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Hunter s thompson hells angels

"I think the Angels came out of World War Two," argued gonzo pioneer Hunter S. Thompson in an interview with fellow journalism great Studs Terkel in 1967 (via Huffington Post). "This whole kind of alienated, violent, subculture of people wandering around looking for either an opportunity or if not an opportunity then vengeance for not getting an opportunity." Thompson's wasn't a speculative observation. Just turning 30 years old at the time of the interview, the journalist was about to become a sensation following the release of "Hells Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs," his first full-length book. The memoir chronicled his time living, partying, and traveling with the band of outsider bikers who had struck fear into the hearts of everyday Americans since their notorious arrival in Monterey, California in 1974 had turned them into a household name. Huffington Post notes that Thompson's time with the Hells Angels lasted around a year and gave him the scoop that would make his name. But though the writer certainly saw many commonalities between his own "outlaw" view of America and that of the gang he at one time believed he had befriended, his adventure also took some dark turns, with Thompson becoming a witness to some of the gang's most sickening crimes, as well as the eventual victim of their well-publicized brutality. Hunter S. Thompson had stood in closer quarters with the Hells Angels than any writer ever had before, allowing him to chronicle their horrifying behavior, including mindless violence and sexual assault. A typical journalist might have been able to extract themselves from the declining relationship before it got out of hand. But Thompson's flourishing gonzo style — which Britannica explains is unique for its "personal" style of reporting, in which the journalist chronicles his own interactions with their subject — meant his friendship with the gang ended with a savage assault on Thompson himself, who had interjected after witnessing a gang member beating his wife and dog, calling the biker a "punk" (via Google Books). Thompson describes the attack as follows: "The first blow was launched with no hint of warning and I thought for a moment that it was just one of those drunken accidents that a man had to live with in this league. But within seconds I was clubbed from behind by the Angel I'd been talking to just a moment earlier. Then I was swarmed in a general flail" (via Google Books). In the final line of his postscript, Thompson turns to the work of one his literary heroes, Joseph Conrad, and lifts a line of dialogue given to the "Heart of Darkness" character Kurtz — "The horror! The horror! ... Exterminate all the brutes!" — to crystallize his final feelings on the gang who had turned their violence against him. "Thompson has presented us with a close view of a world most of us would never encounter. His language is brilliant, his eye remarkable."--The New York Times Book Review"Superb and terrifying."   --Studs Terkel, Chicago Tribune The Modern Library has played a significant role in American cultural life for the better part of a century. The series was founded in 1917 by the publishers Boni and Liveright and eight years later acquired by Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer. It provided the foundation for their next publishing venture, Random House. The Modern Library has been a staple of the American book trade, providing readers with affordable hardbound editions of important works of literature and thought. For the Modern Library's seventy-fifth anniversary, Random House redesigned the series, restoring as its emblem the running torchbearer created by Lucian Bernhard in 1925 and refurbishing jackets, bindings, and type, as well as inaugurating a new program of select-ing titles. The Modern Library continues to provide the world's best books, at the best prices. Roll em, boysCalifornia, Labor Day weekend . . . early, with ocean fog still in the streets, outlaw motorcyclists wearing chains, shades and greasy Levis roll out from damp garages, all-night diners and cast-off one-night pads in Frisco, Hollywood, Berdoo and East Oakland, heading for the Monterey peninsula, north of Big Sur . . . The Menace is loose again, the Hell's Angels, the hundred-carat headline, running fast and loud on the early morning freeway, low in the saddle, nobody smiles, jamming crazy through traffic and ninety miles an hour down the center stripe, missing by inches . . . like Genghis Khan on an iron horse, a monster steed with a fiery anus, flat out through the eye of a beer can and up your daughter's leg with no quarter asked and none given; show the squares some class, give em a whiff of those kicks they'll never know . . . Ah, these righteous dudes, they love to screw it on . . . Little Jesus, the Gimp, Chocolate George, Buzzard, Zorro, Hambone, Clean Cut, Tiny, Terry the Tramp, Frenchy, Mouldy Marvin, Mother Miles, Dirty Ed, Chuck the Duck, Fat Freddy, Filthy Phil, Charger Charley the Child Molester, Crazy Cross, Puff, Magoo, Animal and at least a hundred more . . . tense for the action, long hair in the wind, beards and bandanas flapping, earrings, armpits, chain whips, swastikas and stripped-down Harleys flashing chrome as traffic on 101 moves over, nervous, to let the formation pass like a burst of dirty thunder . . .They call themselves Hell's Angels. They ride, rape and raid like marauding cavalry--and they boast that no police force can break up their criminal motorcycle fraternity.--True, The Man's Magazine (August 1965)They're not bad guys, individually. I tell you one thing: I'd rather have a bunch of Hell's Angels on my hands than these civil rights demonstrators. When it comes to making trouble for us, the demonstrators are much worse.--Jailer, San Francisco City PrisonSome of them are pure animals. They'd be animals in any society. These guys are outlaw types who should have been born a hundred years ago--then they would have been gunfighters.--Birney Jarvis, a charter member of the Hell's Angels who later became a San Francisco Chronicle police reporterWe're the one percenters, man--the one percent that don't fit and don't care. So don't talk to me about your doctor bills and your traffic warrants--I mean you get your woman and your bike and your banjo and I mean you're on your way. We've punched our way out of a hundred rumbles, stayed alive with our boots and our fists. We're royalty among motorcycle outlaws, baby.--A Hell's Angel speaking for the permanent record. . . The run was on, "outlaws" from all over the state rolled in packs toward Monterey: north from San Bernardino and Los Angeles on 101; south from Sacramento on 50 . . . south from Oakland, Hayward and Richmond on 17; and from Frisco on the Coast Highway. The hard core, the outlaw elite, were the Hell's Angels . . . wearing the winged death's-head on the back of their sleeveless jackets and packing their "mamas" behind them on big "chopped hogs." They rode with a fine, unwashed arrogance, secure in their reputation as the rottenest motorcycle gang in the whole history of Christendom.From San Francisco in a separate formation came the Gypsy Jokers, three dozen in all, the number-two outlaw club in California, starved for publicity, and with only one chapter, the Jokers could still look down on such as the Presidents, Road Rats, Nightriders and Question Marks, also from the Bay Area, Gomorrah . . . with Sodom five hundred miles to the south in the vast mad bowl of Los Angeles, home turf of the Satan's Slaves, number three in the outlaw hierarchy, custom-bike specialists with a taste for the flesh of young dogs, flashy headbands and tender young blondes with lobotomy eyes; the Slaves were the class of Los Angeles, and their women clung tight to the leather backs of these dog-eating, crotch-busting fools as they headed north for their annual party with the Hell's Angels, who even then viewed the "L.A. bunch" with friendly condescension . . . which the Slaves didn't mind, for they could dump with impunity on the other southern clubs--the Coffin Cheaters, Iron Horsemen, Galloping Gooses, Comancheros, Stray Satans and a homeless fringe element of human chancres so foul that not even the outlaw clubs--north or south--would claim them except in a fight when an extra chain or beer bottle might make the crucial difference.Over and over again I have said that there is no way out of the present impasse. If we were wide awake we would be instantly struck by the horrors which surround us . . . We would drop our tools, quit our jobs, deny our obligations, pay no taxes, observe no laws, and so on. Could the man or woman who is thoroughly awakened possibly do the crazy things which are now expected of him or her every moment of the day?--Henry Miller, in The World of Sex (1,000 copies printed by J.N.H., for "friends of Henry Miller," 1941)People will just have to learn to stay out of our way. We'll bust up everyone who gets in our way.--A Hell's Angel talking to policeOn the morning of the Monterey Run, Labor Day 1964, Terry the Tramp woke up naked and hurting all over. The night before he'd been stomped and chain-whipped outside an Oakland bar by nine Diablos, a rival East Bay cycle club. "I'd hit one of their members earlier," he explained, "and they didn't appreciate it. I was with two other Angels, but they left a little bit before me, and as soon as they were gone, these bastard Diablos jumped me outside the bar. They messed me up pretty good, so we spent half the night lookin for em."The search was futile, and just before dawn Terry went back to Scraggs' small house in San Leandro, where he was living with his wife and two children. Scraggs, a thirty-seven-year-old ex-pug who once fought Bobo Olson, was the oldest Angel then riding, with a wife and two children of his own. But when Terry came down from Sacramento that summer to look for a job in the Bay Area, Scraggs offered bed and board. The two wives got along; the kids meshed, and Terry found a job on the assembly line at a nearby General Motors plant--in itself a tribute to whatever human flexibility remains at the shop level in the American labor movement, for Terry at a glance looks hopelessly unemployable, like a cross between Joe Palooka and the Wandering Jew.He is six feet two inches tall, 210 pounds heavy, with massive arms, a full beard, shoulder-length black hair and a wild, jabbering demeanor not calculated to soothe the soul of any personnel specialist. Beyond that, in his twenty-seven years he has piled up a tall and ugly police record: a multitude of arrests, from petty theft and battery, to rape, narcotics offenses and public cunnilingus--and all this without a single felony conviction, being officially guilty of nothing more than what any spirited citizen might commit in some drunk or violent moment of animal weakness."Yeah, but that rap sheet's all bullshit," he insists. "Most of those charges are phony. I've never thought of myself as a criminal. I don't work at it; I'm not greedy enough. Everything I do is natural, because I need to." And then, after a moment: "But I guess I'm pushin my luck, even if I'm not a criminal. Pretty soon they'll nail me for one of these goddamn things, and then it's goodbye, Terry, for a whole lot of years. I think it's about time I cut out, went East, maybe to New York, or Australia. You know, I had a card in Actors' Equity once, I lived in Hollywood. Hell, I can make it anywhere, even if I am a fuck-up."On another Saturday he might have slept until two or three in the afternoon, then gone out again, with a dozen or so of the brethren, to find the Diablos and whip them down to jelly. But a Labor Day Run is the biggest event on the Hell's Angels calendar; it is the annual gathering of the whole outlaw clan, a massive three-day drunk that nearly always results in some wild, free-swinging action and another rude shock for the squares. No Angel would miss it for any reason except jail or crippling injury. The Labor Day Run is the outlaws' answer to New Year's Eve; it is a time for sharing the wine jug, pummeling old friends, random fornication and general full-dress madness. Depending on the weather and how many long-distance calls are made the week before, anywhere from two hundred to a thousand outlaws will show up, half of them already drunk by the time they get there.By nine o'clock that morning both Terry and Scraggs were on their feet. Vengeance on the Diablos could wait. Today, the run. Terry lit a cigarette, examined the bumps and welts on his body, then pulled on a pair of crusty Levis, heavy black boots, no underwear and a red sweatshirt smelling of old wine and human grease. Scraggs drank a beer while his wife heated water for instant coffee. The children had been put with relatives the night before. The sun was hot outside. Across the Bay, San Francisco was still covered in a late-lifting fog. The bikes were gassed and polished. All that remained was the gathering of any loose money or marijuana that might be lying around, lashing the sleeping bags to the bikes and donning the infamous "colors."The all-important colors . . . the uniform, as it were, the crucial identity . . . which the Attorney General of California has described with considerable accuracy in a fuzzy but much-quoted official document titled "The Hell's Angels Motorcycle Clubs."The emblem of the Hell's Angels, termed "colors," consists of an embroidered patch of a winged skull wearing a motorcycle helmet. Just below the wing of the emblem are the letters "MC." Over this is a band bearing the words "Hell's Angels." Below the emblem is another patch bearing the local chapter name, which is usually an abbreviation for the city or locality. These patches are sewn on the back of a usually sleeveless denim jacket. In addition, members have been observed wearing various types of Luftwaffe insignia and reproductions of German Iron Crosses. Many affect beards and their hair is usually long and unkempt. Some wear a single earring in a pierced ear lobe. Frequently they have been observed to wear belts made of a length of polished motorcycle drive chain which can be unhooked and used as a flexible bludgeon.The Hell's Angels seem to have a preference for large heavy-duty American-made motorcycles [Harley-Davidsons]. Club members usually use a nickname, designated as their "legal" name, and are carried on club rolls under that name. Some clubs provide that initiates shall be tattooed, the cost of which is included in the initiation fee. Probably the most universal common denominator in identification of Hell's Angels is their generally filthy condition. Investigating officers consistently report these people, both club members and their female associates, seem badly in need of a bath. Fingerprints are a very effective means of identification because a high percentage of Hell's Angels have criminal records . . .Some members of the Hell's Angels as well as members of other "disreputable" motorcycle clubs belong to what is alleged to be an elite group termed "One Percenters," which meets monthly at various places in California. The local Hell's Angels clubs usually meet weekly . . . Requirements for membership or authority to wear the "1%-er" badge are unknown at this time . . . Another patch worn by some members bears the number "13." It is reported to represent the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, "M," which in turn stands for marijuana and indicates the wearer thereof is a user of the drug.This compact description of rancid, criminal sleaziness is substantially correct except for the hocus-pocus about the one percenters. All Angels wear this patch, as do most other outlaws, and all it means is that they are proud to be part of the alleged one percent of bike riders whom the American Motorcycle Association refuses to claim. The AMA is the sporting arm of the Motorcycle, Scooter and Allied Trades Association, a fast-growing motorcycle lobby that is seeking desperately to establish a respectable image--an image the Hell's Angels have consistently queered. "We condemn them," says an AMA director. "They'd be condemned if they rode horses, mules, surfboards, bicycles or skateboards. Regretfully, they picked motorcycles."The AMA claims to speak for all decent motorcyclists, yet its fifty thousand or so members rode less than five percent of the 1,500,000 motorcycles registered in the United States in 1965. As one of the trade magazines noted, that left a lot of outlaws unaccounted for.Terry and Scraggs left the house about ten, taking it easy on the two-mile run through downtown Oakland, keeping the engine noise down, aware of the stares from passing motorists and people on street corners, observing stop signs and speed limits, then suddenly accelerating a half block from the house of Tommy, vice-president of the local chapter, where the others were waiting. Tommy was living on a quiet, deteriorating residential street in East Oakland . . . an old neighborhood with small, once-white frame houses sitting close to each other on tiny lots and sparse front lawns worn down by generations of newsboys delivering the Oakland Tribune. Now, on this holiday morning, his neighbors were out on front porches or at living-room windows, watching the awful show build up. By eleven about thirty Hell's Angels were there, half blocking the narrow street, shouting, drinking beer, brushing green dye on their beards, gunning their engines, adjusting their costumes and knocking each other around to get the feel of things. The girls stood quietly in a group, wearing tight slacks, kerchiefs and sleeveless blouses or sweaters, with boots and dark glasses, uplift bras, bright lipstick and the wary expressions of half-bright souls turned mean and nervous from too much bitter wisdom in too few years. Like the Angels, the girls were mainly in their twenties--although some were obvious teen-agers and a few were aging whores looking forward to a healthy outdoor weekend.In any gathering of Hell's Angels, from five to a possible hundred and fifty, there is no doubt who is running the show: Ralph "Sonny" Barger, the Maximum Leader, a six-foot, 170-pound warehouseman from East Oakland, the coolest head in the lot, and a tough, quick-thinking dealer when any action starts. By turns he is a fanatic, a philosopher, a brawler, a shrewd compromiser and a final arbitrator. To the Oakland Angels he is Ralph. Everybody else calls him Sonny . . . although when the party gets wild and loose he answers to names such as Prez, Papa and Daddy. Barger's word goes unquestioned, although many of the others could take him in two minutes if it ever came to a fight. But it never does. He rarely raises his voice--except in a rumble with outsiders. Any dissenters in the ranks are handled quietly at the regular Friday-night meetings, or they simply fade out of the picture and change their life pattern so as never again to cross paths with any group of Angels.If the gathering at Tommy's was a little disorganized, it was because Sonny was serving time in the Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center, for possession of marijuana. With Sonny in jail, the others were keeping the action to a minimum--even though Tommy, in his quiet, disaffiliated sort of way, was running the show pretty well. At twenty-six he was a year younger than Barger: blond, clean-shaven, with a wife and two children, making $180 a week as a construction worker. He knew he was only filling in for the Prez, but he also knew that the Oakland Angels had to make a tough, full-strength appearance at the Labor Day Run. Anything less would forfeit the spiritual leadership back to southern California, to the San Bernardino (or Berdoo) chapter--the founding fathers, as it were--who started the whole thing in 1950 and issued all new charters for nearly fifteen years. But mounting police pressure in the south was causing many Angels to seek refuge in the Bay Area. By 1965, Oakland was on its way to becoming the capital of the Hell's Angels' world.Prior to their ear-splitting departure, there was a lot of talk about the Diablos and what manner of lunacy or strange drug had caused them to commit such a sure-fatal error as an attack on a lone Angel. Yet this was a routine beef, postponedç and forgotten as they moved onto the freeway for an easy two-hour run to Monterey. By noon it was so hot that many of the riders had taken off their shirts and opened their black vests, so the colors flapped out behind them like capes and the on-coming traffic could view their naked chests, for good or ill. The southbound lanes were crowded with taxpayers heading out for a Labor Day weekend that suddenly seemed tinged with horror as the Angel band swept past . . . this animal crowd on big wheels, going somewhere public, all noise and hair and bust-out raping instincts . . . the temptation for many a motorist was to swing hard left, with no warning, and crush these arrogant scorpions.At San Jose, an hour south of Oakland, the formation was stopped by two state Highway Patrolmen, causing a traffic jam for forty-five minutes at the junction of 17 and 101. Some people stopped their cars entirely, just to watch. Others slowed to ten or fifteen miles an hour. As traffic piled up, there were vapor locks, boil-overs and minor collisions."They wrote tickets for everybody they could," said Terry. "Things like seats too low, bars too high, no mirror, no hand hold for the passenger--and like always they checked us for old warrants, citations we never paid and every other goddamn thing they could think of. But the traffic was really piling up, with people staring at us and all, and finally, by God, a Highway Patrol captain showed up and chewed those bastards good for 'creating a hazard' or whatever he called it. We had a big laugh, then we took off again." We get treated good here [in Monterey]. Most other places we get thrown out of town.--Frenchy from Berdoo talking to a reporter not many hours before the Angels were thrown out of townBetween San Jose and the turnoff to Monterey, 101 rolls gracefully through the rich farming foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Hell's Angels, riding two abreast in each lane, seemed out of place in little towns like Coyote and Gilroy. People ran out of taverns and dry-goods stores to stare at these fabled big-city Huns. Local cops waited nervously at intersections, hoping the Angels would pass quietly and not cause trouble. It was almost as if some far-ranging band of Viet Cong guerrillas had appeared, trotting fast in a tight formation down the middle of Main Street, bound for some bloody rendezvous that nobody in town ever cared to know about as long as the dirty buggers kept moving.The Angels try to avoid trouble on the road. Even a minor arrest in a country town at the start of a holiday weekend can mean three days in jail, missing the party, and a maximum fine when they finally come to court. They know, too, that in addition to the original charge--usually a traffic violation or disorderly conduct--they will probably be accused of resisting arrest, which can mean thirty days, a jail haircut and another fine of $150 or so. Now, after many a painful lesson, they approach small towns the same way a traveling salesman from Chicago approaches a known speed trap in Alabama. The idea, after all, is to reach the destination--not to lock horns with hayseed cops along the way.The destination this time was a big tavern called Nick's, a noisy place on a main drag called Del Monte, near Cannery Row in downtown Monterey. "We went right through the middle of town," recalls Terry, "through the traffic and everything. Most of the guys knew Nick's, but not me because I was in jail the other time. We didn't make it till about three because we had to wait in a gas station on 101 for some of the guys running late. By the time we got there I guess we had about forty or fifty bikes. Berdoo was already in with about seventy-five, and people kept coming all night. By the next morning there were about three hundred from all over."The stated purpose of the gathering was the collection of funds to send the body of a former Angel back to his mother in North Carolina. Kenneth "Country" Beamer, vice-president of the San Bernardino chapter, had been snuffed by a truck a few days earlier in a desert Hamlet called Jacumba, near San Diego. Country had died in the best outlaw tradition: homeless, stone broke, and owning nothing in this world but the clothes on his back and a big bright Harley. As the others saw it, the least they could do was send his remains back to the Carolinas, to whatever family or memory of a home might be there. "It was the thing to do," Terry said.The recent demise of a buddy lent the '64 affair a tone of solemnity that not even the police could scoff at. It was the sort of gesture that cops find irresistible: final honors for a fallen comrade, with a collection for the mother and a bit of the uniformed pageantry to make the show real. In deference to all this, the Monterey police had let it be known that they would receive the Angels in a spirit of armed truce.It was the first time in years that the outlaws had been faced with even a semblance of civic hospitality--and it turned out to be the last, for when the sun came up on that bright Pacific Saturday the infamous Monterey rape was less than twenty-four hours away from making nationwide headlines. The Hell's Angels would soon be known and feared throughout the land. Their blood, booze and semen-flecked image would be familiar to readers of The New York Times, Newsweek, The Nation, Time, True, Esquire and the Saturday Evening Post. Within six months small towns from coast to coast would be arming themselves at the slightest rumor of a Hell's Angels "invasion." All three major television networks would be seeking them out with cameras and they would be denounced in the U.S. Senate by George Murphy, the former tap dancer. Weird as it seems, as this gang of costumed hoodlums converged on Monterey that morning they were on the verge of "making it big," as the showbiz people say, and they would owe most of their success to a curious rape mania that rides on the shoulder of American journalism like some jeering, masturbating raven. Nothing grabs an editor's eye like a good rape. "We really blew their minds this time," as one of the Angels explained it. According to the newspapers, at least twenty of these dirty hopheads snatched two teen-age girls, aged fourteen and fifteen, away from their terrified dates, and carried them off to the sand dunes to be "repeatedly assaulted."repeatedly . . . assaultedaged 14 and 15 . . .stinking, hairy thugsA deputy sheriff summoned by one of the erstwhile dates said he "arrived at the beach and saw a huge bonfire surrounded by cyclists of both sexes. Then the two sobbing, near-hysterical girls staggered out of the darkness, begging for help. One was completely nude and the other had on only a torn sweater."Here, sweet Jesus, was an image flat guaranteed to boil the public blood and foam the brain of every man with female flesh for kin. Two innocent young girls, American citizens, carried off to the dunes and ravaged like Arab whores. One of the dates told police they tried to rescue the girls but couldn't reach them in the mobscene that erupted once the victims were stripped of their clothing. Out there in the sand, in the blue moonlight, in a circle of leering hoodlums . . . they were penetrated, again and again.The next morning Terry the Tramp was one of four Angels arrested for forcible rape, which carries a penalty of one to fifty years in the penitentiary. He denied all knowledge of the crime, as did Mother Miles, Mouldy Marvin and Crazy Cross--but several hours later, with bond set at a lowly $1,100 each, they were lodged in the Monterey County Jail in Salinas . . . out there in Steinbeck country, the hot lettuce valley, owned in the main by smart second-generation hillbillies who got out of Appalachia while the getting was good, and who now pay other, less-smart hillbillies to supervise the work of Mexican braceros, whose natural fitness for stoop labor has been explained by the ubiquitous Senator Murphy: "They're built low to the ground," he said, "so it's easier for them to stoop."Indeed. And since Senator Murphy has also called the Hell's Angels "the lowest form of animals," it presumably follows that they are better constructed for the mindless rape of any prostrate woman they might come across as they scurry about, from one place to another, with their dorks carried low like water wands. Which is not far from the truth, but for different reasons than California's ex-lightfoot senator might have us believe.Nobody knew, of course, as they gathered that Saturday at Nick's, that the Angels were about to make a publicity breakthrough, by means of rape, on the scale of the Beatles or Bob Dylan. At dusk, with an orange sun falling fast into the ocean just a mile or so away, the main event of the evening was so wholly unplanned that the principal characters--or victims--attracted little attention in the noisy crowd that jammed Nick's barroom and spilled out to the darkening street.Terry says he noticed the girls and their "dates" only as part of the overall scene. "The main reason I remember them is I wondered what that white pregnant girl was doing with a bunch of suede dudes. But I figured it was her business, and I wasn't hurtin for pussy anyway. I had my old lady with me--we're separated now, but then we were doin okay and she wouldn't have none of me hustlin anything else while she was around. Besides, hell, when you're seein old friends you haven't seen in a year or two, you don't have time to pay much attention to strangers."The only thing Terry and all the other Angels agree on--in relation to the "victims' " first appearance--is that "they sure as hell didn't look no fourteen and fifteen, man; those girls looked every bit of twenty." (Police later confirmed the girls' ages, but all other information about them--including their names--was withheld in accordance with California's policy of denying press access to rape victims.)"I can't even say if those girls were pretty or not," Terry went on. "I just don't remember. All I can say for sure is that we didn't have no trouble at Nick's. The cops were there, but only to keep people away. It was the same old story as every place else we go: traffic piling up on the street outside, local bad-asses prowling around, young girls looking for kicks, and a bunch of Nick's regular customers just digging the party. The cops did right by staying around. Everywhere we go there's some local hoods who want to find out how tough we are. If the cops weren't there we'd end up having to hurt somebody. Hell, nobody wants trouble on a run. All we want to do is to have some fun and relax."It is said, however, that the Hell's Angels have some offbeat ideas about fun and relaxation. If they are, after all, "the lowest form of animals," not even Senator Murphy could expect them to gather together in a drunken mass for any such elevated pastimes as ping pong, shuffleboard and whist. Their picnics have long been noted for certain beastly forms of entertainment, and any young girl who shows up at a Hell's Angels bonfire camp at two o'clock in the morning is presumed, by the outlaws, to be in a condition of heat. So it was only natural that the two girls attracted more attention when they arrived at the beach than they had earlier in the convivial bedlam at Nick's.One aspect of the case overlooked in most newspaper accounts had to do with elementary logistics. How did these two young girls happen to be on a deserted midnight beach with several hundred drunken motorcycle thugs? Were they kidnapped from Nick's? And if so, what were they doing there in the first place, aged fourteen and fifteen, circulating all evening in a bar jammed wall to wall with the state's most notorious gang of outlaws? Or were they seized off the street somewhere--perhaps at a stoplight--to be slung over the gas tank of a bored-out Harley and carried off into the night, screaming hysterically, while bystanders gaped in horror?Police strategists, thinking to isolate the Angels, had reserved them a campsite far out of town, on an empty stretch of dunes between Monterey Bay and Fort Ord, an Army basic-training center. The reasoning was sound; the beasts were put off in a place where they could whip themselves into any kind of orgiastic frenzy without becoming dangerous to the citizenry--and if things got out of hand, the recruits across the road could be bugled out of bed and issued bayonets. The police posted a guard on the highway, in case the Angels got restless and tried to get back to town, but there was no way to seal the camp off entirely, nor any provision for handling local innocents who might be drawn to the scene out of curiosity or other, darker reasons not mentioned in police training manuals.The victims told police they had gone to the beach because they "wanted to look at the cyclists." They were curious--even after several hours at Nick's, which was so crowded that evening that most of the outlaws took to pissing in the parking lot rather than struggle inside to the bathroom."Hell, those broads didn't come out there for any sing-song," said Terry. "They were loaded and they wanted to get off some leg, but it just got to be too many guys. To start with, it was groovy for em. Then more and more guys came piling over the dunes . . . 'yea, pussy,' you know, that kinda thing . . . and the broads didn't want it. The suede dudes just split; we never saw em again. I don't know for sure how it ended. All I knew then was that they had some mamas out there in the dunes, but me and my old lady went and crashed pretty early. I was so wasted I couldn't even make it with her."No family newspaper saw fit to quote the Angel version, but six months later, playing pool in a San Francisco bar, Frenchy remembered it this way: "One girl was white and pregnant, the other was colored, and they were with five colored studs. They hung around Nick's about three hours on Saturday night, drinking and talking with our riders, then they came out to the beach with us--them and their five boy friends. Everybody was standing around the fire, drinking wine, and some of the guys were talking to them--hustling em, naturally--and pretty soon somebody asked the two chicks if they wanted to be turned on--you know, did they want to smoke some pot? They said yeah, and then they walked off with some of the guys to the dunes. The spade went with a few guys, and then she wanted to quit, but the pregnant one was really hot to trot; the first four or five guys she was really draggin into her arms, but after that she cooled off too. By this time, though, one of their boy friends had got scared and gone for the cops--and that's all it was.""The next morning," said Terry, "I rode in with somebody--I forget who--to some drive-in on the highway, where we got some breakfast. When we got back to the beach they had a roadblock set up with those two broads sittin there in the cop car, lookin at everybody. I didn't know what was goin on, but then a cop said, 'You're one,' and they slapped the cuffs on me. Those goddamn girls were gigglin, righteously laughin . . . you know, 'Ha ha, that's one of em.' So off I went to the bucket, for rape."When we got to the jail I said, 'Hey, I want to be checked. Let's see a doctor. I ain't had no intercourse in two days.' But they wouldn't go for it. Marvin and Miles and Crazy Cross were already there and we figured we were deep in the shit until they told us bail was only eleven hundred dollars. Then we knew they didn't have much of a case."Meanwhile, out on Marina Beach, the rest of the Angels were being rounded up and driven north along Highway 156 toward the county line. Laggards were thumped on the shoulders with billy clubs and told to get moving. Side roads were blocked by state troopers while dozens of helmeted deputies--many from neighboring counties--ran the outlaws through the gauntlet. Traffic was disrupted for miles as the ragged horde moved slowly along the road, gunning their engines and raining curses on everything in sight. The noise was deafening and it is hard to imagine what effect the spectacle must have had on the dozens of out-of-state late-summer tourists who pulled over to let the procession come through. Because of the proximity of an Army base, they undoubtedly thought they were making way for a caravan of tanks, or at least something impressive and military--and then to see an army of hoodlums being driven along the road like a herd of diseased sheep--ah, what a nightmare for the California Chamber of Commerce.At the county line on U.S. 101 a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle talked with Tommy, and with another Angel, named Tiny, a six-foot-six, 240-pound outlaw with a shoulder-length pigtail who later gained nationwide fame for his attack on a Get Out of Vietnam demonstration in Berkeley."We're ordinary guys," said Tommy. "Most of us work. About half are married, I guess, and a few own their homes. Just because we like to ride motorcycles, the cops give us trouble everywhere we go. That rape charge is phony and it won't stick. The whole thing was voluntary.""Shit, our bondsman will have those guys out in two hours," said Tiny. "Why can't people let us alone, anyway? All we want to do is get together now and then and have some fun--just like the Masons, or any other group."But the presses were already rolling and the eight-column headline said: hell's angels gang rape. The Masons haven't had that kind of publicity since the eighteenth century, when Casanova was climbing through windows and giving the brotherhood a bad name. Perhaps the Angels will one day follow the Freemasons into bourgeois senility, but by then some other group will be making outrage headlines: a Hovercraft gang, or maybe some once-bland fraternal group tooling up even now for whatever the future might force on them.What is the trend in Kiwanis? There are rumors in Oakland of a new militancy in that outfit, a radical ferment that could drastically alter the club's image. In the drift and flux of these times it is easy enough to foresee a Sunday morning, ten or twenty years hence, when a group of middle-aged men wearing dark blazers with Hell's Angels crests on the pockets will be pacing their mortgaged living rooms and muttering sadly at a headline saying: kiwanis gang rape: four held, others flee, ringleaders sought.And in some shocked American city a police chief will be saying--as the Monterey chief said in 1964 of the Hell's Angels--"They will not be welcomed back, because of the atmosphere created." Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . 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"California, Labor Day weekend . . . early, with ocean fog still in the streets, outlaw motorcyclists wearing chains, shades and greasy Levis roll out from damp garages, all-night diners and cast-off one-night pads in Frisco, Hollywood, Berdoo and East Oakland, heading for the Monterey peninsula, north of Big Sur. . . The Menace is loose again."   Thus begins Hunter S. Thompson's vivid account of his experiences with California's most notorious motorcycle gang, the Hell's Angels. In the mid-1960s, Thompson spent almost two years living with the controversial Angels, cycling up and down the coast, reveling in the anarchic spirit of their clan, and, as befits their name, raising hell. His book successfully captures a singular moment in American history, when the biker lifestyle was first defined, and when such countercultural movements were electrifying and horrifying America. Thompson, the creator of Gonzo journalism, writes with his usual bravado, energy, and brutal honesty, and with a nuanced and incisive eye; as The New Yorker pointed out, "For all its uninhibited and sardonic humor, Thompson's book is a thoughtful piece of work." As illuminating now as when originally published in 1967, Hell's Angels is a gripping portrait, and the best account we have of the truth behind an American legend. Gonzo journalist and literary roustabout Hunter S. Thompson flies with the angels—Hell's Angels, that is—in this short work of nonfiction.   "California, Labor Day weekend . . . early, with ocean fog still in the streets, outlaw motorcyclists wearing chains, shades and greasy Levis roll out from damp garages, all-night diners and cast-off one-night pads in Frisco, Hollywood, Berdoo and East Oakland, heading for the Monterey peninsula, north of Big Sur. . . The Menace is loose again."   Thus begins Hunter S. 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"Far from being freaks, the Hell's Angels are a logical product of the culture that now claims to be shocked by their existence. The generation represented by the editors of Time has lived so long in a world full of celluloid outlaws hustling toothpaste and hair oil that it is no longer capable of confronting the real thing. For twenty years they have sat with their children and watched yesterday's outlaws raise hell with yesterday's world ... and now they are bringing up children who think Jesse James is a television character." "California, Labor Day weekend ... early, with ocean fog still in the streets, outlaw motorcyclists wearing chains, shades and greasy Levis roll out from damp garages, all-night diners and cast-off one-night pads in Frisco, Hollywood, Berdoo and East Oakland, heading for the Monterey peninsula, north of Big Sur. . . The Menace is loose again." Thus begins Hunter S. 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Be the first one to write a review. Jump to ratings and reviews"California, Labor Day weekend...early, with ocean fog still in the streets, outlaw motorcyclists wearing chains, shades & greasy Levis roll out from damp garages, all-night diners & cast-off one-night pads in Frisco, Hollywood, Berdoo & East Oakland, heading for the Monterey peninsula, north of Big Sur...The Menace is loose again." Thus begins Hunter S. Thompson's vivid account of his experiences with California's most notorious motorcycle gang, the Hell's Angels. In the mid-60s, Thompson spent almost two years living with the controversial Angels, cycling up & down the coast, reveling in the anarchic spirit of their clan, and, as befits their name, raising hell. His book successfully captures a singular moment in American history, when the biker lifestyle was 1st defined, & when such countercultural movements were electrifying & horrifying America. Thompson, the creator of Gonzo journalism, writes with his usual bravado, energy & brutal honesty, & with a nuanced & incisive eye; as The New Yorker pointed out, "For all its uninhibited & sardonic humor, Thompson's book is a thoughtful piece of work." As illuminating now as when originally published in '67, Hell's Angels is a gripping portrait, the best account we have of the truth behind an American legend.GenresNonfictionHistoryJournalismMemoirBiographyCrimeTrue Crime 3277 people are currently reading36858 people want to readHunter Stockton Thompson (1937-2005) was an American journalist and author, famous for his book Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. He is credited as the creator of Gonzo journalism, a style of reporting where reporters involve themselves in the action to such a degree that they become the central figures of their stories. He is also known for his promotion and use of psychedelics and other mind-altering substances (and to a lesser extent, alcohol and firearms), his libertarian views, and his iconoclastic contempt for authority. He committed suicide in 2005. Displaying 1 - 30 of 2,155 reviewsOctober 29, 2012Hunter S. Thompson is the writer you want to read if you want to pull all those cool guys. They all love him, it seems, so just make a trip to some hipster café, open one if his books and wait to score.I didn't go for the obvious "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" but instead I read his debut, a non-fiction account of his time spent the Hell's Angels, a motorcycle gang. It was also the book my book club was reading, so I didn't have that much of a choice. Even growing up in the 80s and 90s in Poland I had a good idea what a motorcycle gang was. The symbolism of it is omnipresent; it's like a cultural picklock. The members of a motorcycle gang wear cut off dirt denim vest with their club colours, they drive big Harley-Davidsons, they have beards and they are scary. The message has always been clear – don't step on their toes. Of course, these days they are most often used for creating a comic effect when a big dangerous bearded thug turns out to be really fond of puppies and wouldn't hurt a fly.It seems that demythologising of Hell's Angels (and some other motorcycle gangs) was Thompson's main goal in this book. On one hand he is trying to do away with the notion that they are the worst threat to the American society by putting their (still quite shocking) hooligan excesses in perspective. On the other hand he is also trying to deromanticise their image and make it clear that they didn't have any agenda and that there was nothing glamorous about them. They were mostly a bunch of lowlifes with few prospects that found a sense identity and belonging in joining the gang.The most fascinating part of the book was the role the media played in creating the Hell's Angels. The media loved them. They were dangerous and flamboyant. A little Hell's Angels riot in a small town in California was like a Christmas come early for any journalist. No wonder, the media created a story even when there was no story. The public wanted it - they liked to be scared. And the Hell's Angels felt obliged to live up to their reputation.Currently, America has a new boogeyman – the terrorists. They are just as exciting for the media as Hell's Angels once were. They are just as unpredictable, unreasonable and they aim to destroy all that is good and true in America. Most of the public has been now driven into such a frenzy they would agree to just about anything to protect themselves from this horrifying threat. And I guess we need another Hunter S. Thompson to write a book to put things in perspective again.Petra in Hawaii doing hulaMay 6, 2015I'd just read Jay Dobyn's extremely exciting and fully-involved No Angel: My Harrowing Undercover Journey to the Inner Circle of the Hells Angels. Dobyn was an undercover cop whose total immersion in Angels' culture led to him substituting his real life for what was really a job. Because it was so involved, it took me a while to get into Hunter Thompson's cool, cynical, totally-detached own year-long involvement with the Angels, whose beer, drugs and addiction to speed he was happy to share, but the rest was left behind when he drove home to his wife and child. Although 40 years separate these books there is an enjoyable synchronicity between them - some of Thompson's characters turn up in Dobyn's book, and the philosophy or politics of rejection by society's rejects remains the same.Stunning writing. No padding, every word of every sentence adds to each developing story. Oh to write like that, like an angel....Damn' good read.popculture-anthropology reviewedMay 2, 2021"By the middle of summer 1965 I had become so involved in the outlaw scene that I was no longer sure whether I was doing research on the Hell's Angels or being slowly absorbed by them.", pg. 46This strange and terrible saga tells the tale of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club. Thompson was able to ride, hang out, party, and observe the Angels in their natural habitat of Northern California in 1965, where Oakland Chapter President Sonny Barger ruled and called shots for all Angels, pg. 42. The book reads like a mix of journalism, magazine article, and detailed report of lawlessness. Thompson does a great job of telling the history, social organization, the origin of their name, and other up-close-and-personal details of these outlaws compared to "Genghis Khan on an iron horse", pg. 3Thompson also goes into a brief history of the motorcycle in America, the post-WWII scene, and how young men gravitated towards what became the motorcycle outlaw culture. Thompson explains all kinds of things unique to this way of life: the partying, the riding, details about their motorcycles, social and club hierarchy, and even women's roles (old ladies, mamas, strange broads).I thoroughly enjoyed this the entire way. I think Hunter S. Thompson was a gifted writer because he had the ability to put voice into his writing. This book can be graphic and violent at times but it's anything but boring. I would recommend it if you've enjoyed other Hunter S. Thompson books. Thanks!September 23, 2012Trigger Warning: violence, rape, etc.Hunter S. Thompson's Hell's Angels purports to be an inside look at the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang, but in the end it's little more than Thompson striking poses as an "insider" and issuing apologias for everything the Angels have done or are alleged to have done. For example, he frequently refers to them as rapists (and to their penchant for rape), but when it comes to specific incidents, he becomes a rape apologist, resorting to tactics ranging from the ridiculous to the outright misogynist to explain it away. Either it never really happened, or the girls/women involved "wanted it," or "it was wrong, but was it really-rape?"--that sort of thing. He refers often to their love of violence, but considers it either overblown or rather charming until he gets "stomped" himself. Incidentally, it isn't until he falls out of favor with the Angels (and is later stomped) that he manages to take a clearer look at what their lifestyle entails: actual violence with real consequences; poverty; drug abuse; ultimately, a dead-end existence. (He throws in some "decline of American culture" and "new, evil delinquency of America's youth" business for good measure. I thought he'd been using too much acid and casually observing too many gang-rapes to have any room to speak there, but I imagine Mr. Thompson disagreed.)The casualness of his attitude towards the Hell's Angels' violence against women and outright misogyny is only surpassed by his casual embrace of their racism. The Angels enthusiastically display Nazi symbols (swastikas primarily), but when confronted by the press, they typically deny being "actual" Nazi sympathizers and claim they just want to freak people out--but you know, there were some good things about those Nazis, of course, the way they had each others' backs and all! Thompson lets all of this slide. (Maybe the rest of the press did, too.) Thompson does like to point to the three or four Angels affiliates who don't happen to be white, even though he writes clearly later in the book that one in particular will never get in because he's black. The Angels throw around racial slurs with abandon and disparage those scary, angry black people who keep rioting (the book is set in, and was originally published in, the early to mid 1960s), as do the police; Thompson lets it all pass. He goes out of his way to note that the Angels are capable of getting along with mostly-black motorcycle gangs, and uses that to excuse their obvious racism. Ultimately, I don't feel like I learned much about the Hell's Angels from Hunter S. Thompson. I feel as though I learned about how Hunter S. Thompson felt special being allowed to hang out with the Angels for about a year, and how he used that time to try to explain away every bad thing anyone could ever say about America's most notorious motorcycle gang. He idolized them as "outlaws"--using an odd definition of "outlaw" that later also included Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor, and Charlie Starkweather (some of these are not like the others. I mean REALLY). He waxed poetic about how "some people" found them heroic, but never said why anyone would find them worth looking up to. Maybe the book as a whole is the answer to that: nearly three hundred pages of a writer who liked to party and felt like he got to roll with the Cool Kids for a while.historical-nonfiction nonfictionApril 18, 2008Hunter S. Thompson's first book, Hell's Angels is not nearly as "gonzo" or as good as his later writings and not nearly as fresh and fascinating as, say, Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. Hell's Angels is a far more straightforward piece of journalism than HST's later work but it is still an interesting read some 45 years on (certainly no small feat).For one, it is cursorily interesting in how Hell's Angels has quickly become outdated with references like, "Hell, eight dollars was a case of beer and gas back to Oakland." Because now eight dollars will probably get you a 6-pack or enough gas to get out of the station.But more importantly than that, Hell's Angels, written about a 3-year period ('64-'66), describes a country's utter fixation and fear about a perceived menace. And reading it in 2008, it all seems rather quaint and foolish. Motorcycle gangs? Really? The subtitle is "A Strange and Terrible Saga." Reading it now, it just doesn't seem very strange and terrible at all. And not much of a saga either.And that makes me wonder about our current era's perceived threats. Terrorists. Immigrants. Religious Fundamentalists. Health Care. Global Warming. Food Production. Disease. Radical Economists. Nefarious CEOs. Dwindling Natural Resources. Greedy and Compromised Politicians. Will they all seem quaint and insignificant in forty years?I read books like The Shock Doctrine and Under the Banner of Heaven and Fiasco, and confidently throw them across the room in a violent rage knowing that I have found our age's plague. How naïve and simple am I?So what wicked monsters wait for us in the future to render our current perils dust bunnies in a dollhouse?Hell's Angels is important, like all of Thompson's writing, for his uncanny ability to summarize the consequence of whatever it is he has set his special acuity upon, this case motorcycle gangs. In Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas it was the American Dream and the 70s hippie movement. In Hell's Angels, Thompson does not, nor did he ever, shy from bludgeoning his subjects with the cruel truth. HST had a special ability to place his topics in context, which, if you read Pierre Bayard, is all that matters.February 12, 2025The Hells Angels were founded in California in the late 1940s and rose to infamy in the mid-1960s following several high-profile events of alleged mass violence and sexual assault. National media coverage terrified both the public and authorities. However, they were also a morbid spectacle. These unkempt, tattooed, and drunk men, often vulgar, violent, and impoverished, were another facet to the 1960s counter culture and anti-establishment movement. Their obnoxiously loud Harley Davidsons gave them their freedom, and their winged death head patches gave them their identity. They were misfits left behind in America's post-war posterity. Hunter S. Thompson hung out with the Hells Angels for a year. He attended their notorious parties, befriended some members, and provided an anthropological study of them in this book. Contrary to sensationalist media reportage, Thompson argues that although lawless, they were largely harmless to the broader public. Hells Angel members were essentially losers that had failed to adapt to modern society. Although likely revelatory at the time of publishing, I found the book repetitive, with Thompson retelling several similar stories. Perhaps this is more of a reflection of the Hells Angels themselves: a vapid organisation masked in violence. Unfortunately, this microcosm of American counterculture spread throughout the world in the coming decades. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are colloquially referred to as bikies in Australia. Hells Angels, Comancheros, Gypsy Jokers, etc, are pathetic organisations that deal in organised crime. They still get undue media attention. An assassination of a high-profile bikie in the city I live in received absurd media veneration a few years ago. These groups are ruining the most disadvantaged communities in the country by trafficking drugs like meth. Their petty and fatal turf wars also spill over into the public domain. Society would be better off without them.December 31, 2024I reread this a few months ago and found it to be just as wild a ride as I'd remembered. Early-era Thompson was such a great observer. I got it into my head that I would write a really boffo

review to do the book justice- but those reviews are often the ones I end up not writing, or writing inadequately. In any case, maybe next year. 2024 is running on fumes.2020s 2024 california January 23, 2021A well rounded survey of the gang in their forrays, their ramblings, their symbols, their coverage, and their blunders too.Matching Soundtrack : Peasantry Or 'Light! Inside of Light!' - GSY!BENovember 30, 2008I just read this for perhaps the fifth time. From this book up to about 1978 Hunter was at his peak and every book he wrote in that period is writing of the highest order. The guy was a major American prose stylist. Those of you who may scoff at this assertion will one day realize that I'm right. Hunter doesn't get nearly enough credit for being the very intelligent guy he was, and that intelligence is very visible in this book, written before the character of Hunter Thompson was developed enough to get in between the text and the reader. The guy simply knows his shit. His use of literary references alone is interesting, revealing a real understanding of just about everything that had come before, especially everything American. If somebody hasn't written a thesis comparing Hunter to Mark Twain yet, they should. If you scoff at that, go read "Life on the Mississippi" and then call me. Also, Hunter was a very good, very professional journalist. All his facts are straight, his figures are correct and his opinions and analysis are always labeled as such. This is a home run.February 8, 2024***SPOILERS ALERT***Hell’s Angel’s is an account of the exaggerated myths, the terrible truths, the origins, motivations and the ethos of the motorcycle gang that terrorized American cities and small towns in the 1960s. A substantial portion of the book is dedicated to disproving the myths about the Angel’s which were created by a paranoid American media. Thompson investigates negative news reports about the Angels and shows how most of them were biased and hollow. But he also harbors no illusions about the Angels. He writes about them with a mix of fascination and disgust. While he is mostly sympathetic to their cause (which involves riding across the country on motorcycles, getting stone drunk and occasionally raping women), he does admit that he would have pulled a gun if the Angel’s ever rode into the town where he lived. He also busts any romantic notions that hippies, anti-war activists (Ken Kesey and Allen Ginsberg) and student activists might have about the Angel’s by showing that despite their anti-social image, they were fiercely patriotic and also very racist. Thompson traces their origins to the Linkhorns who came to California as slave laborers. The Second World War left many of these Linkhorns with separation bonuses which they spent on motorcycles in a new rootless world. When it came to women, the Angels were not unlike conservative religious societies. They were men who would not shy away from rape, often indulging in gang rape of women who ditched a member or gave out information to the wrong people. Even though the subject matter is very interesting, a book like this can end up as a failure in the hands of a lesser writer. While I found the first 100 pages to be a bit tedious with Thompson rebutting many negative articles about the Angels and their celebrity, there were some interesting bits like when he explains why California was the perfect home for the Angels. His description of the Angel’s machines (Harley 74’s) and how they came into being went a little over my head because I am not interested in bikes. Thompson writes clear sentences of medium length. His humor (and there is a lot of it) is caged in with occasional outbursts. His commentary on why the whole of American is fascinated with the Hell’s Angels is what truly makes this book a pleasure to read. For example: “There is an important difference between the words 'losers' and 'outlaw.' One is passive and the other is active, and the main reason the Angels are such good copy is that they are acting out the day-dreams of millions of losers who don't wear any defiant insignia and who don't know how to be outlaws. The streets of every city are thronged with men who would pay all the money they could get their hands on to be transformed-even for a day-into hairy, hard-fisted brutes who walk over cops, extort free drinks from terrified bartenders and thunder out of town on big motorcycles after raping the banker's daughter. Even people who think the Angels should all be put to sleep find it easy to identify with them. They command a fascination, however reluctant, that borders on psychic masturbation.” In the end, this book is about Hunter.S.Thompson as much as it is about the Hell’s Angels. You’ve got to admire this man. He was married with a kid when he collected material for this book. He got in his car and followed the Hell’s Angels across America, often sleeping in his car which had a large beer cooler. He became friends with some of the Angels and lived with them for almost a year, hanging out with them in bars, taking drugs and even riding with them. It was a life well lived.November 21, 2017This was the first hunter Thompson book I ever read and made me an instant fan of his work.Talk about a man who wanted to see the world from every angle. The scene I remember most was when he talked about the Angels getting hooked on acid. It was one thing they had in common with the hippies they hated, the difference being the angels didn’t necessarily take LSD because they loved its effects. While the merry pranksters were all about the hallucinations, the angels only took it because it was the cheapest drug they could find and any high was better than being sober.January 10, 2018Almost gave this 5 stars but HST padded the final 100 pages with about 50 unnecessary pages full of statistics, fantasies, and a ridiculous chapter on a riot in a Sierra national park that never occurs .The rest of the book is just about perfect.You can see in this, his first book that Hunter S. Thompson emerged on the publishing scene a true flame breathing dragon of a journalist.Highest Recommendation.June 6, 2015Drinking with the bikies21 April 2012 I had been meaning to read this book for quite a while; ever since a friend of mine mentioned it to me years ago. Penguin then decided to release a number of books in a new mass market format, similar to their original releases back in the early days of the company. The books that they released in this new format were inexpensive and were collected from various authors throughout history. I actually appreciated this because they selected a lot of lesser known books that I probably would not have read if I had not seen them. One of the books that I grabbed was Junky by William Burroughs, and the other was this one. The reason I grabbed them because not only were they short, but they also fell into the category of 'dodgy'. I say 'dodgy' because in many ways they are not the sort of books that the average middle class reader would pick up and read, but then again the average middle class reader is likely to pick up and read airport trash (though this is not strictly the case, particularly with some of the avid readers that I know at work). The opening sentence of this book captivated me, and I cannot remember it strictly especially since I do not have a copy of the book on hand. Hold it, isn't that what the internet is for? The description of the Hell's Angels rider 'like Gengis Kahn on an iron horse, a monster steed with a firey anus' simply captivated me to a point that I could not put it down. I had read Thompson before (Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas) and I must admit that I found that book really amusing, however this was the first time that I had decided to return to his writings to see what he was like with his other books. I must admit that his style of journalism, called Gonzo Journalism, is different and refreshing. Thompson takes us on a tour through what he considers to be a 'misunderstood part of American culture'. This book was written during the Vietnam War so at this stage the bikie clubs had not had their ranks filled with returning vets. However, at one point he does describe the 'Linkhorns': the indentured labourers and poor people who had come over to the United States in hope of finding a better life but never actually doing so. As such they continue to move off to the west in an attempt to better their life, which never actually comes, and instead of finding a new land and wealth for themselves, they simply fall into the dark undercurrents of the society that is developing. In many cases people suggest that the Hell's Angels of this book and the Hell's Angels of today are two different organisations. I cannot vouch for that statement as my interaction with bikie gangs have been limited at best. I have known people who have been connected, and I have spoken with them about things, but myself, I have never really been involved. It is interesting though because our government seemed to take a disliking to the bikie gangs above and beyond the normal distrust. There was a section of Adelaide where they used to congregated, but the bulldozers moved in, flattened the suburb, and put up new, and more expensive, townhouses in their place. They also enacted laws (since struck down by the High Court of Australia) banning the groups and any such associations. Thank God that the High Court intervened, because I can assure you that while today it is the Hell's Angels, tomorrow it is the Greens, the Christians, and the Liberal Party Supporters. It is a bit of a shame that I cannot remember this book too well, but what Thompson tries to paint is that all they really are is a misunderstood subculture. Okay, at the end they go to town on him, but as it turns out it was because he never actually told them that he was going to write a book about them and that he was researching their lifestyle. Throughout the book we are reminded of how the police go out of their way to persecute and harass, so they will be cautious nonetheless. Thus when it comes to light that Thompson is writing about them no wonder they are pissed. We do go on a journey with them, and meet the bikie girls and enjoy a weekend at a lake. In many cases there seems to just be an awful lot of alcohol, but the drugs do come into the scene. We meet Ken Kesey at the end of the book having one of his massive drug parties, and in a way I was surprised to encounter this side of Kesey. I remember reading One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in high school and was stunned to discover that the writings of this drug fiend is being promoted in our schools. Hey, I don't particularly care, and as one friend of mine said, if 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' is the worst book that schools are forcing children to read then she would be happy. This is a short, well written, and entertaining book. I cannot vouch for whether it is relevant today in that much has changed over the years. I cannot even say if it is relevant to Australia. While Thompson does try to open up a 'misunderstood' subculture in America, I still note that it is a violent subculture, and I must admit that I am a delicate person who really does not like to get into fights, or at least physical fights. However, I guess this is simply the nature of males, in that when angry they lash out in anger but two days later they will be back in the same pub drinking beer. However, I'm not entirely convinced of this description, as males are also more than capable of holding grudges, and I suspect that the higher up the food chain you go, the more likely they are to hold grudges (I know I do, even though I paint it over with the veneer of respect and trust, but that is an argument and discussion for another day).March 13, 2009Still the best book about bikers ever written - and completely unromanticized, too. Their lifestyle is shown in all its greasy and grimy glory. And Hunter took a bad stomping at the end of the book by some vicious Angels. Written over forty years ago and still rawer than a lot of shit out there!January 29, 2009Both Hunter S. Thompson and the Hell's Angels bring preconceived notions to mind:Thompson was a crazy sonofabitch. He was a nutbag druggie who liked to blow things up.The Hell's Angel's are crazy motherfuckers. Remember Altamont? They killed like 500 people while providing concert security for the Rolling Stones.Both of these notions have some basis in reality. Thompson liked drugs and blowing things up. The Hell's Angels did provide security at Altamont, where one person was killed by an Angel (in self-defense).It is very fitting that Thompson got close to the Angels in order to write a book, Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga (1969). This book is definitely in the vein of Gonzo journalism—Thompson spends nearly a year with the Angels, drinking, going on runs, and having close encounters with the lawmen.Don't expect to read about some elaborate ritual where Thompson gets initiated into the gang. That doesn't happen. He just hangs around with them enough that they start trusting him (and he doesn't even ride a Harley, but a British bike!). He sees firsthand what runs are like, what parties are like, and what the members do when they aren't together. Turns out the Angels are much more tame than their reputation sells them.Many are married with a mortgage, but some are unemployed couch-surfers. Neither is unique to the Angels—I'm sure you'll find both types in a Scrapbooking club.But no one has quite the reputation of the Angels. So, where did this reputation come from?Guess, c'mon...Five seconds...Ok, it was the press. Media is responsible for making the Angels simultaneously feared and revered. Thompson uses excerpts from articles and reports to show how this happened. You may have heard how Thompson got "stomped" out of the club—that's such a brief part of the story, it's in postscript.Point being, don't read this book expecting to see how brutally Thompson was beat by the Angels. That is not what it is about. It's about a group of men finding common ground and forming a club. The club—and its members and their actions—get blown out of proportion by the media to become a symbol for all that is wrong with sex, drugs, and motorcycles.Really, they aren't that bad. That's not to say they are good—they just aren't that bad.I highly recommend reading it, especially if you haven't read anything by Thompson before. I also recommend reading it if you're looking to start a much-feared gang... everything comes down to reputation.December 17, 2019Gentlemen, start your engines. An absolutely stunning debut for any writer.Thompson writes with knife-like precision and an eye for detail that pegs him as a born journalist but an ingenuity and original style that puts him in a league of his own. Sometimes he writes like a scientist, or like David Attenborough, describing a new rare species of gorillas that he has suddenly come upon in the jungle as in the following lines..."Probably the most universal common denominator in identification of Hell's Angels is their generally filthy condition." (page 8) They were the original 1%-ers before it took on a broader swathe of the population in modern terms to basically mean the 'underdog.' Their shaky relationship with the AMA (American Motorcycle Association) is also interesting to read about. Another of Hunter's many strengths is his ability to stand inside the shoes of various parties involved in the story. Often considered a 'nuisance' to normal regular run-of-the-mill drivers on the American highway, Hunter paints a description of the Angels through their eyes, "The southbound lanes were crowded with taxpayers heading out for a Labor Day weekend that suddenly seemed tinged with horror as the Angel band swept past...this animal crowd on big wheels, going somewhere public, all noise and hair and bust-out raping instincts...the temptation for many a motorist was to swing hard left, with no warning, and crush these arrogant scorpions." (page 11)HST deftly traces the outlaw motorcycle gang's swift rise to universal notoriety but through his gonzo-journalism method, in which he joins in the action as a somewhat 'neutral' bystander offering firsthand accounts of what went down, he is able to lift the 'deadly fictions' of the press from our eyes, chase away the mist, and show us the true angels, bare bones and all: "Weird as it seems, as this gange of costumed hoodlums converged on Monterey that morning they were on the verge of 'making it big,' as the showbiz people say, and they would owe most of their success to a curious rape mania that rides on the shoulder of American journalism like some jeering, masturbating raven." (page 13). As you can see Hunter has a very gentle tongue-in-cheek way of poking fun at the excesses and exaggerations of the press but he does it with real panache. At other times, he is more direct and at these times, he makes sure not mince his words: "If the 'Hells Angels Saga' proved any one thing, it was the awesome power of the New York press establishment." (page 34). So why was everyone so interested in the Hells Angels to begin with? Weren't they just a bunch of undereducated drunken and disorderly hoods riding around on motorcycles? Well, once again Thompson skillfully analyzes our thirst and interest in their primitive ways with the precision of an expert dart-thrower: "The concept of the 'motorcycle outlaw' was as uniquely American as jazz. Nothing like them ever existed. In some ways they appeared to be a kind of half-breed anachronism, a human hangover from the era of the Wild West." It is also just, to put it simply, great original writing that engages with the reader effortlessly. Thompson's prose borders on poetic at times in his description of the boys he is riding with"To see a lone Angel screaming through traffic - defying all rules, limits and patterns - is to understand the motorcycle as an instrument of anarchy, a tool of defiance and even a weapon." (page 85) Although Hunter got quite close to these outlaws, he is able to distance himself away from them at arm's length to avoid being overly subjective in his analysis or overly romantic about these guys being 'heros': "There is something pathetic about a bunch of men gathering every night in the same bar, taking themselves very seriously in their ratty uniforms, with nothing to look forward to but the chance of a fight or a round of head jobs from some drunken charwoman." (page 85) In other parts of the book he offers us such a clear, level-headed and dispassionate overview of their way of life that if anyone reading this thinks of wanting to become an Angel, they would probably think twice after reading Hunter's assessment of them: "When the party swings right, with plenty of beer and broads, being an Angel is a pretty good way to go. But on some of those lonely afternoons when you're fighting a toothache and trying to scrape up a few dollars to pay a traffic fine and the landlord has changed the lock on your door until you pay the back rent...then it's no fun being an Angel." (page 247)What sets the Angels apart from other motorcycle riders then? "Later, after riding a few months, I understood that the difference between a Hell's Angel on a hog and a white-collar bike buff on a race-tuned Triumph is not all in the engine. The Angels push their luck to the limit. They take drastic risks with no thought at all. As individuals they have been busted, excluded and defeated in so many ways that they are not about to be polite or careful in the one area where they have an edge." (page 89) Once again, Hunter nails it right on the head. Not only did I enjoy Hunter's highly idiosyncratic and often humorous descriptions of the Angels, but I also loved reading his incisive social commentary, in which he tries to look at the wider picture and context within which he tries to 'situate' the Angels, the background, and their raison d'etre (reason for being): "It may be that America is developing a whole new category of essentially social criminals...persons who threaten the police and the traditional social structure even when they are breaking no law...because they view The Law with contempt and the police with distrust, and this abiding resentment can explode without warning at the slightest provocation." (page 103) Their habitual drug-taking is more well-known thanks to the press and Hunter comments on that here too: "The Angels deal freely on the black market, and if any pill really worked as a substitute for food they would use it in large quantities, for it would vastly simplify their lives." (page 165)Despite being outlaws, Hunter talks about the certain unwritten codes that the Angels all adopt and are aware of: "Girls cook for them, waitresses give them 'credit' at greasy diners, and there are always the married men, whose wives rarely balk at feeding five or six of the brethren at any hour of the day or night. According to the code, there is no such thing as one Angel imposing on another. A hungry outlaw will always be fed by one of the others who has food..." (page 165) Hunter's humour is another strong point of his writing and his descriptions of cops, public figures and politicians gave me a good chuckle as I was reading this: "We talked on the phone for about an hour one Thursday morning. I was so fascinated that I couldn't hang up. The mayor spoke in a very exotic way. It was obvious that he was a man who marched through life to the rhythms of some drum I would never hear." (page 215) There are various other questions that the reader has in his/her mind about the Angels and Thompson appears to be able to tap into these queries, very intuitively, and answer each one in turn in a very satisfying manner to the reader. One of these questions is 'why are they often so violent?' or 'from where do they get the image of being so violent?' (which are actually two very different questions)Thompson: "There is not much mental distance between a feeling of having been screwed and the ethic of total retaliation, or at least the kind of random revenge that comes with outraging the public decency." (page 248) So how do non-sociologists, like Hunter, account for their existence in the first place? "Far from being freaks, the Hell's Angels are a logical product of the culture that now claims to be shocked at their existence. The generation represented by the editors of Time has lived so long in a world full of Celluloid outlaws hustling toothpaste and hair oil that it is no longer capable of confronting the real thing." (page 251)If you want to read a writer who, metaphorically, 'takes no prisoners', then read Hunter S. Thompson. He is about as good as it gets. And as one Amazon reviewer put it - Thompson's best book is not Fear and Loathing in Los Vegas (although I enjoyed that book very much too) but it's this - Hell's Angels. His masterpiece.drugs gonzo-journalism modern-classicNovember 19, 2017I've never read Hunter S. Thompson before and after reading this I don't understand his appeal at all. He's a tourist. He wants to tell us how he hung out with a bunch of big, bad biker criminals and how they were cool with him. When he manages to stop talking about himself his writing is almost totally incoherent. He argues that the media created a hysteria around the Hell's Angels, but then goes on to tell us about terrible stuff he witnessed them doing. The absolute nadir of the book is when Thompson explains away the numerous rape charges against the hells angels as the result of women who really wanted it, but changed their mind afterward and even if it was really rape doesn't every woman deep down inside really wonder what it's like to be raped?June 9, 2015The book that cemented Thompson’s reputation as the premier journalist of the crazed, and deservedly so. Thompson rode and hung with the Angels for a couple of years, and he presents them, at the height of their notoriety, through his own cynical, paranoiac freak prism. So we see the Angels as bearded, drooling, vicious outlaws ready to rape or stomp anything and anyone who crosses their path, but we also see them as tired old goons, knowing full well that they’re losers, and just trying to hang on to the little they have that separates them from total ruin.Another journalist, one less inclined toward exaggerated menace, might have told a more straightforward story. One with more facts, and more intent on capturing the human angle on the Angels. But then, that book, ironically, probably would have been a skewed and misleading picture, for the Angels wouldn’t have allowed it. Thompson’s wild ride includes a lot of scary stuff – the Angel who likes to pull out victims’ teeth with a rusty wrench is a particularly effective picture – and ends with violence. But for all his Gonzo madness, he actually deflates the Angel image more than he contributes to it. Twenty-five years later, though its subject may have waned, this book still stands out as effective and vivid journalism. [read twice]August 19, 2016This was an interesting book, it feels like he couldn't decide on what type of book he wanted to write. At times it is a piece of journalism, trying to uncover the truth of the Hell's Angels from the myth created by the news media. We know they are prone to exaggerating/making up stuff, but it is really surprising just how much bullshit they got away with writing about the Angels. The book also seems to be a nature documentary too, describing angels as if they were animals.Hunter S. Thompson spends a lot of his time on edge, ready to leg it at the slightest chance of danger, being with Hell's Angels means he was on edge the whole time, even winding up his windows when sleeping in his car so they couldn't get to him. Some of the stuff they did to their "Mates" when they had passed out was pure class, cuffing their arms and legs to radiators, then lighting a few boxes of matches and dropping it on their crotch to wake them up. Can't wait to give that a go at the next family gathering.I'm a big fan of Hunter's books and this one doesn't disappoint. May 4, 2023My second HST book after Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. One thing I admire is his complete dedication and immersion to Gonzo Journalism. Riding along with The Hell's Angels for a year and documenting the whole bizarre and harrowing journey along the way. No other journalist today would dare put themselves into the kind of situations that Hunter did. Despite my problems with the book itself, I can't deny the tremendous effort here. Can't imagine what people thought when this came out in 1966.February 15, 2019I have to admit, I am amazed. I got this book on sale and I didn't know what to expect. I thought that it might be an interesting little side journey into a part of the human experience I know very little about. I never figured that a fifty-year-old book about the world's most famous biker gang could be this fascinating and fun. It holds up beautifully after all this time. This is the first book I've read by Mr. Gonzo Journalism and I'm certainly open to it not being the last. He really was a hell of a writer.This is not so much a history of the Hells Angels as it is a snapshot of an era, of what they were in the mid-60s with a little bit of the back story filled in. It came across, to me, as a very fair and evenhanded assessment of outlaw bikers at that time. I recommend this one highly.I'd just like to add something. If I'd read this book twenty or thirty years ago, I would've been horrified, for a lot of reasons. The scenes of what went on at those Hells Angel parties were pretty awful but looked at through the lens of today it has a new level of horror. I'm not saying that I'm proud of the fact that thirty years ago I might not have noticed so keenly how horrifying it was that those bikers felt free to gang rape a woman while she was out of her head on drugs, but there it is. Of course, to be clear, I'm not saying I would've approved back then. I certainly would've been horrified but I probably wouldn't have had any clear idea of how to process it. Thompson describes it all as though he were watching a baseball game. It was a different time but I don't think that was to his credit.So yeah, this is a terrific book but in places, you're going to need a strong stomach.history humanities nonfictionMay 18, 2020This is an important book. For one, it gives an insider's account of a counterculture, soon-to-be criminal group right during the epoch of this transition. Another cause for praise is the writing of Thompson. This is not the hyperbolic writings of his Fear and Loathing works. This is fairly straight forward, funny, and mixed with facts, statistics, and headlines to provide an overall picture of the outlaw motorcycle culture embodied by the Hell's Angels. Last, and most noteworthy, Hell's Angels is a candle shining a light on America at large. While vital to understanding the mid-1960s, Thompson's book still burns bright and illuminates much of America's contemporary dilemmas behind the grand myth of our way of life. People are forgotten and cast as outsiders within our vast republic. Most of the dispossessed accept their fate and mark time as "losers" until death comes a knocking. But, there are a few who have taken the messages in our entertainment and media to heart and will go swing chains and wield blades against an oppressive future from which there is no escape. This is the outlaw culture. While it may be a minority within the category of the "have-nots", it is American bred. Pure and simple; and dangerous. american-experience crime-mystery non-fictionNovember 17, 2018“To see the Hell’s Angels as caretakers of the old ‘individualist’ tradition ‘that made this country great’ is only a painless way to get around seeing them for what they really are - not some romantic leftover, but the first wave of a future...The Angels are prototypes. Their lack of education has not only rendered them completely useless in a highly technical economy, but it has also given them the leisure to cultivate a powerful resentment, and to translate it into a destructive cult which the mass media insist on portraying as a sort of isolated oddity...““The Angels’ collective viewpoint has always been fascistic. They insist and seem to believe that the swastika fetish is no more than an anti-social joke, a guaranteed gimmick to bug the squares...if they wanted to be artful about bugging the squares they would drop the swastikas and decorate their bikes with the hammer and sickle. That would really raise hell on the highways...”americans lurid westward-hoMarch 2, 2018such a systemic racism and rape culture perpetuating piece of 'literature'. at one point the author says "women are terrified of rape and yet in the back of every womb there is a nerve that twitches with excitement at its mention" or something extremely similar but I refuse to pick up the book to check so. the author frequently (particularly in the beginning of the book) used disgusting figures of speech "they're not Arab whores" (in reference to their old ladies I reckon) (can't remember the others but Again, mnot pickin the book back up). Also at one point thompson says the angels need a potential member to do something crazy Such As beat up a cop or **rape a waitress in her work** before they will accept them and then the literal frking next page it's like Well The Angels Say They Dont Rape So. And its like oBVIOUSLY nOT THe TrUtH and rape is brought up cOnStANTly like run of the mill shit like oh okAY tHey DonT rApE tHo fuckin hell. Also the entire just racist white supremacy shit at this point and they like omg we only wear swastikas bc it freaks y'all outttt and then being aggressive to anyone who's not white bar like 5 ppl like wowoow and black ppl Cannot join angels as a rule and they constantly using slurs and tearing down civil rights protests to "keep them in line" like wow great and they tore down protests against vietnam war and bashed protesters like it's all a joke man honestly Also constantly thompson states how crazy and wild the angels are and how they'd do anything, and then like 3 paragraphs later the preferred reading or whatever is literally suggesting the police give the angels an overly hard time and it's so unjust like come oN and the cops and politicians are meant to be the bad guys but they're Super Not like I don't much like them either ##badboi but oh no they're so terrible if they're trying to stop a bunch of dickheads who's sole purpose in life is to ruin others' than really what is the problem. I'm glad he gets bashed at the end and I wish he elaborated further bc I Relished it. Also there are a lot of spelling errors littered throughout the book.August 1, 2014Rape, lead pipe to the teeth, gang bangs, LSD, motorcycle outlaws roaming across California. Nobody is better qualified, or crazy enough, to live and ride with the Hell's Angels for two years. The result of Hunter's "strange and terrible saga" was his book Hell's Angels and a savage beating stopped just short of having his head caved in with a massive rock. Luckily, he was not brained.The book reads like a massive magazine article, spattered with person experiences, and occasionally graced with socio-philosophical insights. Despite the drug induced mania, Hunter upheld his integrity as a reporter. He never resorted to sensationalizing his story and made it point to denounce government and news agencies that reported exaggerations to a fearful public. Even the most heinous acts of sex and violence are written with cool objectivity.As an example of traditional journalism, it is a failure. Hunter became too immersed. The outlaw motorcycle culture was starting to consume him. His justifiable paranoia gnawed him into desperation. Yet, the book is a supreme illustration of Gonzo journalism--disregarding all boundaries except honesty (within reason).July 30, 2017"Everyone an outlaw, until it time to do outlaw shit."I picked this up because THE NATION recommended that if I, a pasty suburban leftie liberal, wanted to understand the "forgotten man" Trump voter, I should read this. I find out near the the end, that the goddamn NATION magazine paid the tab on HST's drink account to dictate this into a handheld tape recorder. Shady. But the suggestion is not "that" wrong. As with everything HST wrote, there is a near perfect, poetic epiphany right near the end of the article/book that just sparks with soul cleansing crystal magic poetry. In the case of the Angels, HST crafts it out of the sheer loserdom that defines the cyclists' whole reason for being. "In terms of the Great Society the Hell's Angels and their ilk are losers - dropouts, failures and malcontents. They are rejects looking for a way to get even with a world in which they are only a problem. The Hell's Angels are not visionaries, but diehards, and if they are forerunners of the vanguard of anything it is not the "moral revolution" in vogue on college campuses, but a fast-growing legion of young unemployables whose trapped energy will inevitably find the same kind of destructive outlet that "outlaws" like the Hell's Angels have been finding for years. The difference between the student radicals and the Hell's Angels is that the students are rebelling against he past, while the Angels are fighting the future. Their only common ground is their disdain for the present, or the status quo." p. 256-257.Lost by their own hobbying, lost by their own addictions, lost by their own purposeful sense of community and belonging. But still given a certain nodding respect by conservative society and it's wide belted police force. Because, the Angels, are, when it is said and done, still young white boys and probably could be rehabilitated. HST does an amazing thing, much like Arendt, he unpacks the bluster to strip the myth down to the most banal reality of the outlaw. While he never coins the phrase, the HELL'S ANGELS can be seen as a study in the "banality of hooliganism." The long stretch where HST does a play by play of the party at Bear Lake illustrates just how absurd the whole game of cat and mouse becomes - where the most dangerous thing are the "squares" armed to the teeth and those teeth floating in a bile of pent up fearful rage. The begrudging respect the police afford the motorcycle revelers and the pure drunken inaction of the revelers themselves, puts a fine point on the weekend adventure. But there are honestly disgusting and troubling aspects to the Angel's - their attitude toward women, sex, and rape is primal and tribal. But, I wonder, to what extent does their embrace of demeaning and owning women, beating them into submission, and forcibly raping them did not just give full articulation to the mores of the post-war American spirit? Not to mention their reactionary racism. While they seem to have no issue with individual blacks, they hate "the blacks" writ large. They fear retaliation after kicking the shit out of a young black guy in their bar. The white paranoia was conservative and unironically embracing the "law and order" tactics that are used to corral and harass them, as well. But the most embarrassing part of the book is when the Keasey/Ginsburg crowd adopts the Angels. I mean why wouldn't old Uncle Alan want to make it with some greasy smelling bears while quoting Whitman as he came? The Angels were made for his fiddling bits, the slumming would be delicious. He even wrote a four page nonsense poem about them - under the pretext of convincing them not to wail on his gentle anti-war protesting friends. Oh the wiles of the poet, his song weakening the brutal heart of the barbarian to spare the valley of the river nymphs!Bleck. HST's book is an artifact to a time when America was still outraged by the unkempt appearance of the Hell's Angels, before the "look" became ubiquitous. Now the sight of a bearded, shirtless, leather vested man's man roaring down the highway, spilling beer and flipping off the camera is used to sell watches to stock brokers, not to instill fear into the hearts of upstanding mom and dads.And maybe that is what the Trump supporters are most angry about. They are no longer feared and their existence considered outlaw. They are "forgotten" because their idea of outlaw culture is no longer outlaw.Displaying 1 - 30 of 2,155 reviewsGet help and learn more about the design. Table of Contents What is Hell’s Angels about? This book chronicles Hunter S. Thompson’s year-long immersion with the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang. In the mid-1960s, Thompson connects with a world of outlaws, lawlessness, and wild behavior. He seeks to uncover their public persona versus their reality. However, his journey takes a turn when he faces the violent side of their culture firsthand. Book Details Title: Hell’s Angels Author: Hunter S. Thompson Publisher: First published February 17, 1966 Pages: 295 pages Genres: Nonfiction, History, Journalism, Memoir, Biography, True Crime Language: English Rating: 3.98 (50,816 ratings, 2,023 reviews) Synopsis of Hell’s AngelsIntroduction to Hunter S. Thompson’s Bold Exploration Hunter S. Thompson’s “Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga” presents a raw narrative about an infamous motorcycle gang in America. Released in 1966, the book details a year spent riding and observing the infamous Hell’s Angels. Thompson, a journalist in the heart of San Francisco, encounters a unique subculture that shaped the era. His writing illustrates the chaotic, lawless world of the bikers, blending personal experience with commentary on their societal impact. The book serves as both an indictment and exploration of the gang, capturing their notorious exploits and defying many media-driven myths. Life Among the Angels: The Immersion of Gonzo Journalism In “Hell’s Angels,” Thompson immerses himself within the gang’s world. He befriends members, parties with them and takes readers along for the ride. He paints a vivid picture of life on the road, filled with beer, drugs, and reckless joyrides. His friends among the Angels share their lives, experiences, and camaraderie in a way that flips common perceptions upside down. The narrative reveals the humanity behind the brooding riders. Thompson describes wild parties where the Angels indulge in substances. He shares these moments with a blend of admiration and disbelief. However, he doesn’t shy away from the gang’s violent reputation, often drawing attention to their lawless behavior. The surreal experiences seem irresistible, yet they expose the danger and unpredictability Thompson faces. This immersion culminates in a dramatic climax. After refusing to share his royalties from the stories he wrote, Thompson becomes a target. The Angels abandon him on a desolate road, leaving him battered and broken. This betrayal highlights an inherent duality in the gang; they are both fraternity and fearsome foes. Media Manipulation and Public Perception Thompson critiques the media’s portrayal of the Hell’s Angels, examining how outrageous stories proliferated through newspaper headlines. He deftly shows how the press played a role in amplifying the tensions surrounding the gang. Sensational headlines often overlooked nuanced truths. Rather than being mere villains, the Angels were products of their environment and society. Through insightful anecdotes, Thompson chronicles various encounters with the group. He reveals the absurdity of public fascination, presenting the Angels as more relatable than most would prefer. He argues that their popularity stemmed from a collective desire among Americans to see figures willing to defy societal norms. The contrast between public perception and the true life of the Angels emerges as a central theme. Thompson writes with irony, noting that the Hell’s Angels became a symbol of rebellion, even as journalists depicted them as monsters. He muses on the way fear can shape a narrative, leading readers to simultaneously revile and idolize these outlaws. His commentary serves as a more profound assessment of contemporary American culture and its fixation on outlaws. The Dark Side Within the Brotherhood Despite Thompson’s attempts at understanding the Angels, the book does not overlook their darker tendencies. He addresses violence, racial prejudices, and misogyny head-on, illustrating the gang’s complex inner workings. He contrasts their bond as brothers with their troubling actions towards women and outsiders. Moments of aggression butt up against fleeting camaraderie among members. Throughout the narrative, Thompson grapples with his feelings regarding the gang’s actions. Conversations intertwine with accounts of brutal behavior, manifested through violence or destructive impulses. He reveals the contradictions of the bikers’ existence: searching for freedom while perpetuating cycles of oppression. The stark honesty creates tension, as Thompson acknowledges both the allure and the horror of their lifestyle. His analysis of women, in particular, exposes uncomfortable truths about gender dynamics within the gang. He recounts the willingness of many Angels to engage in predatory behavior, shedding light on a culture steeped in overt misogyny. While Thompson argues that he seeks to demystify the Angels, he cannot escape the gruesome realities underpinning their brotherhood. A Lasting Legacy: America and Its Outlaws “Hell’s Angels” stands not only as a memoir but serves as a critique of American society in the 1960s. Thompson’s unique narrative challenges readers to reflect on the allure of outlaw culture. As the reader journeys with him, they encounter the blurred lines between heroism and villainy. His insights remain potent even decades later, revealing issues that persist in contemporary moments of rebellion. The book concludes with Thompson facing brutality at the hands of the Angels. This moment underscores the unpredictable relationship between him and the gang. It encapsulates the larger story of outsiders seeking identity and belonging against a backdrop of societal discontent. In summation, Hunter S. Thompson’s “Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga” remains a poignant exploration of a subculture. The book intricately weaves personal narrative, journalistic scrutiny, and social commentary, painting a vivid portrait of life on the fringes. Readers walk away with a deeper understanding of both the Hell’s Angels and the society that birthed them. From here you can jump to the Spoilers section right away. Below you can search for another book summary: Alternative Book CoverComing soon… Quotes “The Edge… There is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over.”—Hunter S. Thompson,Hell’s Angels “All my life, my heart has sought a thing I cannot name.Remembered line from a long-forgotten poem”—Hunter S. Thompson,Hell’s Angels “It was obvious that he was a man who marched through life to the rhythms of some drum I would never hear.”—Hunter S. Thompson,Hell’s Angels You want to give Hell a try? Here you go! Characters Hunter S. Thompson: The author and narrator, he immerses himself in Angel culture. His unique perspective brings both humor and critical insight. Sonny Barger: The president of the Oakland chapter of the Hell’s Angels. He is a central figure in the gang’s social structure. Hell’s Angels Members: Various unnamed members showcase the lifestyle of the gang, embodying the rebellious spirit and chaos. Highlights Gonzo Journalism: Thompson’s unique style blends personal narrative with journalism, making his experiences visceral and engaging. Media Representation: The book critiques how the media sensationalizes the Angels, contrasting image versus reality. Violence and Misogyny: Thompson does not shy away from depicting the gang’s troubling behaviors, demanding critical reflection. Spoilers Spoiler Alert! If you want to read the book, don’t click “Show more” and spoil your experience. Here is a link for you to get the book. The Turning Point: Thompson becomes a target when he refuses to share royalties, resulting in a brutal assault by the Angels. Gang Life: The depiction of the Angels as both feared outlaws and ordinary men challenges stereotypes. Insider Perspective: Thompson’s journey reveals the duality of the Angels’ existence, living as both rebels and societal rejects. Let us know what you think about this book and the summary in the comment section at the end of the page. FAQs about Hell’s Angels Thompson employs Gonzo journalism, merging personal experience with traditional reporting.While Thompson portrays the Angels’ lives intimately, his perspective is subjective and critical.The book explores themes of identity, rebellion, and the impact of media on cultural perceptions.Yes, the book does include graphic and violent scenarios, reflecting the harsh reality of gang life.It serves as a cultural commentary on America in the 1960s, connecting the past with contemporary issues. Reviews For an in-depth look at Hell’s Angels and to explore both its praises and criticisms, check out our full review. Are you looking for a nice read that perfectly fits your current mood? Here is a free book suggestion tool. It gives you suggestions based on your taste. Also a likelihood rating for each recommended book. Would you like to find the book you will love later or now? Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005) was an influential American journalist known for his unique style. He created Gonzo journalism, making himself part of the story. Famous for works like Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, he remains a legendary figure in American literature. Are you looking for a nice read that perfectly fits your current mood? Here is a free book suggestion tool. It gives you suggestions based on your taste. Also a likelihood rating for each recommended book. Would you like to find the book you will love later or now? Conclusion We hope you found this synopsis of Hell’s Angels enjoyable. Summaries are just a starting point, much like previews for films. If you liked what you’ve read, the full book offers an even deeper experience. Ready to get started? Here is the link to buy Hell’s Angels. DISCLAIMER: This book summary aims to analyze and summarize the book, not replace the original work. If you are the original author of any content on our website and would like it removed, please contact us.

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