

# **AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF POLICE/SPECTATOR CONFLICT AT THE BATHURST MOTORCYCLE RACES**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Motorcycle races attracting national and international competitors have been held over Easter at Bathurst since 1931. Large crowds have continually been attracted to the event. The number of spectators during the 1930s was ten to twenty thousand, and, in the post-war period, has been in the order of twenty to thirty thousand on a regular basis. A large proportion of the people coming to Bathurst for the long weekend have always camped out in and around the city. During the post-war period one of the most popular camping spots has been at the top of the race track on Mt. Panorama. A group of ten thousand or more campers on top of the mountain is not unusual.

Research interest in Bathurst dates back to the early 1980s and is a result of the continuing conflict between spectators and police at the event.<sup>1</sup> What has become known as the Bathurst riots occurred in 1980, 1981, 1983 and 1985. They were marked by violent conflict including the use of Molotov cocktails against police and large numbers of arrests. Two fundamental points soon became apparent in the research. First, the conflict, far from being an anarchic outburst of drunken hooliganism perpetrated by so-called 'bikies' or 'bike gangs', was in fact a highly structured activity with rules and meaning that gave the behaviour a quite coherent purpose. Second, the conflict with police, far from being spontaneous in the sense of being unpredictable and without inherent logic, has in fact a distinct historical development which dates back directly to the early 1960s. These two points, the history and the structure of the conflict, form the basis of the paper.

In placing the riots at the Bathurst Motorcycle Races in historical perspective what I have done is to concentrate on the

period of the early 1960s to demonstrate how the conflict became institutionalised. The paper is divided into several sections which show, chronologically, how the process of institutionalisation occurred. The paper begins with a brief view of 'hooliganism' at Bathurst during the 1950s, and then concentrates on the development of anti-police activity during the 1960s and the response to it. In essence there are three levels of analysis running through the paper: that of the activities themselves and how they might be best understood within a class analysis of conflict over public space; an analysis of the way in which the media stereotyped and magnified the 'threat'; and an analysis of the state response to the 'threat' through the criminal justice system.

### RACES AND CROWDS AT BATHURST DURING THE 1950s: BEGINNINGS OF THE 'HOOLIGAN' PROBLEM?

The first consistent reporting of 'hooliganism' associated with the Easter Races began in the 1950s. What were the types of behaviour associated with the crowds at Bathurst over Easter that brought about official concern?

One problem was associated with motor vehicles and their driver/riders. N.S.W. Public Safety Bureau police from Sydney patrolled the highways in and out of Bathurst and within the township itself. 'Throttle - happy lads' and 'milk bar cowboys' were warned before the weekend that breaches of traffic regulations would not be tolerated.\* Within the township of Bathurst there were occasional reports of 'hooligan' behaviour in cars and on motorcycles. Other behaviour complained of during the period, while something of a nuisance, were certainly very much of a marginal nature and were mainly concerned with vandalism or misbehaviour such as letting off fireworks in the street. On Mt. Panorama there was the continuing 'problem of people who managed to avoid paying entrance costs by arriving on the Easter Thursday or Good Friday and setting up camp before the races actually started. According to one report in 1956, 'hundreds' of people saw the races for free by arriving early.<sup>3</sup>

During the later 1950s these various elements of essentially marginal illegal activity came to be increasingly associated with one type of person: the male 'bodgie' and the female 'widgie'.

Other assorted titles denoting larrikinism, youth and motor vehicles such as 'milk bar cowboys' and 'promenade percys' began to disappear. It is significant that the term bodgie was not necessarily associated with motorbikes or cars. The term referred both to a certain style and a certain 'type'.

The year 1958 was the high point in bodgie terror to Bathurst during the 1950s. The type of behaviour evident during that Easter was hardly different from previous years. Yet the local media were to grasp it as an example of the national 'hoodlum problem' at its worst. A prominent editorial on page two of the *Western Times*, 8/4/58, was headlined 'A Big Problem'. It noted that the behaviour of bodgies and widgies "goes to the very depths of hooliganism (and) is a source of grave concern to the decent-minded citizen". The essential nastiness of the bodgies was shown through the observations of another *Western Times* columnist who reported:

Bodgie types exhibited their particular outlook on life at a camping reserve...Two of them obviously bored with the pleasant things of life passed the time by throwing ornate stilleto-type knives at a target on the ground.<sup>4</sup>

## PRELUDE TO 'CRISIS': THE EARLY 1960s,

During the early 1960s there developed a new dimension to the previous 'hooligan' problem at Bathurst. Violent clashes between young spectators and police began to occur. It is during this period that a pattern of conflict emerges which sets in motion the institutionalisation of police/spectator conflict at Bathurst. Dimensions of the pattern revolve around the conflict over 'public' space, resistance and aggression towards police and the participation of working class youth, predominantly male. It is also the first time the notion of 'riot' is attached to the behaviour. Initially the idea that 'riots' occur at Bathurst remains localised. Neither the national media nor the police regard the events as particularly disturbing or requiring extraordinary attention. Police do not change their response until the latter part of the 1960s. The media begin to develop their 'moral panic' theme in 1964, at the same time as developments in England and the United States point to a generalised 'youth problem'. The Easter Races in 1960 were the first time that a direct confrontation occurred

between young spectators and police. The events set the pattern for the following decades in several ways:

- i. a particular area becomes a focal point of conflict;
- ii. youths challenge police to make arrests;
- iii. the challenge is presented as the work of stereo-typed deviants;
- iv. the 'solutions' to the problem centre around stronger law enforcement and are unworkable, one-sided and overly exaggerate the magnitude of the challenge.

Firstly, the question of social space as a focal point for conflict. The location of the confrontation was at one end of King's Parade Park, a long oblong-shaped park with carillon, statues, fountain and war memorial, situated in central Bathurst. At a symbolic level the park and its contents represent the values of a clearly defined social order. The positions of class, race and gender, that is, the social and economic relations of power are manifestly represented in the spatial organisation of the 'public place'. Correct use of the park did not involve 'hanging about', drinking beer, letting off firecrackers, swimming in the fountain or climbing on statues. Over the years individuals were arrested for all of the above behaviour.

The contradictory demands on the use of social space by different classes is shown when one considers that King's Park situated as it is in central Bathurst is surrounded by pubs and milk bars. The Commercial Hotel and the Metropolitan Hotel face one end of the park, while the popular Knickerbocker Hotel and the (now closed) Royal Hotel face the other end of the park where it joins William Street, a main thoroughfare and shopping area. As the crowds at Easter spilled out of the hotels onto the street the area around the front of the Knickerbocker Hotel and the end of the park became a focal point where large numbers of people congregated. The park itself was often used for (illegal) drinking. However at a time when upwards of thirty thousand people were in Bathurst for the weekend, when all accommodation in the district was booked out and when thousands of people were camping in and around the town, the park became a central location of free open space.

The trouble in 1960 started around 7.30 pm on the Saturday night as hundreds of youths congregated around the end of the park opposite the hotel. Some were throwing firecrackers at traffic and passers-by. Two police attempted to arrest two of the youths but were surrounded by scores of other youths, some of whom began throwing firecrackers at the police. The original two apprehended slipped away. Police reinforcements arrived, some ferried by taxi from the police station. Beyond the immediate crowd of three hundred youths, police estimated several hundred more onlookers were attracted to the disturbance. The crowd were dispersed by a total of twenty police. The disturbance lasted approximately half an hour and reached its peak when those arrested were placed in the police truck. Ten arrests were made. These included labourers aged 18, 20 and 22, an 18 year old panelbeater, an 18 year old clerk, a 19 year old railway porter, a 20 year old fitter and a 20 year old electrician.

Explanation for the outbreak centred around notions of 'hooliganism'. Significantly in this case hooliganism was associated with motorcyclists, mediated by the image of the leather jacket. According to the *National Advocate* the 'near-riot' was caused by "300 leather-coated youths", and the *Western Times* referred to "a group of Sydney visitors, the majority of them in leather jackets".<sup>5</sup> The 'motorcycle element' was saddled with responsibility. Both Bathurst newspapers pushed this explanation. The *Western Times* wrote, "The majority of the hoodlum type who participated in the disturbance appeared to be young Sydney motorcyclists and their hangers-on".<sup>6</sup> A further dimension in the explanation of the behaviour was the 'gang':

This year youth gangs made their appearance on Bathurst streets as the leather-coated ones and their girl friends marched along the street calling out, and shouting at other groups.<sup>7</sup>

While it is obvious from the description of the events that the youth involved resented police interference into their activities, it appears that it is the decision to arrest individuals that sparks the resistance into a more directly anti-police activity. The explanations of the occurrence tend to gloss over this point by associating the incident with more general views about 'delinquent' behaviour.

For the next three years there was something of a stand-off between youth 'troublemakers' and police. This can partly be explained through better co-ordinated and more aggressive police methods including a steady increase in arrests for public order offences. Anti-police feeling obviously remained but there is no evidence of a riot situation developing for several years.

During the Easter following the 1960 'near riot' the police took up more aggressive styles of policing. Intensive patrols were made by plain clothes and uniformed police, breaking up groups of youths as they gathered in William Street and the end of King's Parade Park. Early on Saturday evening the police cleared the bars of the Knickerbocker and Royal Hotels and the people who congregated outside were moved on.

Police also kept close control on campers both on the mountain and around Bathurst. On Easter Saturday night three carloads of police went to a large camp of youths between Denison Bridge and the Showground. Situated on the edge of the Macquarie River and the outskirts of Bathurst, this was a popular spot for campers. Hanging from a tree in the middle of the camp was a large dummy which bore the sign, 'This is what we think of cops'. Police ordered it to be taken down.<sup>8</sup>

The account of an effigy of the police hanging from a tree in the campground is important. It indicates an extensive and underlying level of meaning attached to the conflict at Bathurst that needs elaboration. Any account of the confrontation with police that fails to move beyond the superficial causes of individual 'riots' will fall into an abyss of discriminant factor analysis and fail to see the structures of meaning inherent in certain activities. Cultural practices and the symbolic universe they embody give meaning to actions which may appear as otherwise incomprehensible. Furthermore those cultural practices are class specific. Mockery of the police and an anti-authority attitude has remained a part of working class culture and it has manifested itself at Bathurst in a variety of forms. It is often there in a symbolic or ritualised form rather than the overt confrontation which a 'riot' would indicate.

The role of ritual and symbol in public displays means that there can be simultaneously a range of contradictory meanings

attached to events. Even in full scale violent confrontations it has been noted that 'rioters' behave in a carnival-like atmosphere. The point was noted by police and observers after the riot on Easter Saturday night at Bathurst in 1985.<sup>9</sup> A sergeant in the Tactical Response Group stated:

I was astounded as far as the behaviour of the people was concerned. I think it is general throughout the community today - this lack of response to authority... the number of people who stood by and watched at Bathurst! They thought it was great fun. It was a night's entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

Continuously through the records of Bathurst the challenge to police in gestural form and the carnival atmosphere is evident. What is being drawn out here is the historical antecedents and the popular culture involved in such activity.

Thus it becomes essential to understand that the conflict at Bathurst is determined on several levels. There is the reality of baton charges, molotov cocktails, arrests and court proceedings, of police provocation or active disrespect of the law. And there is the symbolic meanings and cultural ordering of that conflict as it develops out of the particular historical conditions in which people find themselves.

Of the period under discussion, 1961 is the first year where court records are available for analysis. These records are invaluable for an understanding of the social background of those people arrested and the processes of criminal justice at the summary level in which they were involved. In the Bathurst Court of Petty Sessions on April 4, 1961 charges against 37 individuals were determined. The age range of the offenders was 18 to 51 years, however the vast majority were young: 86.4% were between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. Most of the offenders came from Sydney (75.6%). The occupation most represented were labourers (56.7%), others included fitters, plumbers, storeman and apprentices. Only two occupations were not strictly blue collar: a grocer and a telephonist. None of the offenders stated that they were unemployed. Only one person was female: a 20 year old telephonist from Sydney charged with being drunk. As for the offences committed: 54% were charged with offensive manner; 35.1% with being drunk; 10.8% with indecent language. The location of the arrests and the

time of the arrests were also concentrated: 67.5% occurred in William Street and another 24.3% were in adjacent Bathurst Streets. The most probable scenario would be the arrest of a 20 year old labourer from Sydney on the Saturday evening in or around William Street on the charge of behaving in an offensive manner.

The analysis of court proceedings for 1961 and later years show clearly the continuities in the conflict at Bathurst. The sex, age and occupation profile of the offenders is highly predictable, as is the time, location and offence. It has been argued here that the relations of class, leisure and social space must be recognised as a basis for explanation. It is the conflict over 'street' behaviour as it manifests itself on the Saturday night in Bathurst that causes the problem. The afternoon and evening congregation of young people in the town was as much part of the leisure activity in going to Bathurst as sitting by the racetrack. However the activities of the youth congregated in the town *without apparent reason* became a threat to the perceptions of legitimate 'street' behaviour. What ensues is contestation and negotiation over what is acceptable in 'public' space. As the conflict evolves over several years at a particular site, class specific cultural practices involving disrespect for police manifest themselves regularly as the expectation for the 'event' re-occurring is established. There develops then a conflict over time as well as space. A tension develops that has both history and immediacy, that is both class specific and seemingly concerned with disparate individuals.

## 1964: BATHURST, CLACTON AND DAYTONA, THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH AT LEISURE GOES INTERNATIONAL.

Easter 1964 was a time when youth 'riots' occurred simultaneously around the world in England, the U.S.A. and Australia. In England the mods and rockers clashed first with themselves and later with police at seaside resorts in Clacton, Essex and later in Margate, Kent; in the holiday resort area of Daytona, Florida college students clashed with police; and at Bathurst in Australia leather-jacketed rockers challenged police to leave their station and fight. At least this was the international media's view of 'teenage terror' as it affected the English-speaking world.

The conflict in Daytona was widely reported in Australia. However the reporting in the local media of the mods and rockers riots in England was far more extensive. Most of Sydney newspapers carried reports of the mods and rockers over the two days of Easter Monday and Tuesday. Easter 1964 is also the first year that the national media in Australia pick up on the 'youth problem' at Bathurst. The *Daily Mirror*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Telegraph* all carried prominent stories concerning the challenge made to police. It would be easy enough to explain this as a simple copy of the overseas stories if Clacton and Daytona had been reported first, however the time sequence is the reverse. The *Herald* and the *Mirror* ran their stories on Bathurst on the Easter Monday, the day before the overseas events became major news. The *Telegraph* ran the story of the three events together on the same page the next day. The story published in the *Mirror* demonstrates most clearly the stock phrases and exaggeration involved in reports of youth. Its headline on page one was 'Wild Mob Invades Bathurst'. Daytona or Clacton could have been just as easily inserted. The storyline followed:

A wild mob of 200 rockers invaded Bathurst at the weekend. Leather jacketed youths on motorcycles, hurled abuse at police, molested townspeople and set off an explosion in the main street. Police arrested 74 youths..,

The rockers began jostling people in the streets, acting offensively and driving at high speeds through the town...

Some of them insulted women and used indecent language. On Saturday night they milled around outside Bathurst police station and challenged the police to come out and fight...

A stick of gelignite exploded in King's Parade.<sup>11</sup>

The storylines that appeared in the other newspapers were somewhat less flamboyant in their description of the event. The *Telegraph* ran the headline "Bathurst's 80 Easter Arrests". The story that followed concentrated on the 200 people who 'demonstrated' outside the Bathurst police station until dispersed. It mentioned that much vandalism had occurred in parks and gardens around the city. This was the only report of vandalism. There was no mention of it in the Bathurst local papers which would have presumably been most concerned with the issue. The report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*

follows closely the report in the Bathurst *Western Times* of the same day. It describes the youths "yelling abuse and shouting for the police to come out". There are several references to motorcyclists but none which specifically hold them responsible for the trouble.

As mentioned earlier the *Telegraph* article on Bathurst appeared on the same page as the reports on Clacton and Daytona on the Tuesday after Easter. In other words Bathurst was clearly framed by the wider events. This is important because although it is primarily the *Mirror* which writes of wild mobs of rockers, motorcycles and leather jackets at Bathurst, the stories in other papers are coded in such a way as to make any other readings almost impossible. Thus the *Telegraph* report of Bathurst is simultaneously read with the heading 'Teenage Riots In 2 Countries' and the subheading 'Motorcycles'. Certainly the *Mirror* report on the Monday headlines 'Wild Mob Invades Bathurst' and the report the following day on Clacton citing a reference to Marlon Brando's *The Wild One* leaves the reader with clear images of what the trouble is all about.

It is not surprising then after the immediacy of the event disappears the disparate points are consciously brought together. The fact that they were previously coded in a particular manner makes their later assemblage seem all the more 'rational' and 'natural'. In the overall discussion of the youth problem after Easter 1964 it is an editorial in the *Telegraph* that really pulls all the points together in an Australian context. After originally coding the Bathurst problem in an international context, the problem of 'youth' is relocated into the Australian arena not by talking about deviance as such but rather about 'normality'. In fact the discourse on normality is far more encompassing and constrictive than any simple definition of delinquency. The editorial states:

The hooligan behaviour of youthful mobs at Bathurst as well as in England and the United States over the holidays is no reason for damning young people generally.

In Australia, certainly, during the holiday weekend many more of the younger generation were to be found on the beaches, competing in the national surf championships, keeping guard over thousands of holiday swimmers and rescuing lives.

In spite of all the lamentation about the morals, manners and musical tastes of the younger generation, there still

seem to be lots of rugged young men willing to risk their lives on the surf beaches.<sup>12</sup>

The editorial concludes that it is the courage and dedication of these young Australians that puts the behaviour of a little group in a country town (Bathurst) into its right perspective. This piece of writing calls up some of the most powerful mythologies underlying the Australian 'identity'. It does so to deny the validity of behaviour that is different to its own construction. In effect it denies the legitimacy of the experience of all those outside what is narrowly defined as 'Australian'. It both reassures us: this delinquent behaviour is marginal; and threatens us: to be Australian is to partake in certain legitimate activities. The mythology of the classless, sun-bronzed, muscular Australian male is clearly presented. Acceptable masculinity is to be found in competitive games, keeping guard, rescuing lives and ruggedness. Embedded in this are the class mythologies of 'selfless service' to an undifferentiated 'society'; and secondly the legitimate area of struggle is defined as the beach, that is nature. It is most definitely not the factory floor or the street. There may be times when it is necessary to risk one's life. However this will be done on the beaches, selflessly, like our great ANZAC fathers fighting an 'unknown' and 'alien' enemy. And it will be done in an 'organised' manner, on 'orders' like the military precision of a surf-life saving club carrying out manoeuvres. The experience of the 'other' Australia, the young factory hands, the labourers and the apprentices, the young women process-workers and cashiers who went to Bathurst on motorbikes, cars or hitched for the crowds and excitement; who got drunk, who made nuisances of themselves and were harassed by police; their experience, their culture and their lives were constantly invalidated by a hegemonic ideology that defined acceptable attitudes and past-times.

The Easter weekend of 1964 did not seem particularly 'abnormal'. There were a lot of people in Bathurst and the weather was fine. According to the Council a record number of people camped out. Eight hundred and fifty-seven pounds was collected in camp fees at Carrington Caravan Park and on Mount Panorama, while large numbers of people camped free along the Macquarie River.<sup>13</sup> Early on the Saturday evening large numbers of youths gathered in front of

the police station. They yelled at the police and challenged them to make arrests. One chant was "Come out and get us you bastard coppers". Police came out of the station and made two arrests as the youths ran off. Police vehicles that had been out on patrol were called back to the station, then a big sweep was made through Bathurst streets and parks where another 35 people were brought in and charged.

The pattern of charges, location and time follow closely the analysis presented of previous years: trouble was most likely to occur in downtown Bathurst on the Saturday evening. As for the individuals charged a similar pattern as previous years is evident. The age range was 18 to 50 years old, however 29.3% were 19 years old, and 89.5% were between 18 and 23 years old. Fifty-one individuals had occupations recorded. Of these 41.1% were labourers. Of the rest only five individuals did not fit into strict blue collar categories. They were shop assistants (2), clerks (2) and a salesman. No professional or semi-professional categories were represented. As demonstrated in the analysis of previous years the overwhelming majority of those arrested came from the manual working class.

We need to turn now to the wider political framework of the mid-1960s to throw some light on the question of why Bathurst developed into a centre of panic over 'wild ones'. There are several inter-related themes that dominated 'politics' during this period. Throughout 1964 and 1965 there developed in N.S.W. a perception of crisis in policing and law and order. It was one of the factors that brought Askin and the Liberal Party into office in May 1965. During 1964 there was a great deal of publicity around the decline in police strength in N.S.W. and the associated problem of an uncontrolled 'hooliganism'. Similar to media campaigns that re-emerge fifteen years later with the repeal of the Summary Offences Act, the argument was simple: the police no longer controlled the streets of N.S.W. One of many possible examples from the period is an article in *N.S.W. Police News* in February 1964 just before the Easter Races. The article was particularly interested in youth in cars and on motorbikes. It described the girls as 'disgusting' and the boys as 'monkeys'. Certain styles could identify the likely offenders: "black shirts, skin tight trousers, cowboy studded

belts, hair combed down the back of the neck". There was reference to overseas influences: "what a brainwashing Hollywood has given the youth of this nation with its cheap glorification of crime and sex in what is allegedly entertainment". There was also a reference to a mythical history of policing. "In the past police would not have allowed hoodlum mobs to loiter in streets and congregate outside milkbars". And an equally mythical solution was presented: more police and longer gaol sentences.

The corollary to the 'hoodlum' problem during 1964 and 1965 was the decline in police strength. The Police Association, supported by the Liberal Party ran a constant campaign for increasing the numbers of police officers in N.S.W. On the day after the Easter holidays the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an editorial which supported the then Opposition Leader Askin and the Police Association in their demand for an extra 2036 officers.<sup>14</sup> The following week the *Herald* again reported the Association's demands.<sup>15</sup> One of the principal reasons cited in the editorial for the increase, and supported by many local councils, was the problem of juvenile delinquency and vandalism.

Interspersed in the papers during these weeks were not only the stories about Bathurst, Clacton or Daytona, but also a great deal was published about the problems of youth 'today'. There were the continuing references to hoodlums and law and order but also the wider terms of what constituted the teenage 'problem' such as 'Beatlemania'. There was a certain fluidity in what constituted the problem. Many pointed to a problematic youth culture drawn from Hollywood or commercialism or the mass media. The term 'Beatlemania' was used in a way to capture all these points. The term in fact reappears along with 'wild ones' in the 1965 Bathurst 'riot' as a description of the malaise. Three days after Easter youth 'riots' in 1964 another dimension of the teenage problem showed itself when Gerry and the Pacemakers, Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, and Dusty Springfield arrived at Sydney Airport. According to the *Sun* they were "mobbed by screaming teenage fans".<sup>16</sup>

Given the historical and political context it is not surprising that the national media pick up on the events at Bathurst in Easter 1964. The events that year may have been more rowdy than previous Easters - there were an extra thirty arrests over previous

years but that could be an indication of police activity as much as public activity. It seems more likely that the style of activity at Bathurst that year was substantially the same as at least the previous four years. Hence the editorial in the *Western Times* referred to the 'tradition' of misbehaviour at Bathurst.<sup>17</sup> What was about to occur through the interest of the media was the thrusting of that tradition into the national arena. That interest itself was generated from a number of factors both specific to N.S.W. at the time and to much wider problems around the development of a mass teenage culture which was at least as international as the capitalist market that spawned it. Once again it is important to understand the different layers and tensions which manifested themselves in the event: the 'wild one' image that was taken up by some in fashion and behaviour with the longer traditions of contestation over public space; the implantation of an international youth mass culture and the solid and traditional working class occupations of the vast majority of visitors to Bathurst; the particular contingencies of a law and order campaign in N.S.W. at the time and the wider fears about youth in the '60s'. Symbolically the events at Bathurst had the power to encapsulate for both the media and the state a whole range of issues that were seen to be corrupting the 'social' fabric.

#### 1965: THE WILD ONES CONFIRMED,

Many of the themes discussed as influencing the interest in Bathurst 1964 continue throughout the year and have a strong effect on perceptions of Easter 1965. Clashes between mods and rockers in England, the U.S. Hell's Angels scare and the 'law and order' crisis lead-up to the N.S.W. elections in May 1965 continued to play their part in determining the reaction to events at Bathurst.

Throughout the year from Easter 1964 to Easter 1965 there were reports of clashes between mods and rockers at seaside resorts in England. However the other area to influence profoundly the perceptions of 'trouble' at Bathurst were the events concerning the Hell's Angels in the U.S. between the later part of 1964 and early 1965. What was to occur during this period in the U.S. was the creation of a folk devil in the shape of the Hell's Angels. ' The creation of the panic occurred contemporaneously with the moral

panic over mods and rockers in England outlined by Cohen.<sup>19</sup> Thus the two imperial centres of Australian culture (Britain and the U.S.A.) created moral panics over closely related issues - both symbolised by the motorcycle.

Towards the end of March 1965 both *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines ran articles on the U.S. Hell's Angels. One was entitled 'The Wild Ones', the other 'The Wilder Ones'. Both stories were included in the Australasian and Pacific editions of the magazines so were featured in Australia. Both stories were a conscious allusion to the Brando movie of the same name. A section of the *Newsweek* account of the Angel's run to Porterville is cited below:

A roaring swarm of 200 black jacketed motorcyclists converged on the small sleepy Southern California town of Porterville. They rampaged through bars, shouting obscenities. They halted cars, opening their doors, trying to paw female passengers. Some of their booted girlfriends lay down in the middle of the street and undulated suggestively...<sup>20</sup>

This *Newsweek* account and a very similar *Time* account (which had statements like 'No act is too degrading for the pack') appeared on sale at Australian newstands the fortnight before the 1965 Bathurst Easter races. It is perhaps not surprising then that accounts of Bathurst were portrayed in very similar language. For instance the *Daily Mirror's* account of Easter Saturday is barely distinguishable from the above account of Porterville:

More than 100 leather-jacketed motor bike hoodlums tried to wreck Bathurst on the weekend. The hoodlums brawled their way through the town's 10 hotels. In the streets and parks mobs of jeering hoodlums egged on by their girlfriends yelled insults at middle-aged women and threatened passing girls. At the height of the riot a youth stripped off his clothes...and his girlfriend began to strip too.<sup>21</sup>

Thus one reason for the continued interest in Bathurst was the influence of overseas events. Those events had effects on the media's perception of the 'trouble', the police perceptions of youth 'delinquency' and how to deal with it. The overseas events would have also influenced those who actually participated in the 'degrading' activities.

The other area of public debate which influenced perceptions of Bathurst was the continuing promotion of a 'law and order'

crisis in the build-up to the May elections. Mention has been made previously of the crisis over police strength and the problems of juvenile delinquency. Both these issues remained in the public arena throughout 1964 and into 1965. The advertisements for Askin's election campaign contained references to the decline in public administration, law and justice. The N.S.W. Police Association continued to demand a huge increase in police strength. It published articles such as 'Where are the Cops?'<sup>22</sup> The newspapers ran a campaign of 'fear in the city'. In fact two murders by juveniles just before Easter seemed to confirm the worst fears. In Auburn on April 14 1965, a fifty year old woman was stabbed to death by a fifteen year old boy while she slept. And on Good Friday five young boys all aged around fourteen set fire to, and burnt to death a fifty-five year old man as he slept in a bus shelter at Lewisham.

There is one further factor that needs to be considered and that is the escalation of the war in Vietnam. The Vietnam War and youth culture in the 1960s cannot be understood separately. What is of particular significance for the period we are considering (April 1965) is that military conscription had just been reintroduced and that the announcement to deploy Australian troops was imminent. The notion of 'Beatlemania' and youth mass culture has been mentioned already. Beatlemania was the symbolic shorthand for the problems of a seemingly hedonistic youth who would not take things seriously - particularly an imperialist war. The term could refer to anything from a 17 year old clerk at the Housing Commission who lost his job rather than have a haircut ('Unkindest Cut For Beatle-Boy. Keeps Hair But Loses Job'.) to brawls at Bathurst ('Several licensees yesterday bore visible evidence of their weekend clashes with Beatle Boys').<sup>23</sup>

Underlying these disparaging comments about youth was the need to generate commitment to fight in the war. This developed into the real 'law and order' crisis - a crisis of legitimacy for the state by the end of the decade. The first of the National Service Ballots was held in March 1965 when numbered balls were drawn from the Tattersall's Lottery Barrel. Meanwhile through March and April there was barely a day when the Vietnam War was not on the front page of the papers. The days when the war took second best, it usually did so to stories of local violence and crime like

those mentioned above. As the war escalated through early April when the U.S. began bombing 'economic' targets in the north Menzies built up the morale at home with front page stories concerning the 'moral courage' and the 'manifestation of justice and principle' involved in those actions.<sup>24</sup> Michael Sexton has shown clearly the uncritical and fawning response of the Australian media to events in Vietnam and, more importantly the inveiglement used by Menzies to get Australian troops into the war.<sup>25</sup> The announcement of Australian troop commitment to Vietnam was made April 29, 1965.

While it is obviously not possible to draw any simplistic relationship between these events of global significance and what was occurring at Bathurst what I am trying to suggest is the contextualisation of the 'Wild One' problem at Bathurst. In particular what framed the Bathurst events and gave meaning and signification to them is essential if we are to understand the manner in which a relatively small event with a 'local' history comes to exert a wider and powerful position in the mythologies of 'delinquency'.

In commenting on the events of Easter 1965 several points seem clear. Some of the activities referred to as part of the riot have obvious elements of being games. The climbing of light poles is still a major informal activity at Bathurst although now it occurs on Mount Panorama rather than downtown. Other elements reflect a continuity of provocative anti-police and anti-authority behaviour.

Some idea of the activities around police 'baiting' can be discerned from the descriptions of the 'riot', in particular the shouting of insults and the challenge made to police authority in the street, that is, within public space. The court records show clearly that these activities did not only involve motorcyclists. For instance evidence offered by police in Charge Case Z77001, a case of offensive manner against an 18 year old labourer from Seven Hills, gives some indication of occurrences. Police were patrolling in William Street on Saturday evening when a car overtook the police vehicle. Police observed that the car had "loud shouts and laughter coming from it", so they pulled it over. The youths in the car jumped out, ran to the curb and told police to pick out who was driving. Police stated in evidence, "After some questioning he (defendent) admitted driving the vehicle". The other youths were charged with drunkenness. Or Charge Case Z77013

which involved a 21 year old labourer from Mackay in Queensland on the offences of resist arrest and indecent language. The defendant was with a group of thirty or forty youths who were camped near the Vale Road to attend the races. When the police patrol went past early on Saturday evening some obscenities were shouted in their direction. The defendant was arrested, charged with indecent language and placed in the police car. As the vehicle began to move off he jumped out of the car. He was recaptured and also charged with resisting arrest. The defiant behaviour would have been sure to please the crowd of other youths. The overall evidence of the events during Easter 1965, both from court records and the media, point to this tradition of dislike for police authority. An essential part of that dislike was the attempted control by police of leisure-based activities that exist in public space. Historically it continued (and continues) to be a conflict involved over the negotiation of acceptable behaviour in the arena of the street, the campground and the park.

Over the period of Easter 1965 there were 55 arrests made - less than 1962 and 1964 and only slightly more than 1961. In other words the arrest rate for that particular year was not abnormal. Certainly not in the order one would expect from the media description of the incident. As in previous years one can point clearly to the homogenous class, age and gender composition of those arrested at Bathurst.

In drawing together the points raised in this section it is possible to analyse the event at Bathurst on two, not completely separate levels. Firstly there is the media signification of the event. This was undoubtedly far beyond what the actual occurrence seemed to justify. That signification was achieved by journalistic exaggeration. At the symbolic level it drew on certain images of 'delinquency' which had been established in the international arena of a 'problem' mass youth culture. The potency of those symbols of 'delinquent' youth can only be understood if contextualised within the domestic and international political framework of that period. One wonders, for instance, how much displacement there was between the 'total war' at Bathurst and the total war being waged in Vietnam, Of course the symbolic notions of disorder and destruction at Bathurst had *practical* effects. The demands to put an end

to the hooligan problem meant that the state response began to change. By the following Easter (1966) the police force had been substantially reinforced.

The other level of analysis is the events themselves. The conflict and fights, the arrests and court proceedings. The social and economic class of those involved is clear, as is the conflict over public space and the policing of leisure activities. These were powerful continuities in the events of 1965 which had been established over several years. One of the most important of those continuities was the active disrespect for police.

There are, however, points where the two levels inter-relate. One is the class nature of those involved. What makes the particular symbolisation of the event possible is the relatively powerless social position of those participating in the conflict. Their inability within the dominant power structures to make any other interpretation of the events heard is important. The other point where the two levels inter-relate is through the notion of sub-culture. Undoubtedly the public signification of the event as caused by certain identifiable 'types' meant that, via the exigencies of mass culture, some youth lived out the media defined reality.

## FROM 1966 TO 1986: A BRIEF OVERVIEW,

In 1966 substantial police reinforcements were sent to Bathurst, in particular the 21 Division. Before 1966 there had been 40 police sent there over Easter, in 1966 176 police were sent up there, by the late 1970s it was 300 police, while in 1985 and 1986 there were 400 police. Bathurst has become the largest single policing operation in N.S.W. Not only have more police been committed, the type of police squads used have broadened. What were once simply 'general duties' police now include riot police, the Drug Squad and members of the Bureau of Crime Intelligence who infiltrate the crowd.

As the town became more heavily policed during the late 1960s people stopped coming into it on Saturday night, preferring to stay at the main campsite on Mt. Panorama where they could engage in activities in what was technically a public place but away from

police observation. As mentioned at the beginning of the paper the campsite may hold 10,000 people over the Easter weekend. By the mid 1970s the police began to make heavier patrols of the camping area which triggered off growing resentment and increased anti-police activity. The location of arrests and the policing changed from the town to the mountain campsite five kilometres away.

In the late 1970s, a response to the technical problem of deploying large numbers of police at the campsite it was decided to build a police station (the police compound surrounded by a three metre high cyclone fence ribboned with barb-wire) in the middle of the campground. The site chosen was a flat grassy area which had traditionally been used for games. It was a classic case of the overt colonisation of space by police in an area that had been seen to be outside their control. It had been regarded as the sub-culture's territory. The police compound was built in 1979 and since that time it has been the focal point of the four most recent riots.

At one level there has been a strong historical continuity since the early sixties: the age, occupation and sex of the youth involved has remained the same, the time, day and date of the conflict has remained the same, only the location from the town to the mountain has altered. It is abundantly clear from the evidence that the leisure activity was dominated by generally younger men and women who came from the manual working class. There has been a direct continuity at this level for the last fifty years. In the oral histories that I collected all the men came from similar backgrounds: mechanics, labourers, machinists, fitters, boiler-makers etc. When questioned about their friends in the clubs to which they had belonged they described them as coming from similar backgrounds. More importantly in the court records that were examined from 1960 to 1985 relating to individuals who were arrested at Bathurst during the Races, surprisingly few occupations account for the vast majority of people. A large proportion of the men were labourers while the bulk of the remainder had manual working class jobs such as those just mentioned. Of the women brought before the courts most were cashiers, clerks, machinists and process workers.

Similarly the age group of those arrested remained historically

constant over the twentyfive years from 1960 to 1985. The mean age of those arrested each year oscillated between 21 and 23 years old.

Thus the typical person to be arrested at Bathurst was a 22 year old male with possibly a trade as a mechanic or, as likely, an unskilled worker in a factory..

## CONCLUSION,

An historical analysis of the police/spectator conflict and the representations of that conflict at Bathurst considerably broadens our understanding of the process at work within the conflict. The representation of the conflict by the state and the media has been to deny any historical continuity and to concentrate solely on the immediacy of the singular event. The result has been explanations which have centred on 'mindless hooligans', 'drunken gangs' and the like. The response has been towards increasingly tighter control over leisure activities at Bathurst, and more widely, within the general leisure sector. Restrictions on alcohol consumption, police searches, the establishment of a permanent riot squad within the N.S.W. Police Force and the use of more draconian legislation are some of the consequences.<sup>26</sup> These changes have usually occurred without public debate and within a scenario of 'law and order' breakdown.

Furthermore the historical analysis shows an important level of meaning to the anti-police activity. The challenge made to police by the participants is often within a strong form of ritual. It is not simply a challenge to 'law and order' but rather a gestural challenge to the control over social space. Far from being the harbinger of social disruption, the challenge to police has a high sense of counter-theatre and carnival.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of a research grant from the Criminology Research Council, Canberra which facilitated this study. The article is a shortened version of a paper presented to the A.H.A. Conference in Adelaide in

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