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## Charles Manson, Fifty Years Later, Part II: The Investigation



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### Part II: The Investigation

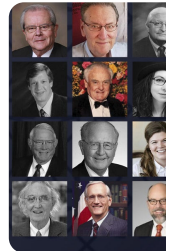
By Mark J. Phillips and Aryn Z. Phillips

*“Last year marked a half century since the sensational trial of Charles Manson for the Tate/LaBianca murders, and the passage of time has not diminished the place the trial and murders occupy in the American psyche. The following is the second of a three-part series reflecting on the Manson murders, the ensuing investigation, and the historic trial.”*

Several theories circulated about the Tate murders. Cocaine and marijuana had been found among the victims' possessions, leading some to believe that the gruesome rampage had been the result of a drug trip gone wrong or a drug deal turned violent. Another promising theory was that William Garretson, the groundskeeper, was behind the killings. He was found that morning in the guest house and claimed to have heard or seen nothing unusual the night before. He was arrested and questioned but was eventually cleared of suspicion. 1 The LaBianca detectives, by contrast, were operating under the suspicion that the murders had been the result of an upset robbery.

Two months after the murders, neither team had made much headway. Eventually, on October 15th, the LaBianca team asked the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office if it was investigating any other murders that might be similar to that of Leo and Rosemary. The LASO officers told their LAPD colleagues about the murder of Gary Hinman, a thirty-four-year-old music teacher whose body had been found in July, in his home in the nearby City

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In Memori

of Malibu. Hinman had been stabbed to death, and the words “POLITICAL PIGGY” had been written on the wall in blood. The LASO had arrested a suspect, Robert “Bobby” Beausoleil, shortly after. Beausoleil had been in custody since August 6th, so he could not have been involved in either the Tate or LaBianca murders several days later. However, the LaBianca investigators discovered that—prior to his arrest—he had been living at Spahn Ranch with Manson. 2 Spahn Ranch had coincidentally been raided later in August and several Family members, though not those involved in the Tate/LaBianca murders, were arrested as suspects in an auto theft ring. 3

That August raid had convinced Manson to go underground and await Helter Skelter, and he had moved the Family 200 miles northeast to Barker Ranch, an extremely remote and isolated homestead near Death Valley. Barker Ranch had in turn been raided in early October, and twenty-four Family members, including Manson, were arrested on a wide variety of unrelated charges. They were being held in jail in Inyo County, about five hours outside of Los Angeles, still unconnected to the Tate and LaBianca murders.



Barker Ranch in Death Valley, Charles Manson's last hideout and place where he was arrested.  
Photo credit: William Girard Girard / Alamy Stock Photo.

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But the mystery would soon unravel. During the Barker Ranch raid, Inyo County law enforcement had come across two young girls attempting to flee the Family. One was seventeen-year-old Kitty Lutesinger, Bobby Beausoleil's girlfriend. Lutesinger remembered hearing that Susan Atkins had also been involved in the Hinman murder. Atkins, being held in Inyo County, was questioned by the LaBianca team, booked on suspicion of murder, and moved to Sybil Brand Institute, a women's detention center in Los Angeles. 4 There, she was placed in a cell with Ronnie Howard, jailed for forging prescriptions, and Virginia Graham, arrested for violating parole. Atkins was talkative and she told her cellmates all about life with Manson. She also told them about killing Hinman and, eventually, that she had killed Sharon Tate and her guests, and that her friends had killed the LaBiancas. 5 Howard would remember her saying that it "felt so good the first time I stabbed [Sharon Tate]" and that "the more you [murder], the better you like it." Atkins bragged that she and the Family were responsible for eleven murders that police would never solve, and that there would be more to come. 6

Taken from Sybil Brand for a court appearance on November 17, a frightened Howard telephoned the LAPD, claiming to know who had committed the Tate murders. That evening, two officers came to Sybil Brand and interviewed her, placed her in protective custody, and brought the news back to headquarters. They were convinced that she was telling the truth; Atkins had mentioned several details that were known only to the police and the murderers. 7

The young Lutesinger had also told authorities that Manson had attempted to recruit members of the Straight Satans, a motorcycle gang, as bodyguards. Five days earlier a member of this gang, Al Springer, had been picked up and questioned on an unrelated matter and detectives took the opportunity to re-interview him about Manson. Springer had never joined the Family, but he did remember Manson bragging about killing five people and writing on a refrigerator in blood. 8

Springer also directed the police to Danny DeCarlo, another member of the Straight Satans, who confirmed Springer's story. DeCarlo remembered that Manson had a favorite gun that had disappeared the weekend of the murders and, knowledgeable about firearms, he was able to draw a picture of the weapon. Pieces of a broken and bloodstained gun handle had been found at the Tate residence, and DeCarlo's drawing was an exact match to the gun to which these pieces belonged. Finally, he described a certain kind of rope kept at Spahn Ranch, which matched the rope used to tie up Tate and Sebring. 9

Slowly but surely, LAPD identified the remaining murderers. Interviews with other Family members exposed Watson, Krenwinkle, and Kasabian as those present at the Tate residence, and warrants were issued for their arrests. Watson was taken into custody in his hometown of McKinney, Texas; Krenwinkle in Mobile, Alabama, where she had been staying with family; and Kasabian in Concord, New Hampshire. 10 Interviews with Atkins confirmed the involvement of these three, plus Manson and Van Houten in the LaBianca murders. 11

As the investigation picked up steam, physical evidence against the Family members began building up. A print found on the front door of the Tate house was identified as belonging to Tex Watson, and one found on the inside of the French door in Sharon Tate's bedroom was matched to Krenwinkel. 12 A broken gun found months earlier in the backyard of a home below Benedict Canyon was identified as the gun used at the Tate residence. It was covered in blood of the same subtype as Sebring, and the broken pieces of gun grip found in the house fit its broken handle. Bullets found at Spahn Ranch were

traced to this gun. Rosemary LaBianca's wallet was found in a service station restroom, where it had been left by Kasabian, just as Atkins had described. A television crew, attempting to reenact the events of the Tate killings, found the bloody clothing that Watson, Kasabian, Krenwinkel, and Atkins had thrown from their car onto the hillside while fleeing the scene.

Having implicated herself, Atkins was charged with the Tate murders, and the case was assigned to Deputy District Attorney Vincent Bugliosi and head of the Trials Division, Aaron Stovitz. Thirty-five-year-old Bugliosi was an experienced prosecutor who had been practicing with the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office since 1964. He had tried 104 felony cases and lost only one. 13 Stovitz would be taken off the case for inadvertently violating a gag order shortly after the trial began, and he was replaced by District Attorneys Donald Musich and Steven Kay, but Bugliosi remained the chief prosecutor for the duration of the trial and played an active role in the investigative process. 14 Richard Caballero, a former district attorney who had gone into private practice, was already representing Atkins in the Hinman case and would represent her in the Tate case as well. 15

In light of the evidence, attorney Caballero struck a deal with the District Attorney's office on behalf of Atkins that, in exchange for testifying against the other Family members, the District Attorney would not seek the death penalty against Atkins. On December 5th, Atkins testified before the grand jury, explaining in detail the events of those two gruesome nights. The jury was shocked not only by her story, but also by her frigid, emotionless, and entirely remorseless telling of it. When asked to identify a picture of Steven Parent, the eighteen-year-old found in the white Rambler at the Tate house, she confirmed "that is the thing I saw in the car." Bugliosi asked, "When you say 'thing,' you are referring to a human being?" Atkins responded, "Yes, human being." Her testimony was so chilling that one of the jurors had to ask to be excused for a few minutes. 16 While Manson himself had not personally committed any of the murders, it was clear from the testimony that he was the mastermind behind them, and that he had a powerful hold over the minds and motivations of his followers. After deliberating for only twenty minutes, the grand jury delivered indictments for murder against Watson, Krenwinkel, Atkins, Kasabian, Van Houten, and Manson. Kasabian and Krenwinkel were returned to Los Angeles to stand trial, and Van Houten and Manson were brought down from Inyo County, where they had been jailed since the Barker Ranch raid. Watson fought extradition from Texas and, ultimately, had to be tried separately at a later date. 17

The date for the trial was set, and it was bound to be a challenging one. The prosecution would have to prove not only that Kasabian, Krenwinkel, Atkins, and Van Houten had committed the murders, but also that Manson—indicted under conspiracy laws—had engineered these murders and had used his powerful control over his followers to get them to act for him. 18





**Charles Manson, cult leader, on August 6, 1970.**  
Photo Courtesy: CSU Archives / Everett Collection.

The five defendants were to be tried together, and their defense team was made up of a rapidly revolving cast of diverse characters. Manson's case was initially assigned to attorney Paul Fitzgerald of the Public Defenders' Office but, on December 17, almost immediately after being indicted, Manson requested permission to act as his own attorney, claiming that "there is no person in the world who could represent" him. After an experienced third-party attorney judged him mentally competent, presiding judge William Keene approved Manson's request.

Manson used his newly acquired position to make outrageous motions and requests. He asked that copies of every document related to the case be made and delivered to his jail cell. He asked that he be allowed freedom to travel outside of prison. He asked for the names, telephone numbers, and home addresses of every prosecution witness. Finally, in March, when he asked that the prosecuting attorneys be jailed under conditions similar to his own, Judge Keene revoked his privileges with Manson screaming, "There is no God in this courtroom!"

Manson's defense was next assigned to attorney Charles Hollopeter, but Manson was displeased with some of the motions Hollopeter made and quickly had him replaced with Ronald Hughes. 19 Thirty-five years old, Hughes was often referred to as a "hippie

lawyer.” Large and burly, he sported a long, unkempt beard and mismatched suits that he bought for a dollar apiece from the MGM wardrobe department. He was well acquainted with counterculture, enjoyed hiking and the great outdoors; admitted having experimented with drugs; and lived in a friend’s garage. He had never tried a case before.  
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In April, Manson filed an affidavit of prejudice against Judge Keene, and the case was reassigned to Judge Charles Older. A highly decorated former World War II fighter pilot, fifty-two-year-old Older had developed a reputation as a no-nonsense judge since his appointment to the bench three years earlier. 21

Only two weeks before the trial’s opening day, Manson asked Judge Older to reassign his case yet again. If he could not act as his own attorney, Manson proclaimed, he wanted to be represented by Irving Kanarek. A stocky man with wavy hair, thick eyebrows and receding hairline, it was rumored that he wore a new suit on the first day of each trial and continued to wear it every day until the trial was over. A notorious obstructionist, Kanarek was widely known for his excessive use of objections and other delaying tactics. Hughes was replaced by Kanarek. 22

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Visiting Family members constantly ferried messages back and forth between the girls and Manson. In late February, in accordance with his instructions, Atkins abrogated her agreement with the prosecutors and refused to testify at the trial. She fired Caballero and asked that he be replaced by Daye Shinn, an immigration attorney who had visited Manson in prison over forty times, hoping to be put on the defense case. 23 Forty-years old and of Korean descent, Shinn was entirely new to criminal proceedings. 24

Krenwinkel requested as her attorney Paul Fitzgerald, the attorney initially assigned to Manson. The Public Defender’s Office felt that this assignment constituted a conflict of interest, but Fitzgerald was anxious to be a part of the defense team. He resigned from the office and went into private practice, taking Krenwinkel on as his only client. 25

Van Houten went through what was perhaps the longest sequence of attorneys. Her case was first assigned to Donald Barnett, whom she asked to be dismissed after he ordered that she undergo a psychiatric evaluation. Her defense passed to Marvin Part, who made the same mistake, and eventually to Ira Reiner, later to find fame as the Los Angeles County District Attorney who supervised the trials of Richard Ramirez, the police arrest of Rodney King, and the defendants in the McMartin preschool trial. Reiner lasted eight months, until jury selection, when it became clear that he was trying to separate her defense from that of the rest of the Family. Van Houten had him replaced by Ronald Hughes, the former Manson attorney. 26

Kasabian was represented by Gary Fleischman, who made it clear from the start that his client was willing to cooperate with the prosecution. She had been the driver and claimed that she had not actually killed any of the victims, that she had been told to stand guard

outside on the first night, and that she had never entered the house on the second night. She had been new to the Family at the time of the murders, and she felt badly about what had happened. While she openly admitted that she loved Manson, she claimed to have only cooperated in the murderous rampage out of fear for the safety of her daughter who was being cared for back at Spahn Ranch. She was clearly different from the other girls, who struck outsiders as deceitful, naïve, or insane. Kasabian was polite, truthful, more grounded, and seemed genuinely devastated by what had transpired. When Atkins reneged on her promise to testify in court, the prosecution team dropped its end of the bargain, sought the death penalty for Atkins, and turned to Kasabian, promising to petition the court for immunity if she testified at the trial. Despite threats made to Fleischman by Family members that “if Linda testifies, thirty people are going to do something about it,” Kasabian agreed and became the prosecution’s star witness. 27

Next, the trial.



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