

The Hell's Angels Incident

Version 1: Wolfe

Version 2: Thompson

Version 3: Ginsberg

Further Reading

Introduction

In the summer of 1965, a strange combination of social forces took place: forty of the Hell's Angels, one of the most feared and violent gangs of the time, partied with some of the most influential literary figures of the 1960's. The guest list included Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg, and Neal Cassady. Two famous journalists were also present: Hunter S. Thompson, who was writing a book on the Hell's Angels, and Tom Wolfe, who was writing a book on Kesey's Merry Pranksters. After the party ended, Wolfe, Thompson, and Ginsberg recorded three radically differing accounts of the famous Hell's Angels party.



Kesey's Invitation

Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, had organized the Merry Pranksters as a huge experiment. The Pranksters did copious amounts of LSD (and other drugs) driving across the United States in a multi-colored bus, wreaking havoc. Their driver was Neal Cassady, the inspiration for Dean Moriarty in Kerouac's famous book, *On the Road*. Cassady introduced Kesey to Ginsberg and Kerouac. Though Keroauc disliked Kesey, his good friend Allen Ginsberg befriended Kesey.

Kesey, like Ginsberg, moved in interesting circles. After having some drinks with Hunter S. Thompson and learning about Thompson's writing project, Kesey decided that he wanted to meet the Hell's Angels himself.

Thompson had been following the Hell's Angels for a year and was all too familiar with their violent ways. He felt that the combination of LSD, peace-loving hippies, intellectuals, beer, and the volatile Hell's Angels was a recipe for disaster. Despite Thompson's warning, Kesey made plans for a party at his cabin in La Honda and invited the Hell's Angels.