:

Woman's Building records
Collection # 2017.M.43

Huntington Library
255 W Park Drive, Los Angeles, California
Collections:

Los Angeles Times Records
Collection # mssLAT
Ted Rall Papers
Collection # mssRL 1-1382

*While I do not cite these files in the body of the text, browsing them helped me to get a better sense of crime reporting and crime critique through artwork in Los Angeles between 1969 and the mid-90s – so I have included them here. I hope to return to the Huntington now that I have a better sense of the direction of this research.

Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center

200 North Spring St, Los Angeles, California
Collections:

Los Angeles City Council Records, 1977
Los Angeles City Council Records, 1985

*City council records are indexed in two collections; the first from 1940-1979; the second since 1980. Both are searchable in the online City Archives index, but those after 1980 must be viewed in person. Some meetings after 1980 were also recorded on VHS tapes, which are housed on site.

Paley Center for Media

465 North Beverly Drive, Los Angeles, California
Items consulted:

60 minutes: Why People Murder, VHS tape, 1968.
ABC News Special Report: Murder in Beverly Hills, VHS tape, 1994.

*As of 2020, the Paley no longer has an archival location in Beverly Hills. I found this out by surprise – as did other researchers – when the Center lost its lease but chose not to announce it publicly. I was hoping to consult quite a few more materials here, as they have a very rich visual media archive including productions of which I was not able to find original copies elsewhere. I was, however, able to compile a large enough television programing archive on my own by purchasing, renting, and accessing open-source materials, and I did not ultimately find the Paley's inaccessibility to be a hindrance to the project except insofar as time lost by re-orienting during an archive trip. I do hope to do more work in the Paley for more granular research into media representations of some of the events covered in this dissertation. Researchers should know that not all the Paley's visual records are digitized – though some of them are – and they must be viewed on site, so you must either purchase a day pass or become a member of the Center, which does also gain you access to events that might be of use. Last I checked, archivists are still deciding where to house the new West Coast office, but items are still searchable in their online finding aid and the location in New York City is operational and open for visit by researchers.

Sonoma State University Special Collections

Sonoma State University Library, Rohnert Park, California

Collections:

Lynn Woolsey Congressional Papers

Items of note for researchers include a VHS tape of the Klaas memorial service and materials relating to the foundations started and maintained by Marc Klaas, including copies of the Klaas Action Review newsletter.

Additional unsorted files relating to the deaths of Georgia Moses and Polly Klaas, Courtesy of David Walls and Lucia Gattone

*While doing research at Sonoma State, I met a fantastically knowledgeable archivist named Lynn Prime, who was able to point me to additional materials about Georgia Moses and tell me more about both cases as a local with sharp memory. It was from this interaction with her that I first came to understand how a spectacular crime comes to comprise such a large archive of material for both true crime practitioners as well as historians. Though there was quite a lot of material on the work of Jeannie Kelly and other organizers in these additional files – including material on the organization A Time to Smile, which I mention in Chapter 5 – most of these were not and could not have been mass produced like the materials I consulted about the Polly Klaas kidnapping. In other words, they were personal photos, handwritten notes, and materials that had most likely been printed inside someone's home or at a local print shop: fliers, meeting announcements, and memorial materials. I hope to do more work on Georgia's case in the future and to write about larger trends in memorial practice through the items I found in this collection. It was very difficult for me not to dive further into this case, but I strongly believe it deserves its own space and did not want to use Georgia's life or death (or the experiences of those who knew her) as a "foil" to Polly Klaas, or as a corollary to the murder of Latasha Harlans in Los Angeles. While the conditions that produced their deaths and made them vulnerable to violence were different, their lives were equally meaningful to those who knew them and it would be unethical, in my opinion, to tell the stories this way in a project about the effects of spectacular storytelling.

I would additionally like to thank Lynn Prime for digitizing a VHS copy of the Polly Klaas memorial service for me. The full service was too much to witness, observe, and notate for research in one sitting – both practically but also emotionally – but I had very limited time on location due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. She and her staff were able to convert and send the digital file by email within just a few days, which allowed me to process the experience over several weeks and return to it multiple times to check details. Earlier versions of Chapter 5 included much more on the memorial service before I arrived

at the overall arc of the dissertation story and I chose to save that material for another piece. It is important to recognize the emotional and mental toll of this kind of work on your audience, but much more important to recognize it in yourself as a researcher and set limits like these, especially when you begin to feel overwhelmed about ethical obligations to the people in your work. Lynn and her staff were instrumental in allowing me to write the Polly Klaas story at my own pace, a privilege that allowed me to marinate on it between March and November 2020.

University of California Los Angeles Special Collections
Charles E. Young Research Library
Collections:

Women Against Violence Against Women collection, 1964-1994
Collection # 1850
Motion Picture Press Kits
Collection # PASC 42
V. Vale Collection of Search and Destroy and RE/Search Publications Records, 1927-2014
Collection #LSC.1858

University of California Los Angeles Film and Television Archive
University of California Los Angeles Library, Los Angeles, California
Items consulted:

20/20: "You Remember Kitty Genovses?" March 21, 1979, VHS tape
America's Most Wanted, undated VHS tape
Quincy, M.E., "Memories of Allison," originally aired 1981.
Quincy, M.E., "For Love of Joshua," originally aired 1981.

*While doing research in this archive, I learned that it is where many documentary film crews find primary source footage for true crime films about California, as it houses quite a lot of local news footage from KTLA. There is also a Los Angeles News Service Archive – mentioned in Chapter 5 – maintained by Marika Gerrard, though I was not able to view it in time for this study.

Vanderbilt Television News Archive
Collections:

ABC Nightly News, selected items between 1969 and 1998.
CBS Nightly News, selected items between 1969 and 1998.
NBC Nightly News, selected items between 1969 and 1998.

*All items in this collection are digitized and thus word-searchable through the online finding aid. *NBC Nightly News* segments can be accessed remotely if your institution is partnered with the Archive. All others must be accessed on site due to copyright.

Collections on display

The National Museum of Crime and Punishment.
575 7th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. Viewed 2012.
Admission estimated at $20 (visited before beginning this research project)

Alcatraz East Crime Museum.
2757 Parkway, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Viewed twice in 2019.
Admission $28.95

Museum of Death Collection, J.D. Healy and Kathy Shultz.
6063I Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. Viewed 2019.
Admission $13

Museum of Death II Collection, J.D. Healy and Kathy Shultz.
227 Dauphine Street, New Orleans, Louisiana. Viewed 2019.
Admission $13

Dearly Departed Artifact Collection, Scott Michaels.
Dearly Departed Death Tours and Museum, Los Angeles, California. Viewed 2020.
Free with tour.

Selected Periodicals

Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles Sentinel

New York Times

New York Times Magazine

Petaluma Argus-Courier

San Francisco Examiner

San Francisco Chronicle

Santa Barbara Sun Times

Sacramento Bee

Washington Post

Life Magazine

Time Magazine

People Magazine

Databases, Online Resources, and Fora

Online Archive of California

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times

Newspapers.com

Investigations by Forensic Architecture

CRIMEHQ, Oxygen.

Scheide, R.V. "Killers Club." *Killer Club* (blog), 2004.

ZODIAC CIPHERS. https://www.zodiacciphers.com/the-halloween-card.html.

Michelle McNamara, *True Crime Diary* (blog), 2014.

Lacy, Suzanne. "ARIADNE:" https://www.againstviolence.art.

Harnisch, Larry. "The LA Daily Mirror." https://ladailymirror.com/.

Harnisch, Larry. "Heaven Is HERE! The Murder of Elizabeth Short, the Black Dahlia; Los Angeles' Most Famous Unsolved Killing," 1999. http://www.lmharnisch.com/.

Kaba, Mariame. "Prison Culture." http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/.

Koenig, Sarah Rabia Chaudry, and *This American Life*, *Serial* archive. https://serialpodcast.org/

Moore, Rebecca. "Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple." https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/.

Sultan, Reina, Micah Herskind, Derecka Purnell, Eli Dru, Rachel Kuo, Mon Mohapatra, Leila Raven, Nnennaya Amuchie, Sarah T. Hamid, and K. Agbebiyi. "#8toAbolition," 2020, https://www.8toabolition.com.

Agbebiyi, K. "Prison Abolition FAQ," Google docs, 2020. https://docs.google.com/document/d/182cay4IFu4S3wJuTChWA63NAKXqmJIDgkSxuNDZZTZo/mobilebasic.

Glossy Pages, Artworks, and Critique

Backderf, Derf. *My Friend Dahmer*. Illustrated edition. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2012.

Burnham, Bo, *Inside*. Netflix, 2021.

Chicago, Judy. "Womanhouse." 1972.

Creepy Magazine

Fangoria Magazine

Gonzalez-Day, Ken. *Erased Lynchings*. November 12, 2016.

Hader, Bill, *Documentary Now!* Broadway Video, The Royal Budapest Film Co, 2015.

Kelley, Mike. *Pay for Your Pleasure*. 1988.

Lacy, Suzanne, *In Mourning and Rage*, 1977.

Mauer, Marc, Sabrina Jones, and Michelle Alexander. *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling*. New York: The New Press, 2013.

Mulaney, John. *John Mulaney: Kid Gorgeous at Radio City*. Comedy. 3 Arts Entertainment, Jax Media, 2018.

Powell, Eric, and Harold Schechter. *Did You Hear What Eddie Gein Done*? Albatross Funnybooks, 2021.

True Crime Magazine

Collaborative Material

Participant: Smith, Alyssa Corinne; Kathleen Belew; Roland Black; Trish Kahle; and Andrew Seber. **History of the Present Colloquium, 2019.** Experimental Course, University of Chicago.

Attendee: Oxygen Network. **"Crime Con" Annual Meeting"** New Orleans, Louisiana, June 2019.

Sessions attended:

Burroughs, Alina, "The Use of Technology in Forensic Investigation"
Canning, Andrea, Josh Mankiewicz, Keith Morrison, Dennis Murphy, Stephanie Gosk, "Dateline NBC: Inside the Stories We Tell"
Darden, Chris, "From OJ to NO-J: Ten Things I Learned from the Trial of the Century"
Holes, Paul, "The DNA of Murder"
Lee, Henry, "New Concepts in Homicide Investigation"
Moore, Cece, "DNA Detectives: One Thousand Years of Cold Case Investigations Resolved"
Gutman, Matt and Matt Murphy, "20/20 Presents: Murder in the OC: From Crime Scene to Conviction"
Grace, Nancy, "Injustice with Nancy Grace"
Miller, Crystal Whitman and Art Roderick, "Active Shooter Situations: It Can Happen to You"
Rudolf, David, "Behind the Staircase"
Rule, Leslie, Sheryl McCollum and Kathy Kleiner Rubin, "A Tribute to the Queen of True Crime: Ann Rule"
Stout, Peter, "Forensics 101"
White, John, "Serial Killers Among Us"

Attendee: **"Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration."** Conference, Garrett Felber. Oxford, Mississippi, December 2019.

Attendee: Oxygen. **"Crime Con" Annual Meeting,"** virtual, 2021.

Sessions attended:
Goldman, Kim, "Grief and Trauma in the Public Eye"
Carillo, Gil, "I Wouldn't Change a Thing"
Cyril Wecht, "The Life and Deaths of Dr. Cyril Wecht"
Ramsland, "Confession of a Serial Killer"
Candace DeLong, "My Best Day: The Unpredictable Life of an FBI Agent"
Paul Woodward and John Ramsey," JonBenet: Dispelling 25 Years of Myths"
Henry Lee, "Logic and Lessons with Dr. Henry Lee"
Panel: Fatima Silva and Chris Anderson, "Investigation Discovery's *Reasonable Doubt*"
Panel: Delphi family, "The Delphi Murders: Five Years Later"
Grace, Nancy, "This is WAR!"
Jensen, Billy, and Alexis Linklater, "The. Long Island Serial Killer"
Panel: Jim Clemente, Bob Ruff, and George Derrit, "Profiling the West Memphis Three"
Fil Waters, "The Art of the Interview"
Burroughs, Alina, "Crime Scene Confidential"
Robinson, David, "A Father's Fight"

*I was also able to observe the virtual chatroom for these sessions through membership to "CRIMEHQ," which I held from 2021-2022.

Attendee: **Black Dahlia Research Group Weekly Meetings**, virtual, 2020-2021.
Invited by Larry Harnisch.
Participants included: Harnisch; Anne Redding; Doug Laux; Gretchen Wenner; Christi Clogson; and Cheyna Roth

Attendee: **"Helter Skelter Tour."** *Dearly Departed* by Scott Michaels, 2020. Los Angeles, California

Attendee: **Urban History Association Panel Series. Policing the City**, organized by Matthew Guariglia and Charlotte Rosen, 2020.

Participant: Joint research project with University of Chicago Public History Colloquium and Forensic Architecture: **"Police Brutality at The Black Lives Matter Protests"** 2020. https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/police-brutality-at-the-black-lives-matter-protests.

Attendee: **Teach-in** on Policing and the University, University of Chicago Graduate Students United and Care Not Cops undergraduate student group, 2020.

Attendee: **Teach-in**, Black Abolitionist Network Chicago, and University of Chicago Graduate Student United, 2020.

Participant: **Truth and Reconciliation Committee**, August-September 2020. Anonymous Organization.

*I have anonymized the other participants and umbrella organization here to protect the identities of those involved. To truly avoid punitive responses to harm, any investigative and reporting efforts to document your process in cases like these should be done with the express consent of *all* participants, whose safety and healing is your priority. If you find that you have begun an effort with the end goal of judgment or discipline, it is your responsibility to recognize that you have constructed a power dynamic that denies your subjects the ability to provide fully consensual testimony. Because the institutions in which most of us work, live, and would most likely conduct an effort like this often make it extremely difficult to provide the conditions for consensual testimony, it is important to acknowledge this up front. In this case, the committee decided to anonymize our report, but I did draw heavily on my experiences while writing and chose to cite it here.

Participant: **The Alarmist Podcast**, invited by Rebecca Delgado-Smith, 2020.
Delgado-Smith, Rebecca, and Alyssa Corinne Smith. "Aftermath: Betty Broderick Murders."
Delgado-Smith, Rebecca, and Alyssa Corinne Smith. "Betty Broderick Murders: Who is to Blame?"
Delgado-Smith, Rebecca, and Alyssa Corinne Smith. "Ed Gein: Who Is to Blame?"

Participant: Smith, Alyssa Corinne; Kathleen Belew; Nick Estes; Jennifer L. Holland; and Jessica Ordaz **"Violence in the West: Past, Present, and Future"** panel presented at the Western History Association Annual Meeting, virtual, 2021.

Participant: Smith, Alyssa, Corinne, Danielle Wiggins, and Paul M. Renfro. "**Family Values, Endangered "Childhood, and the Neoliberal Revolution"** panel presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, virtual, 2021.

Participant: **Pozen Center Colloquium on Carceral Studies**. Invited by Alice Kim. 2021-2022.

Participant: "The Criminal Minds of Jim and Tim," *Vulture*, quoted by Rachel Monroe," 2021.

Participant: "Cop Shows Are Facing Major Scrutiny Amid Calls for Racial Justice." *Newsy*, June 11, quoted by Casey Mendoza, 2020.

Part II:

I have chosen to categorize the following sources separately to reflect my method. I mined each for primary source material to supplement and corroborate my archival work; but I also used each as evidence of a type of storytelling that together comprises a body of secondary literature. As such, many of the following items represent *two* bodies of source material.

Podcasts and Audio Sources

Dearly Departed Podcast. Michael Dorsey and Scott Michaels, Apple Podcasts, 2022.

Dirty John Podcast, Christopher Goddard. Wondery, 2019.

In the Dark Podcast, *Season 1: Jacob Wetterling.* Madeleine Baran, American Public Media, 2016.

On the Road with Abolition: Assessing Our Steps Along the Way, Haymarket Books, 2020.

The Murder Squad Podcast, Paul Holes and Billy Jensen, Exactly Right Media, 2019.

*Holes and Jensen worked together on finishing and promoting Michelle McNamara's posthumous book about the Golden State Killer in 2015, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*. Through these efforts, they met and connected with Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark of the *My Favorite Murder Podcast* (listed below), who were also friends of McNamara's and her husband, Patton Oswalt. When MFM expanded to its own network, *Exactly Right* (one of Karen's most used phrases on the podcast), the first new show they revealed was this collaboration between Holes, a former forensic investigator with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office (an office through which Marc Klaas also organized in the 1990s) and Jensen, an amateur crime writer-turned-

journalist, to discuss cold cases. Kilgariff, Holes, and Jensen all also participated in the HBO documentary based on her book in 2020. Through these connections with McNamara and her contacts in the true crime world, Holes and Jensen have thus become celebrities – I have seen them at both Crime Con annual meetings I have attended – but, in my experience, they are not necessarily accepted or trusted by hardline cold case researchers because of their allegiances. The MFM team recently sold Exactly Right to Amazon and Wondery. Through this trajectory, it is very easy to see how true crime practitioners with the intention of challenging dominant narratives become conscripted into the spectacle murder project by corporations once they become popular. While this is a podcast-specific analysis, it is reflective of the same shift I saw in television true crime content during the '90s.

Man in the Window, Paige St. John, Apple Podcasts. 2019.

Millennials are Killing Capitalism Podcast, Spotify, 2020.
Selected episodes:
Kaba, Mariame. "You Have the Right to Disrupt"
Kelley, Robin D. G. "Midnight on the Clock of the World."

My Favorite Murder, Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff, Exactly Right Media, 2016.

Root of Evil: The Hodel Family and the Black Dahlia. Rasha Pecoraro and Yvette Gentile, TNT, 2019.

Serial Season 1: Adnan Sayed, Sarah Koenig. NPR, 2014.

Welcome to Your Fantasy Podcast, Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, 2021.

You Must Remember This Podcast: Charles Manson's Hollywood, Karina Longworth, 2015.

Your Own Backyard Podcast: The Kidnapping of Kristin Smart, Chris Lambert, 2018

You're Wrong About Podcast, Sarah Marshall. Apple Podcasts, 2018-2022.
Selected episodes:
Marshall, Sarah. "You're Wrong About: The Victims' Rights Movement."
——— "You're Wrong About: True Crime with Emma Berquist."
——— "Deep Dive: Nancy Gracey's 'Objection!'"
——— "You're Wrong About: Tom Cruise on Oprah's Couch with Willa Paskin."
——— "You're Wrong About CSI: Junk Science with Josie Duffy Rice.
——— "Bonus: How to Become a Police Psychic with Josie Duffie Rice."
Marshall, Sarah, and Michael Hobbes. "You're Wrong About: The Stonewall Uprising."
——— "You're Wrong About: Killer Clowns."
——— "You're Wrong About: Kitty Genovese and 'Bystander Apathy.'"
——— "You're Wrong About: Multiple Personality Disorder."
——— "You're Wrong About: The Stanford Prison Experiment."
——— "You're Wrong About: Sex Offenders."
——— "You're Wrong About: Stranger Danger."

Testimonials and Paperbacks

Amirante, Sam L., and Danny Broaderick. *John Wayne Gacy: Defending a Monster*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2011.

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Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2004.

Bortnick, Barry. *Polly Klaas: The Murder of America's Child*. Pinnacle, 1996.

Cagin, Seth, and Philip Dray. *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi*. Revised edition. Nation Books, 2006.

Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*. New York: Random House, 1965.

Carlo, Philip. *The Night Stalker: The Disturbing Life and Chilling Crimes of Richard Ramirez*. Reprint edition. Citadel, 2016.

Clark, Marcia. *Without a Doubt*. West 26th Street Press, 2016.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: One World, 2015.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World, 2017.

Cochran, Johnnie, and David Fisher. *A Lawyer's Life*. Thomas Dunne Books, 2003.

Cullen, Dave. *Columbine*. New York: Twelve Books, 2009.

Darden, Christopher. *In Contempt*. Graymalkin Media, 2016.

Dahmer, Lionel. *A Father's Story*. 2nd ed. edition. Echo Point Books & Media, LLC, 2021.

Didion, Joan. *White Album*. Reprint. New York: FSG Adult, 2009.

Douglas, John E., and Mark Olshaker. *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*. Gallery Books, 2017.

Doyle, William. *An American Insurrection: James Meredith and the Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962*. New York: Anchor, 2003.

Durando, Stu. *Under the Gun: A Children's Hospital on the Front Line of an American Crisis*. Stu Durando, 2018.

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Frank, Gerold. *The Boston Strangler*. New York: The New American Library, 1966.

The Freedom Archives. *Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica & Black Liberation - Freedom Archives*. AK Press, 2002.

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Visual Documents

*Materials in this section are listed in chronological order.

Broadcast and Cable Programming

NBC News. National Broadcasting Company, 1939.

CBS Nightly News, CBS News Productions, Columbia Broadcasting System, 1941.

ABC Nightly News, American Broadcasting Company, 1953.

NBC Nightly News, National News Productions, National Broadcasting Company 1970.
*While the NBC network pioneered nightly news, it originally aired these as film reels simultaneously with their radio news show, which is why it appears here to begin in 1970 though the network began airing news in 1939.

60 Minutes. CBS News, 1968.

20/20. ABC News, 1978.

The Oprah Winfrey Show. Harpo Productions, Harpo Studios, HBO Films, 1986.

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America's Most Wanted. 20th Century Fox Television, 1988.

48 Hours. CBS News Productions, 1988.

Cops. 20th Century Fox Television, Barbour/Langley Productions, 1989.

The Maury Povich Show. MoPo Productions, NBC Universal Domestic Television, Paramount Television, 1991.

Dateline NBC. NBC News, 1992.

Autopsy. Home Box Office (HBO), 1994.

Forensic Files. Medstar Television, Court TV. 1996.

The FBI Files. Discovery, 1998.

Cold Case Files. Kurtis Productions, 1999.

Dr. Phil. Harpo Productions, King World Productions, Paramount Domestic Television, 2002.

To Catch a Predator, MSNBC, 2004.

Criminal Minds, CBS, 2005.

Real Housewives of Beverly Hills, BRAVO TV, NBC Peacock, 2010.

Live PD. Big Fish Entertainment, Motiv8 Media, 2016.

Murder House Flip. Sony Pictures Television, Roku Channel, 2020.

Documentary Films

Gimme Shelter. Albert and David Maysles. Maysles Films, Penforta, 1970.

The Murder of Fred Hampton, Howard Alk. The Film Group, Chicago, 1971.

Expose of Willowbrook State School, Geraldo Rivera. Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance, 1972.

Manson, Robert Hendrickson. Merrick International, Tobann International Pictures, 1973.

Helter Skelter, Tom Gries. Lorimar Productions, 1976.

The Atomic Café, Kevin Rafferty. Libra Films, 1982.

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement, Henry Hampton. Public Broadcasting Services (PBS), 1987.

The Thin Blue Line, Errol Morris. American Playhouse, Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), Program Development Company Productions Inc., 1988.

Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment. Ken Musen, Stanford University, 1992.

Autopsy, Marlene Sanders and Michael Baden. Home Box Office (HBO), 1994.

Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills, Joe Berlinger. Thinking International Ltd., Home Box Office (HBO), 1996.

4 Little Girls, Spike Lee. 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks, Home Box Office (HBO), 1997.

Collectors, Julian P. Hobbs. Abject Films LLC, Magnet Media, 2000.

Paradise Lost 2: Revelations, Joe Berlinger. Creative Thinking International Ltd., Hand to Mouth Productions, Home Box Office (HBO), 2001.

Bowling for Columbine, Michael Moore. United Artists, Alliance Atlantis Communications, Salter Street Films International, 2002.

Capturing the Friedmans, Andrew Jarecki. HBO Documentary Films, Hit The Ground Running Films, Notorious Pictures, 2003.

Have You Seen Andy? Melanie Perkins.HBO Documentary Films, 2003.

Un Coupable Idéal, Jean-Xavier Lestrade. Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC), France 2 Cinéma, Home Box Office (HBO), 2003.

H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer, John Borowski. Waterfront Productions, 2004.

Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, Jeff McQueen. Starz, thinkfilm, Candy Heart Productions, 2006.

Albert Fish: In Sin He Found Salvation, John Borowski. Waterfront Productions, 2007.

Inside the Manson Gang, Robert Hendrickson. Tobann International Pictures, Exclusive Film Network (EFN), 2007.

Crazy Love, Dan Klores. Shoot the Moon Productions, 2007.

Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His Father, Kurt Kuenne. MSNBC Films, 2008.

This Is the Zodiac Speaking, David Prior. Dreamlogic Pictures, 2008.

Cropsey, Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio. Cinema Purgatorio, Breaking Glass Pictures, 2009.

The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter, Michael Dorsey and Scott Michaels. Not a Hollywood Sign Production, Tenacity Entertainment, 2009.

Feast of the Assumption: The Otero Family Murders, Marc Levitz. Unsubfilms, 2011.

Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory, Joe Berlinger. RadicalMedia, HBO Documentary Films, Home Box Office (HBO), 2011.

There's Something Wrong with Aunt Diane, Liz Garbus. Home Box Office (HBO), 2011.

Tabloid, Errol Morris. Air Loom Enterprises, Moxie Pictures, 2011.

The Central Park Five, Ken Burns. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2012.

The Act of Killing, Joshua Oppenheimer. Piraya Film A/S, Novaya Zemlya, 2012.

Into the Abyss, Werner Herzog. Creative Differences Productions, Skellig Rock, Spring Films, 2012.

Room 237, Rodney Ascher. Highland Park Classics, The Ebersole Hughes Company, 2012.

The Woman Who Wasn't There, Angelo J. Guglielmo. Meredith Vieira Productions, 4235 Productions, 2012.

West of Memphis, Amy Berg. Disarming Films, WingNut Films, 2012

The Jeffrey Dahmer Files, Chris James Thompson. Good / Credit Productions, 2013.

Killer Legends, Joshua Zeman and Rachel Mills. Gulp Pictures, Gigantic Pictures, Chiller Network, 2014.

Serial Killer Culture, John Borowski. Waterfront Productions, 2014.

Who Took Johnny? David Bellinson and Michael Galinsky. RumuR Inc., 2014.

The Stanford Prison Experiment, Kyle Patrick Alvarez. Coup d'Etat Films, Sandbar Pictures, Abandon Pictures, 2015.

The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst, Andrew Jarecki. HBO Documentary Films, Hit The Ground Running Films, Blumhouse Productions, 2015.

Making a Murderer, Moira Demos and Laura Ricciardi. Netflix, 2015.

The Seventies, Tom Hanks. CNN, 2015.

Thought Crimes: The Case of the Cannibal Cop, Erin Lee Carr. HBO Documentary Films, 2015.

13th, Ava DuVernay. Forward Movement, Kandoo Films, Netflix, 2016.

Amanda Knox, Rod Blackhurst. Netflix, Plus Pictures, 2016.

The Killing Season, Joshua Zeman. Gigantic Pictures, After Hours Productions, Jigsaw Productions, 2016.

O.J.: Made in America, Ezra Edelman. ESPN Films, Laylow Films, 2016.

Tickled, David Farrier. A Ticklish Tale, Fumes Production, Horseshoe Films, 2016.

The Witness, William Genovese. Five More Minutes Productions, 2016.

The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson, Victoria Cruz and David France. Netflix; Public Square Films, 2017.

Do Not Resist, Craig Atkinson. Vanish Films, 2017.

The Confession Tapes, Kelly Loudenberg. Netflix, 2017.

The Hunt for the Zodiac Killer Sal LaBarbera. The History Channel, Hulu, 2017.

The Keepers, Ryan White. Film 45, Tripod Media, Netflix, 2017.

LA 92, T.J. Martin. National Geographic, Lightbox, Netflix, 2017.

The Menendez Murders: Erik Tells All. MEg TV, A&E, Hulu, 2017.

Mommy Dead and Dearest, Andrew Rossi. HBO Documentary Films, 2017.

The Mothman of Point Pleasant, Seth Breedlove. Cyfuno Ventures, Small Town Monster, 2017.

November 13: Attack on Paris, Gédéon Naudet. Netflix, 2017.

TIME: The Kalief Browder Story, Jenner Furst and Jay-Z. The Cinemart, The Weinstein Company, 2017.

Tower, Keith Maitland. Go-Valley, Texas Archive of the Moving Image, Killer Impact, 2017.

The Vietnam War, Ken Burns. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2017.

Voyeur, Myles Kane. Brooklyn Underground Films, Chicago Media Project, Netflix, 2017.

Wormwood, Errol Morris. Fourth Floor Productions, Moxie Pictures, Netflix 2017.

A Dangerous Son, Liz Garbus. Home Box Office (HBO), 2018.

Beware the Slenderman, Irene Taylor. HBO Documentary Films, Vermilion Films, 2018.

Dark Tourist, David Farrier. Fumes Production, Razor Films, Department of Post, 2018.

Evil Genius: The True Story of America's Most Diabolical Bank Heist, Trey Borzillieri. Duplass Brothers Productions, 2018.

Murder Mountain, Joshua Zeman, Fusion, Netflix, 2018.

Rest in Power: The Trayvon Martin Story, Sybrina Fulton. The Cinemart, 2018.

Three Identical Strangers, Tim Wardle. RAW, Hulu, 2018.

Wild Wild Country, Jay and Mark Duplass. Duplass Brothers Productions, 2018.

Abducted in Plain Sight, Skye Borgman. Top Knot Films, Netflix, 2019.

Becoming Evil: Serial Killers, Tom Kimball. Mill Creek Entertainment, 2019.

The Case Against Adnan Syed, Sarah Koenig. Working Title Television, Instinct Productions, Disarming Films, 2019.

The Confession Killer, Robert Krenner. Netflix, 2019.

Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes, Joe Berlinger. Netflix, 2019.

The Devil Next Door, Yossi Bloch, Netflix. 2019.

The Disappearance of Madeleine McCann, Anthony Summers. Paramount Television, Pulse Films, 2019.

*Don't F**k with Cats: Hunting an Internet Killer*, Mark Lewis. Netflix, 2019.

Grégory, Jean-Marie Villemin. Netflix, 2019.

Killer Ratings, Daniel Bogado. Netflix, 2019.

Lorena, Jordane Peele. Amazon Studios, Monkeypaw Productions, Number 19, 2019.

Missing 411: The Hunted, David Paulides. NABS, 2019.

Missing 411, David Paulides. NABS, 2019.

The Preppy Murder: Death in Central Park, Mike Sheehan. Break Thru Films, Bungalow Media & Entertainment, 2019.

Surviving R. Kelly, Nigel Bellis. Bunim-Murray Productions (BMP), Kreativ, Netflix, 2019.

Who Killed Garrett Phillips? Liz Garbus. Home Box Office (HBO), 2019.

American Murder: The Family Next Door, Jenny Popplewell. Knickerbockerglory TV, Netflix, 2020.

Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children, Joshua Bennett. Show of Force, Get Lifted Film Company, HBO Documentary Films, 2020.

Crazy, Not Insane, Alex Gibney. Jigsaw Productions, HBO Max, 2020.

Fear City: New York vs the Mafia, Paul Moessl. Brillstein Entertainment Partners, RAW, 2020.

I'll Be Gone in the Dark, Patton Oswalt. HBO Documentary Films, 2020.

McMillions, Chris Graham. FunMeter, Home Box Office (HBO), Unrealistic Ideas, 2020.

The Most Dangerous Animal of All, Gary L. Stewart. Campfire, FX Network, Hulu, 2020.

Murder on Middle Beach, Madison Hamburg. Armian Pictures, Blue Day Films, HBO Documentary Films, 2020.

The Innocence Files, Peter Neufeld. Jigsaw Productions, One Story Up Productions, Story Syndicate, 2020.

Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich, Michael Reiter. RadicalMedia, James Patterson Entertainment, Third Eye Motion Picture Company, Netflix, 2020.

The Ripper, Jesse Vile and Ellena Wood. Netflix, 2020.

Sasquatch, David Holthouse. Number 19, Duplass Brothers Productions, Hulu, 2021.

The Social Dilemma, Jeff Orlowski-Yang. Exposure Labs, Argent Pictures, The Space Program, 2020.

The Vow, Bonnie Piesse. HBO Documentary Films, The Othrs, 2020.

Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer, Trish Wood. Amazon Studios, Saloon Media, 2020.

Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness, Chris Smith. A Goode Films Production, Article 19 Films, Library Films, 2020.

Trial By Media, Rebecca Arzoian. Netflix, 2020.

Betrayal at Attica, Michael J. Hull. Home Box Office (HBO), 2021.

Crime Scene: The Times Square Killer, Joe Berlinger. Imagine Documentaries; RadicalMedia; Netflix, 2021.

Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel, Joe Berlinger. Imagine Documentaries, RadicalMedia, Third Eye Motion Picture Company, 2021.

Beanie Mania, Yemisi Brookes. Home Box Office (HBO), 2021.

Catching Killers, Simon Dekker, Netflix, 2021.

City of Angels, City of Death, Matt Murphy. ABC News, Highway 41 Productions, Hulu, 2021.

Crack: Cocaine, Corruption & Conspiracy, Stanley Nelson. Netflix, 2021.

John Wayne Gacy: Devil in Disguise, Sam Amirante. NBC News Studios, Witchcraft Motion Picture Company, 2021.

Monsters Inside: The 24 Faces of Billy Milligan, Kathy Preston. Upside Films, Netflix, 2021.

The Murders at Starved Rock, Johnny Cannizzaro. American Barber Films, HBO Documentary Films, Unrealistic Ideas, HBO Max, 2021.

Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer, Tiller Russell. The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC), 2021.

The Sons of Sam: A Descent into Darkness, Joshua Zeman. Netflix, 2021.

The Way Down: God, Greed and the Cult of Gwen Shamblin. Huntley Productions, HBO Max, 2021.

Whirlybird, Matt Yoka. Different by Design, Fishbowl Films, Steady Orbits, 2021.

Why Did You Kill Me? Frederick Munk. Netflix, 2021.

BTK: Confession of a Serial Killer, Katherine Ramsland. Good Caper Content, Wolf Entertainment, A&E, 2022.

Captive Audience, Todd Eric Andrews. High Five Content, Wonderburst, Hulu, 2022.

Conversations with a Killer: The John Wayne Gacy Tapes, Joe Berlinger. Mike Mathis Productions, 2022.

I Just Killed My Dad, Jarrett Ambeau. Half Yard Productions, Netflix, 2022.

Like a Rolling Stone: The Life and Times of Ben Fong-Torres, Suzanne Joe Kai. StudioLA.TV, XTR, Netflix, 2022.

Trainwreck: Woodstock '99, Ananda Lewis. BBH Entertainment, RAW, Netflix, 2022.

Worst Roommate Ever, Domini Hofmann. Blumhouse Productions, Blumhouse Television, Chris Morgan Productions, 2022.

Works of Fiction

*Materials in this section are listed in chronological order.

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Cooney, Caroline B. *The Face on the Milk Carton*. New York: Bantam Books, 1990.

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Larson, Erik. *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004.

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Hendrix, Grady. *The Final Girl Support Group*. New York: Berkley, 2021.

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Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1960.

Dragnet 1967, Jack Webb. Mark VII Ltd., Universal Television, Dragnet Productions, 1967.

Rosemary's Baby, Roman Polanski. William Castle Productions, 1968.

The Zodiac Killer, Tom Hanson. American Genre Film Archive, 1971.

Black Christmas, Bob Clark. August Films, Film Funding Ltd. of Canada, Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), 1974.

Kolchak: The Night Stalker, Jeff Rice. Horror, Francy Productions, Universal Television, 1974.

Jaws, Stephen Spielberg. Zanuck/Brown Productions, Universal Pictures, 1975.

Quincy M.E., Glen A. Larson. Universal Television, NBC, 1976.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Philip Kaufman. Solofilm, 1978.

Halloween, John Carpenter and Debra Hill. Compass International Pictures, Falcon International Productions, 1978.

Alien, Ridley Scott. Brandywine Productions, 1979.

The Amityville Horror, Stuart Rosenberg. American International Pictures (AIP), Cinema 77, Professional Films, 1979.

Friday the 13th, Sean S. Cunningham. Paramount Pictures, Georgetown Productions, Inc., Sean S. Cunningham Films, 1980.

The Changeling. Peter Medak. Chessman Park Productions, 1980.

Prom Night, Paul Lynch. Guardian Trust Company, Prom Night Productions, Simcom Limited, 1980.

The Shining, Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros., Hawk Films, Peregrine, 1980.

Escape from New York, John Carpenter and Debra Hill. AVCO Embassy Pictures, International Film Investors, Goldcrest Films International, 1981.

Halloween II, Rick Rosenthal. Dino De Laurentiis Company, Universal Pictures, 1981.

The Thing, John Carpenter, Universal Pictures, Turman-Foster Company, Province of BC, Ministry of Tourism, Film Promotion Office, 1982.

Adam, John Walsh. Alan Landsburg Productions, 1983.

A Nightmare on Elm Street, Wes Craven. New Line Cinema, Media Home Entertainment, Smart Egg Pictures, 1984.

Manhunter, Michael Mann. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG), Red Dragon Productions S.A., 1986.

Hellraiser, Clive Barker. Film Futures, New World Pictures, New World Pictures, 1987.

The Untouchables, Brian de Palma. Paramount Pictures, 1987.

RoboCop, Paul Verhoeven. Orion Pictures, 1987.

The Case of the Hillside Stranglers, Steve Gethers. Fries Entertainment, Kenwood Productions, 1989.

It, Richard Thomas and Stephen King. Green/Epstein Productions, Konigsberg/Sanitsky Company, Lorimar Television, 1990.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, John McNaughton. Biography, Crime, Drama. Maljack Productions, 1990.

The Silence of the Lambs, Jonathan Demme. Strong Heart/Demme Production, Orion Pictures, 1991.

Cape Fear, Martin Scorcese. Amblin Entertainment, Cappa Films, Tribeca Productions, 1991.

Candyman, Bernard Rose and Clive Barker. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, Propaganda Films, Candyman Films, 1992.

The X-Files, Chris Carter, Fox Network, 1993.

Natural Born Killers, Oliver Stone and Quentin Tarantino. Warner Bros., New Regency Productions, Alcor Films, 1994.

Se7en, David Fincher. Cecchi Gori Pictures, Juno Pix, New Line Cinema, 1995.

Copycat, Jon Amiel. New Regency Productions, 1995.

Scream, Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson. Dimension Films, Woods Entertainment, 1996.

I Know What You Did Last Summer, Jim Gillespie and Kevin Williamson. Mandalay Entertainment, Original Film, Summer Knowledge LLC, 1997.

Scream 2, Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson. Dimension Films, Woods Entertainment, 1997.

Summer of Sam, Spike Lee. 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks, Hostage Productions, 1999.

Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, Dick Wolf. Wolf Films, Studios USA Television, Universal Network Television, 1999.

Scream 3, Wes Craven. Dimension Films, 2000.

Red Dragon, Brett Ratner. Universal Pictures, Dino De Laurentiis Company, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 2002.

The Life of David Gale, Alan Parker. Universal Pictures, Intermedia Films, Dirty Hands Productions, 2003.

Criminal Minds, Jeff Davis. Touchstone Television, Paramount Network Television, The Mark Gordon Company, 2005.

Zodiac, David Fincher. Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros., Phoenix Pictures, 2007.

Changeling, Clint Eastwood. Imagine Entertainment, Malpaso Productions, Relativity Media, 2008.

Martha Marcy May Marlene, Sean Durkin. Maybach Film Productions, Searchlight Pictures, Cunningham & Maybach Films, 2011.

Scream 4, Wes Craven. Dimension Films, 2011.

The Conjuring, James Wan. New Line Cinema, The Safran Company, Evergreen Media Group, 2013.

Manson Family Vacation, J. Davis and Jay Duplass. Duplass Brothers Productions, 2015.

Get Out, Jordan Peele. Universal Pictures, Blumhouse Productions, QC Entertainment, 2017.

Mindhunter, David Fincher. Denver and Delilah Productions, Netflix, Panic Pictures (II), 2017.

Wolves at the Door, John R. Leonetti. New Line Cinema, 2017.

American Vandal, Dan Perrault. Netflix, September 15, 2017.

Trial & Error, Jeff Astroff and Matthew Miller. Other Shoe Productions, Good Session, Warner Bros. Television, 2017.

Halloween, David Gordon Green. Blumhouse Productions, Miramax, Night Blade Holdings, 2018.

All That We Destroy, Chelsea Stardust. Into the Dark by Blumhouse, Hulu, 2019.

Charlie Says, Mary Harron. Epic Level Entertainment, Roxwell Films, 2019.

The Haunting of Sharon Tate, Daniel Farrands. Skyline Entertainment, ETA Films, 1428 Films, 2019.

I See You, Adam Randall. Head Gear Films, Kreo Films FZ, Metrol Technology, 2019.

Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood, Quentin Tarantino. Columbia Pictures, Bona Film Group, Heyday Films, 2019.

Us, Jordan Peele. Monkeypaw Productions, Blumhouse Productions, Dentsu, 2019.

Halloween Kills, David Gordon Green. Universal Pictures, Miramax, Blumhouse Productions, 2021.

Only Murders in the Building, John Hoffman. 20th Century Fox Television, August 31, 2021.

Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story, Ryan Murphy. Ryan Murphy Productions, Netflix, 2022.

The Staircase, Antonio Campos. Annapurna Television, HBO Max, 2022.