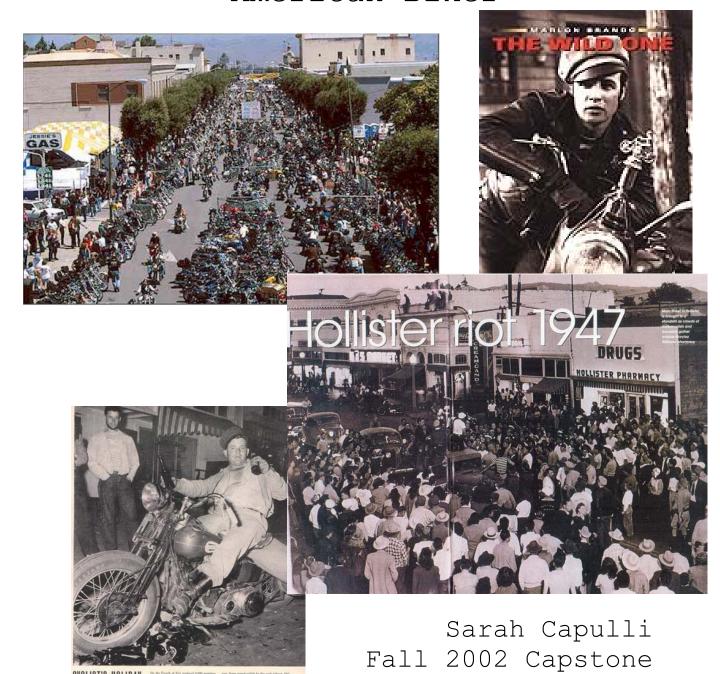
Hollister, California: Birthplace of the American Biker



Hollister, California: Birthplace of the American Biker

Sarah Capulli
December 13, 2002
Senior Capstone
Fall 2002
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Acknowledgements

San Benito County Historical Society

The Hollister Independence
Rally Committee
(www.hollisterrally.com)

Cecilia O'Leary

My Friends & Family

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Courtesy of The Hollister Independence Rally Committee

Extra! Extra!

"With several thousand motorcyclists from California, Arizona, Nevada and Oregon expected to arrive in Hollister Friday, final plans for the annual Gypsy Tour were being made today."

Author Unknown, "Motorcycle Races Will Draw Riders From Four States." <u>Hollister Evening Freelance</u>, July 2, 1947.

"Sleeping Space SoughtAny county residents
having sleeping
accommodations which they
will make available for
contestants and others
visiting Hollister during
the meet are asked to
telephone 468-M and leave
their name and address."
Author Unknown, "Three-Day Motorcycle Meet Will Begin
Tomorrow With Hill Climb." Hollister Evening Freelance,
July 3, 1947.

"The outburst of terrorism-wrecking bars, bottle barrages into the streets from upper story windows and roofs and high speed racing of motorcycles through the streets- came as participants in the annual 'Gypsy Tour' sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association converged on Hollister for a three-day meeting." C.I. Dourghty Jr., "Havok in Hollister Motorcyclists Take Over Town, Many Injured." San Francisco Chronicle, July 5, 1947.

"The 4000 visitors, about half of them operating motorcycles, almost doubled Hollister's population and created a severe housing problem. Many of them slept on haystacks on the edge of town while others simply stretched out on the court house lawn."

C.I. Dourghty Jr., "Housing Tough." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.

Read All About It...

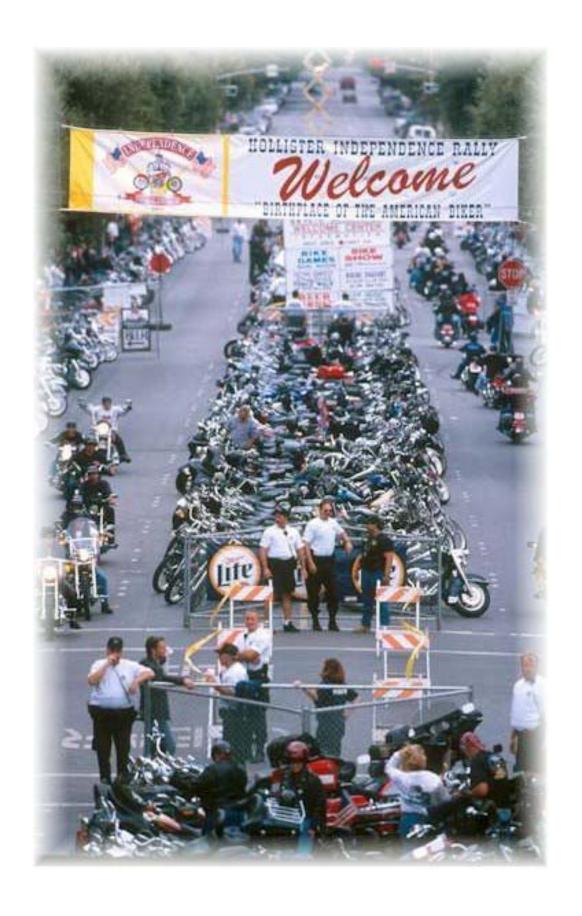
"Newspapers
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'Invasion."
Author Unknown, Title Above.
Hollister Evening Freelance,
July 7, 1947.

"Two San Francisco
newspapermen were flown
here Friday evening to
provide on-the-spot
coverage of the
motorcyclists' 'Battle of
Hollister' for the San
Francisco Chronicle."
Author Unknown, "Two S.F. Newsmen Flown Here To Cover
'Battle." Hollister Evening Freelance, July 7, 1947.

"San Benito Street, the main thoroughfare through the town, was littered with the wreckage of thousands of beer bottles, and other debris." C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.

"Battle of Hollister' Ends as Wild, Celebrating Motorcyclists Leave City." Author Unknown, Title Above. Hollister Evening Freelance, July 7, 1947. "The diminishing roar and crackle of the last of an estimated 2000 motorcycles today ended the 'worst 40 hours in Hollister history." C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.

> "2000 'Gypsycycles' Chug Out of Town and The Natives Sigh 'Never Again." C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.



Introduction

"55th anniversary comes and goes. They came almost silently, those leather-clad ghosts of 1947- but perhaps that was just the sound of the wind. What is certain is that on a clear, gorgeous Fourth of July weekend, tens of thousands (an estimated 40,000 to 100,000) of today's bikers, mostly laid-back, weekend 'rebels' came with their expensive bikes cracking, throbbing, and purring. All of it was simply to have a ride and have fun and to worship at the epicenter of the 'outlaw biker' mystique, in Hollister on San Benito Street."

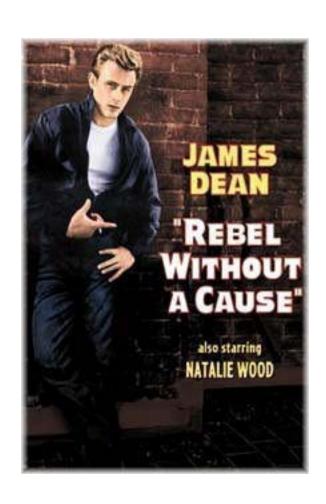
(Howard Decker, "55th Anniversary Comes and Goes." The Pinnacle, July 11, 2002, sec. A.)

In 1947 on the Fourth of July weekend, the American Motorcycle Association sponsored the Annual Gypsy Tour in Hollister, California. Between one and four thousand people attended the rally, thus doubling the population of the small agricultural community. Stories of this infamous weekend have been passed through families and the mass media for the past fifty-five years.

This year, 2002, just like the past five years, I attended the Hollister Independence Rally. I have lived in Hollister for fourteen years now and it has been just recently that I have learned about the town's legendary history. The story of the so-called "invasion" of bikers in 1947 has been told numerous times and in many different ways. It has been told through various medias including, newspaper and magazine articles, feature films, and a short story.



What is the true history of that Fourth of July weekend, 1947, in Hollister, California? While trying to determine fact from fiction, I have found that the mass media has a great influence on how we remember the past. Many people in Hollister, as well as the rest of the country, remember this event. The mass media has also "remembered" this event by documenting it, be it truly or falsely. How has the mass media shaped the way the nation remembers the Hollister Independence Rally: 1947-present?



1940's and 1950's Culture

"The utopian vision included 'replenished' families with male providers 'secure in stable careers' and female housewives 'in comfortable homes' who would 'raise perfect children."

In 1947, World War II was over and the American people were trying to get back to normalcy. Returning soldiers had to figure out where they fit into society. Women were also trying to decide how they fit into the picture.

Traditional family values were being challeged by the change in family structures during the post war years. Also at this time, juvenile delinquency was just starting to be an issue. Families, as well as the government, were changing and the youth didn't know how to react.

During the war years, men were shipped off to fight and the women went into the work place. When the war was over, the men returned to their jobs and many women returned to the home with about 30% staying in the workforce. The postwar years began the "Baby-Boom", when children symbolized a hope for the future. "Through children, men and women could set aside the difficulties of their sexual relations and celebrate the procreative results. In doing so, they also

¹ Elaine Tyler May, <u>Homeward Bound, American Families in the Cold War Era</u> (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1988) p. 58.



demonstrated their loyalty to national goals by having as many children as they could "raise right and educate and be a benefit to the world."²

With more women in the workforce, children were being put in daycare, which was no longer socially acceptable after the war, left in the company of family and friends and older children were often left unattended. Women who were not housewives were seen as "bad mothers" because they were not in their homes raising their children. "[Many agreed] that women should focus their talents and expertise on the home, and argued that the new opportunities for education and employment would reduce a woman's reproductive potential." Mothers who did not properly care for their children according to traditional American values were blamed in part for the new emergence of youth crime and violence.

Juvenile delinquency was on the rise in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The FBI reported, "young people under the age of eighteen were responsible for nearly 54 percent of all car thefts, 49 percent of all burglaries, 18 percent of all robberies, and 16 percent of all rapes." Reasons for the rise in youth crime were blamed on comic books, movies, television, divorce, the decline of the American family, rock and roll music, the rise of consumer culture, and the Communists. All of these factors may have contributed to the rise in crime, but

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² Elaine Tyler May, <u>Homeward Bound</u>, <u>American Families in the Cold War Era</u> (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1988) p. 58-60,136.

³ Ibid, p. 137.

⁴ James S. Olsen, <u>Historical Dictionary of the 1950s</u> (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), p 149-150.

⁵ Ibid.



confusion about the war, a study done in 1942 showed that 44% of high school students had no idea what the war was about and the absence of a male figure who has gone to fight in the war are also reason that may have had an influence.⁶ Parents and schoolteachers were also concerned with the image that teenagers were seeing portrayed by Hollywood through television and the movies.

In 1954, <u>The Wild One</u> featuring Marlon Brando was released. It portrayed a rebellious youth culture that society saw as a threat. The bikers in the film were depicted as miscreant outlaws that were out to corrupt American's youth. This first generation of "rock 'n' rollers" embraced the biker image because it allowed them to do whatever they wanted to do and to fly in the face of convention. "Harleys" was a term adopted to describe these adolescents who dressed the part of the biker-leather jackets, blue jeans, boots, and a cigarette dangling from their mouths.⁷

The deficiency of male role models at this crucial time of development in a teenager's life could be the reason that many young men looked to teen icons such as Marlon Brando and James Dean for guidance. These two men usually played the part of the rebel, with the leather jacket and a bad attitude. With figures like these shaping the youth of the late 40's and early 50's, it's no wonder that the post war years had so many young people feeling at odds with society and wanting to rebel.

⁶ Eugenia Kaledin, <u>Daily Life in The United States</u>, <u>1940-1959</u>, <u>Shifting Worlds</u> (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000) p. 22.

⁷ Outlaw Biker Gangs: The Wild Ride of Outlaw Bikers Real and Imagined. Produced by The History Channel, 2002.



The Outlaw Biker

"Following World War II, thousands of veterans spilled out of the armed forces, disoriented and disenfranchised.... inevitably some drifted toward the fringes of society, unable to make the transition from the intensity of warfare to the comparatively pallid pace of civilian life...Oozing around the edges were the rebels, for the most part veterans still in their early twenties who were not only restless but possessed of a new knowledge of and fascination with machinery....

These veterans, feeling cast out of normal society, embraced the motorcycle not only as a recreational diversion but as a weapon against the established order..."

For many of those men who didn't want to fit in to American society, the life of a biker is what they chose. While the rest of the country was either going back to work, school, or into the home to raise children, these bikers were out to ride and have fun. Motorcycle clubs were forming as early as the 1920s, but a large rise in clubs and club membership was seen after the war.⁹

Motorcycle culture changed drastically after the war. The biker outfit went from suits, nice hats, and a tie, to bomber jackets, scarves, leather and goggles. The veterans didn't fit in with the non-veterans so they started to form their own

⁸ Brock Yates, <u>Outlaw Machine</u> (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 13-15.

⁹ Ibid.

"It's about camaraderie,
A need to escape,
And the thrill of the open
road."

Outlaw Biker Gangs: The Wild Ride of Outlaw Bikers Real and Imagined. Produced by The History Channel, 2002.

clubs. The term Outlaw Biker had nothing to do with being in trouble with the law. These veterans wanted to ride dangerously to try and simulate the thrill they got from flying bomber planes. These wild riders could not and did not want to conform to the rules of the races. They wanted to race alone on the open roads and in the deserts. These were the Outlaw Racers; they obeyed no rules or limits. ¹⁰

The Wild One introduced America to the outlaw bikers and the media reinforced the idea that bikers were threatening. "This was an image partly invented by the media, and image partly based in reality." The outlaw biker enjoyed the Mardi Gras atmosphere, drinking and partying. They shared a love of motorcycles, alcohol, and the open road. In the film, Brando represents the juvenile generation, rebelling against anything and everything. This idea scared society into thinking that the youth would act as Brando and his gang of outlaws.

The outlaw bikers needed an escape; they needed real freedom after fighting a war and fighting for their lives. While trying to fit the mold of society, they were lacking the brotherhood and camaraderie they had experienced while in the service. The outlaw biker gangs gave them the sense of belonging that they needed.

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¹¹ Ibid.

Outlaw Biker Gangs: The Wild Ride of Outlaw Bikers Real and Imagined. Produced by The History Channel, 2002.



History

"The Hollister Incident has become so mythologized among bikers that it's now widely considered the birth of American outlaw biker culture." 12

Hollister, California is now considered the birthplace of the American biker, making the infamous event on the Fourth of July weekend in 1947 the American biker's birthday. I have set out to tell the true tale of that weekend. To the best of my knowledge, here is what happened:

The American Motorcycle Association (AMA) had scheduled the "Gypsy Tour" for the Fourth of July weekend in Hollister, California. Hollister was a small farming community, but had a nice racetrack at the Veterans Memorial Park, in which races had been held since the 1930s. Between one and four thousand people came for the weekend thus almost doubling the population of the town.¹³

The AMA had scheduled races, hill climbs and other biking events, but many soon grew tired of these and headed the few miles into town. At the time, Hollister had 21 bars, many of which surrounded main street, San Benito Street. The bikers had some drinks and eventually started drag racing outside of

¹³ Ibid. p. 45.

¹² Tom Reynolds, <u>Wild Ride: How Outlaw Motorcycle Myth Conquered America</u> (New York: TV Books, 2000), p. 57.



the bars. Many of the townspeople came out to watch the exciting stunts that the bikers were attempting on their bikes.¹⁴

The seven-man police force couldn't keep control over the bikers, so they called in the Highway Patrol. The police soon blocked off a two-block area on San Benito Street in order to keep everyone in one area. A band was scheduled to play at the American Legion and the police ordered them to play outside on stage. The bikers loved the music and danced the night away. ¹⁵

By Monday, many of the bikers had made their way out of town. Over the course of the weekend, "forty-nine arrests were made, for the most part on charges of public intoxication, disorderly conduct, indecent exposure, and assorted misdemeanors." There were also very few injuries, but none were serious. All of the injuries resulted from drunken bikers trying to do outlandish stunts on their bikes. None of the townspeople were hurt. Brock Yates, author of Outlaw Machine, writes, " [It] was at best a skirmish and at the least a glorified drunken binge. Hollister's impact far exceeded the damage wrought by the actual incident."

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¹⁴ Mark Gardiner, "Hollister Riot 1947," Classic Bike, March 1999.

¹⁵ C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>, July 6, 1947; John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55; Tom Reynolds, <u>Wild Ride: How Outlaw Motorcycle Myth Conquered America</u> (New York: TV

Books, 2000), p. 57

¹⁶ Brock Yates, Outlaw Machine (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 16.



The impact of the Hollister incident was felt all over the country. Families, as well as various forms of mass media, have passed down their memories of that legendary weekend. The true story of that weekend has now been told, but how has it come to be remembered?

"2000 'Gypsycycles' Chug Out of Town and The Natives Sigh 'Never Again."

C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.

The San Francisco Chronicle

"Havok in Hollister- Motorcyclists Take Over Town, Many Injured." 17

Headlines similar to the one above were what the *San Francisco*Chronicle was printing during the Fourth of July weekend in 1947. They flew two reporters to cover the "Battle of Hollister." The reporters were horribly dissatisfied with the action, or the non-action, so they exaggerated what was happening and used exciting words. Quotes like "the outburst of terrorism" and "at the height of the pandemonium" intrigued readers. These embellished words made the American people believe that riots had broken out in Hollister, when in fact they had not. The *Chronicle* used exaggerated descriptions of the events that occurred, in order to make a mountain out of a molehill.

"There was no estimate of the damage. At the height of the pandemonium, the motorcyclists drove their vehicles into bars and restaurants, tossed beer bottles over upper-floor windows and raced through traffic signals and defied the seven-man police force."

When you strip away all of the unnecessary details and fancy words, the Chronicle did basically tell what happened that weekend. But, the reporters were

⁸ C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1947.

¹⁷ C.I. Dourghty Jr., "Havok in Hollister Motorcyclists Take Over Town, Many Injured." <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>, July 5, 1947.

"By evening, they were virtually out of control..."

C.I. Dourghty Jr., "Havok in Hollister Motorcyclists Take Over Town, Many Injured."

San Francisco Chronicle, July 5, 1947.

flown to Hollister to cover a battle, and that's what they did. They wanted their paper to sell, so they manufactured a riot.¹⁹

¹⁹ Brock Yates, <u>Outlaw Machine</u> (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 17.

"Newspapers Phone
To Get Facts on
Hollister 'Invasion."

Author Unknown, Title Above. Hollister Evening Freelance, July 7, 1947.

The Hollister Evening Freelance

"Hundreds of Motorcyclists Arrive Here For Three-Day Gypsy Tour."20

The Hollister Evening Freelance welcomed the bikers into town with articles describing the weekend's events. There was also an article asking the town residents to make sleeping accommodations available. The weekend was considered, "the outstanding event of the year for motorcycle enthusiasts."²¹

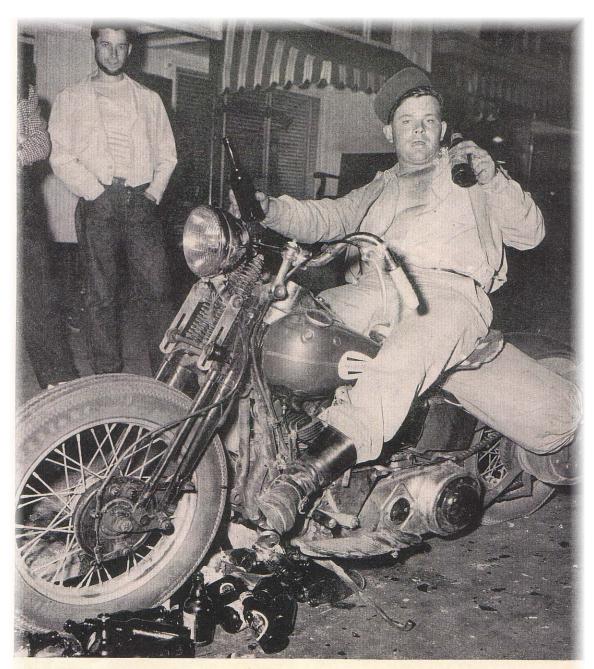
The paper covered the events of the weekend, reporting who was jailed and who was hurt. As the weekend continued, the paper released articles mocking the *Chronicle*. On July 7th, 1947 the *Evening Freelance* posted the following headlines: "Two S.F. Newsmen Flown Here To Cover 'Battle", "Newspapers Phone To Get Facts on Hollister 'Invasion", and "Battle of Hollister' Ends as Wild, Celebrating Motorcyclists Leave City." The articles report that the *Chronicle* sold out in Hollister because of its pictures and by-lines. They also report that newspapers and wire associations from all over were calling (after reading the *Chronicles*' articles) to find out about the "invasion." ²²

The San Francisco Chronicle, a highly renowned newspaper, was being mocked by the small town Hollister Evening Freelance, and for good reason.

²⁰ Author Unknown, "Hundreds of Motorcyclists Arrive Here For Three-Day Gypsy Tour." <u>Hollister Evening Freelance</u>, July 5, 1947.

Author Unknown, "Motorcycle Races Will Draw Riders From Four States". Hollister Evening Freelance, July 2, 1947.

²² Author Unknown, "Newspapers Phone To Get Facts on Hollister 'Invasion". <u>Hollister Evening</u> <u>Freelance</u>, July 7, 1947.



CYCLIST'S HOLIDAY

He and friends terrorize a town

On the Fourth of July weekend 4,000 members of a motorcycle club roared into Hollister, Calif. for a three-day convention. They quickly tired of ordinary motorcycle thrills and turned to more extiting stunts. Racing their vehicles down the main street and through traffic lights, they rammed into restaurants and bars, breaking furniture and mir-

rors. Some rested awhile by the curb (above). Others hardly paused. Police arrested many for drunkenness and indecent exposure but could not restore order. Finally, after two days, the cyclists left with a brazen explanation. "We like to show off. It's just a lot of fun." But Hollister's police chief took a different view. Wailed he, "It's just one hell of a mess."

Life Magazine

"Cyclist's Holiday – He and friends terrorize a town. On the Fourth of July weekend 4,000 members of a motorcycle club roared into Hollister, Calif. for a three-day convention. They quickly tired of ordinary motorcycle thrills and turned to more exciting stunts. Racing their vehicles down the main street and through traffic lights, they rammed into restaurants and bars, breaking furniture and mirrors. Some rested awhile by the curb. Others hardly paused. Police arrested many for drunkenness and indecent exposure but could not restore order. Finally, after two days, the cyclists left with a brazen explanation. 'We like to show off. It's just a lot of fun.' But Hollister's police chief took a different view. Wailed he, 'It's just one hell of a mess."

"Cyclist's Holiday" was the picture that supposedly "started it all." It ran in *Life Magazine* on July 21, 1947. According to Gus Despersa, the picture was staged by the photographer who had set up the beer bottles and the bike, then waited for a someone to come stumbling out of the bar. The photographer then put the drunk on the bike and took the photo.²⁴ This was America's first look at what happened in Hollister, Ca 1947.

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²³ Author Unknown. "Cyclist's Holiday," <u>Life Magazine</u>, July 21, 1947, p. 31. 24 Mark Gardiner, "Hollister Riot 1947," <u>Classic Bike</u>, March 1999, p. 18-22.

"He and friends
Terrorize
A Town"

Unknown author, "Cyclist's Holiday," Life Magazine, July 21, 1947, p. 31

While most of what the article describes is true, *Life Magazine* used exaggerated terms to describe what happened. It is true that someone rode their bike into a bar, but it was with the bartender's permission, and nothing was broken. There was also no documented damage to any of the shops, bars, restaurants, hotels, homes, or the townspeople for that matter. There was broken glass in the streets and some were arrested for minor infractions, mostly for drunk and disorderly conduct. ²⁵

This exaggerated caption and staged picture appeared in the most nationally read form of mass media in 1947. Life Magazine had a readership of almost five million and was the largest weekly in the United States.²⁶ Many Americans believed *Life Magazine's* version of the "Cyclist's Holiday."

²⁵ Brock Yates, <u>Outlaw Machine</u> (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), p. 16; C.I. Dourghty Jr., "More on Hollister's Bad Time." <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>, July 6, 1947. ²⁶ John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55.



Cyclists' Raid

A Story by Frank Rooney .

Drawings by David Berger

Cyclists' Raid

"They stood together quietly, looking, without appearing to stare, at a long stern column of red motorcycles coming from the south, filling the single main street of the town with the noise of a multitude of pistons and the crackling of exhaust pipes."27

Life Magazine placed Hollister on the national map. Only weeks after the July 21st release, copies of the magazine were sold out of newsstands and Hollister residents were loaning their copies to friends and family. A New York writer, by the name of Frank Rooney, saw the story on Hollister and was inspired. The tale of the drunken bikers and wild riots enthralled him. A few years later, he wrote a short story entitled "Cyclists' Raid." 28

Cyclists' Raid was published in Harper's Magazine in 1951. The story is about a biker gang that ransacks a small town in California (Hollister). They ride in to town, get drunk, race up and down the main street, break bottles in the street, and break storefront windows. Some of the cyclist's ride their bikes into the hotel. While in the lobby, they run over the owner's daughter and she later dies.

Frank Rooney. "Cyclist's Raid." <u>Harper's Magazine</u>, 1951, p. 34-44.
 John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55.



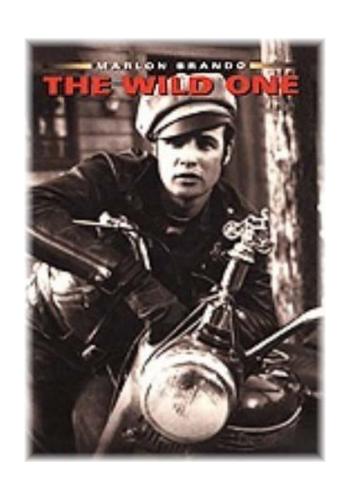
"The motorcycle on the sidewalk speeded up and skidded obliquely into a plate-glass window, the front wheel bucking and climbing the brick base beneath the window.... Now there were other motorcycles on the sidewalk. One of them hit a parked car at the edge of the walk. The rider standing astride his machine beat the window out of the car with his gloved fists.... Bleeker couldn't know how long he stood on the veranda watching the mounting devastation on the street - the cyclist racing past store windows and hurling, presumable, beer bottles at the glass fronts; the two, working as a team, knocking down weighing machines and the signs in front of the motion picture theater; the innumerable mounted men running the angry townspeople, alerted and aroused by the awful sounds of damage to their property, back into their suddenly lighted homes again or up the steps of his hotel or into niches along the main street, into doorways, and occasionally into the ledges and bays of glassless windows "29

The story has hardly any relation to the actual events that occurred in Hollister. The author used the event to inspire his tale. This story was then the motivation for the movie <u>The Wild One</u>. The events in the movie, like the events in the story, are hardly related to the rally in Hollister. "In the progress from actual incident to short story to film, some significant and to some critics disturbing changes took place."

Many people believe that the story and the movie are actual accounts of what happened that Fourth of July weekend in 1947, but they are not. The writers of Cyclists' Raid and The Wild One dramatized the events of that weekend in order make interesting and exciting stories.

²⁹ Frank Rooney. "Cyclist's Raid." <u>Harper's Magazine</u>, 1951, p. 41-42.

³⁰ William Kittredge and Steven M. Krauzer, <u>Stories into Film</u> (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), p. 110-131.



The Wild One

"What are you rebelling against?"... "Well, what have ya got?" 31

"This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most American towns-but it did in this one. This is a public challenge not to let it happen again."32 (Opening lines to The Wild One.)

The Wild One, released in 1954, was based on the story titled The Cyclist's Raid, which appeared in *Harper's* magazine in 1951. Hollywood producer, Stanley Kramer, read the story and was inspired. He wanted to "capture the first big divorcement of youth from society- the outlaw biker gang." 33

The intent of The Wild One was "to make a film of social commentary on the conformity of American society in the 1950's."34 With the war over, many people were eager to get back to their regular lives, with the men working and the women back at home raising babies. But, many young men were rebelling against this. They were eager to keep the camaraderie that they were accustomed to in the service, thus forming biker clubs and the like.

The movie was also intended to comment on the concerns surrounding adolescent behavior in the Fifties. Juvenile delinquency was a hot topic around the time The Wild One was released. The movie reinforced the idea that young

³¹ The Wild One, Directed by Laslo Benedek and produced by Stanley Kramer, 1954.

³² Ibid.

John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55.
 Ron Briley. "Hollywood and the Rebel Image in the 1950's". <u>Social Education</u>, October 1997, p. 355.



adults were a threat to society. Divorce and a decline in the American family were just a few reasons thought to be the reason for rises in juvenile crime.³⁵

The plot of the film is loosely based upon the incidents in Hollister. Ca on Fourth of July weekend 1947. The movie tells the story of Johnny and his biker gang who were responsible for the Hollister "invasion of 1947." The movie portrays what the national mass media had already printed about Hollister. They showed riots and unruly bikers. "That evening many of the bikers, now quite inebriated, begin to get out of control, and some looting and vandalism occur."36 This scene in the movie is when the men get out of control and take over the town. They later kidnap Johnny's love interest, a small town girl and the barkeeper's daughter. Johnny later fights his way to get to her and saves her from the mob.

Some locals didn't agree with the way in which the story was told. According to one Hollister resident, "that movie really downed the motorcycle image. The way they made the picture, 90 percent wasn't the way it happened here." Most of the country was unaware of what really happened in Hollister and many thought that Stanley Kramer had finally revealed the truth.³⁷

According to biographer Peter Manso, "the temperamental star (Brando) insisted the film had 'to show the citizens of Hollister for what they were; drones and Babbits responding to the leather-jacketed bikers with a hysteria that had

³⁵ James S. Olsen, Historical Dictionary of the 1950s (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), p

³⁶ Ron Briley. "Hollywood and the Rebel Image in the 1950's." <u>Social Education</u>, October 1997, p. 355. ³⁷ John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55.



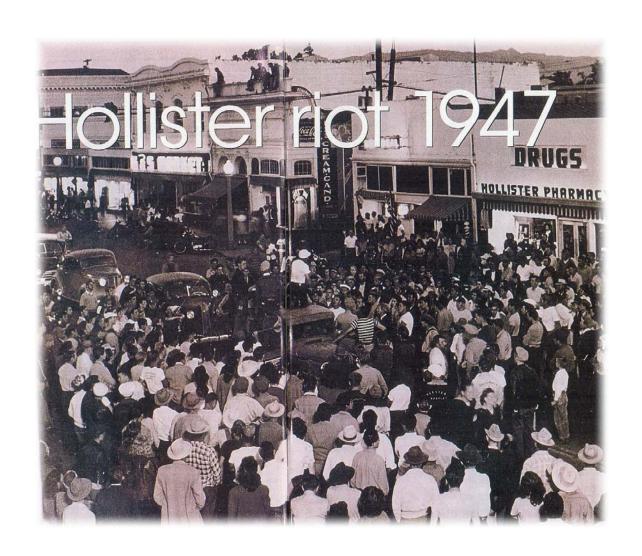
driven the group to violence in the first place.' In other words, the film was to focus upon outsiders who rejected the status quo."³⁸

The movie is loosely related to the events that actually happened in Hollister. The way in which Brando wanted the town's people to be portrayed is far from true. Kramer had not set out to "tell the true story of Hollister's Rally, or smudge the image of motorcyclists." He basically wanted to explore the alienation of youth from American society. Although not intended, the movie gave a false representation of what really happened.

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³⁸ Ron Briley. "Hollywood and the Rebel Image in the 1950's." <u>Social Education</u>, October 1997, p. 355

p. 355.
³⁹ John Dorrance. "Forty Hours in Hollister," <u>Cycle</u>, August 1987, p. 50-55.



Constructing Memory in the Mass Media

"The remembered past turns into myth...."

The mass media has played a large role in influencing the way in which we remember the Hollister event of 1947. In order to look at how it has influenced our memories, we first need to look at what memory is, how it is shaped, and if memory has anything to do with actual events.

The social contruction of memory is when "[social groups] determine what is 'memorable' and also how it will be remembered." This idea is exactly what happened in Hollister. The repoters for the *San Fransicico Chronicle* and the *Hollister Evening Freelance*, decided what was "memorable" about that weekend and then wrote their articles how they thought it should be remembered. The writers of the two papers had different memories, actual or not, which were reflected in their articles.

The transmission of social memory happenens in a few ways. One of these ways is through still pictures, like "Cyclist's Holiday" in *Life Magazine*, that "emphasize the value of associating whatever one wanted to remember with striking images....but material images have long been constructed in order to

⁴⁰ Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in <u>Thomas Butler, ed., Memory: History, Culture and the Mind (</u>Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 98.

Through the mass media,
I have been given a chance
to remember the event.

assist the retention and transmission of memories."⁴¹ Life Magazine printed a striking photo that was contstructed in order get people to remember the Hollister event. It worked. That photo is remembered by many people who believe that the photo and it's caption actually represent what happened.

Another way that memory is shaped is through myths. "The remembered past turns into myth....a story with a symbolic meaning, made up of stereotyed incidents and involving characters who are larger than life, whether they are heroes or villains." This is screaming "the Hollister Riot" to me. The simple story of the bikers coming to Hollister, turns into riots and battles and fights from the stereotypes about bikers. During 1947, people were fearing juvenile deliquency and still weren't sure how they felt about the influx of biker clubs, so the character of the biker easily turned into a villian.

If memories can be constructed through the mass media, does one need to be at the actual event in order to have memories of it? Actual memories of an event would be much more vivid than a socially constructed memory. However, they are both still memories. I don't think that people need to be present at an event to remember it. I can tell the story of the Hollister incident, but it happened almost 35 years before I was born. Through the mass media, I have been given a chance to remember that event. Although socially contructed memories aren't always as accurate as real ones, they can be a starting point to get to the truth.

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⁴² Ibid. p. 103-104.

Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in <u>Thomas Butler, ed., Memory: History, Culture and the Mind (</u>Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 101.

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"[Social groups]
determine what is
'memorable' and also
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remembered."
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Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in <u>Thomas Butler, ed., Memory:</u>

The construction of memory through the mass media is fascinating. The event in Hollister is a prime example of how memory can be socially constructed. In answer to my question above, memory is related to the events that actually happened, but it is also an interpretation of those events by the person who is relaying them.



Conclusion The Solution to the Puzzle

The story of the Hollister "Invasion" of 1947 is legendary. It has been told many times and will continue to be told generation after generation. The mass media remembered the event by documenting it through newspapers, magazines, short stories, and a feature film. The residents of Hollister, and people all over the nation, remember this event by telling the story and by celebrating every Fourth of July.

The social construction of memory influences history. If we actually live through an event or just read about it, we retain those memories, even if they aren't always accurate. Whether it is stories from grandparents or stories in the mass media, they all play a part in what and how we remember. They also influence how we tell or retell histories. History is forever changing and we need to take that into account when we go looking for the past. History is like a puzzle, it has many pieces and if you are missing just one, the puzzle isn't complete.

The Pieces of the

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