

# Why Did An Artistic Youth of 19 Go On A Killing Rampage That Took 11 Lives?

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — What drove convicted killer Charles Starkweather to one of the bloodiest forays in recent criminal history? A widely known author and lecturer on criminal behavior, Dr. James Melvin Reinhardt, professor of criminology at the University of Nebraska, sums up the case after interviewing the youth, his family, friends and teachers, and after watching him in court.

By DR. J. M. REINHARDT  
LINCOLN, Nebr. (AP)—Charles Starkweather, the 19-year-old killer, has reached the end of the line.

Of 11 slayings he has admitted, he was convicted of one. But he awaits with indifference the day of his execution.

His cell will open to the electric chamber. It is well lighted and ventilated. From a barred window he can see an arch of sky above the prison yard. He can watch the sun go down, but he cannot see it rise.

Charles Starkweather terrified a city. He put a stop to laughter, made people fearful to step out of doors. He fixed his name in criminal history.

What made him kill?

I watched Starkweather during his trial. I talked with family and friends. I had a private, unmonitored, three-hour conversation with him in prison. Out of this, some of his life's values became evident, some conclusions could be drawn.

The answer to why he killed must be found inside Charles Starkweather, in his way of looking at life, in the values he gave it.

He is the third of seven children—six boys and a girl. He grew up in a law-abiding family, knew good public schools and libraries.

## A Normal Childhood

His earlier years were not markedly different on the surface from that of thousands of young people who have grown into respectable adulthood. He shared the companionship of the family dog, often went hunting with his older brothers and his father, spent weeks ends with August Meyer of Bennet, a family friend whom he later murdered.

For a number of years he attended church and Sunday school regularly, but lost interest before he finished the eighth grade. He said "I just got tired of it."

Charles Starkweather's school intelligence rating was dull normal. Both the psychologists for the defense and the prosecution put his intelligence in the normal range.

The hideous eruption did not break suddenly out of a tranquil past. The provoking incidents came quickly, but the destructive forces were already there, waiting.

They had been quietly building up for years. Charles himself was not aware of what was really going on inside of him.

The exterior blustered and withdrew. Nobody gave it a thought. All the time the inside of him was watching fences go up that he couldn't cross, gates closed that he couldn't open.

In his job at a printing plant, he said, people were "looking down on me."

I said, "Why didn't you stay with your brother? He has made a living and stayed out of trouble."

He said: "You think I wanted to be a garbage hauler—who gives a damn for a garbage hauler?"

For Charles, life's purposes had

no scope. Egoistic and biologic satisfactions, that was about all. A girl to use, a gun to shoot, and power that could be tasted.

Whatever the provocative incidents that set Charles Starkweather off on the killing rampage, the inhibited, remorseless, power-hungry ego was already there.

It had been nursed in a multitude of grotesque and cruel fantasies. It was unfolded in his language and manner in the interview.

When I asked him for an explanation of his killings, he could say only: "The old man came at me . . . I had to kill him . . . the old lady was coming at me with a knife . . . she wanted to break up me and Carl . . . the little girl was crying . . ."

Killing not only served his immediate ends, it symbolized the destruction of opposing forces.

Behind his hunger for the feel of power was a cowering sense of failure. The gun could do things in a hurry.

He had thrilled to its performances on the television screen. He had watched himself handle it in the mirror.

As far back as Charles could remember he wanted to be important.

He had acquired numerous personal oddities and mannerisms to shield his sense of inadequacy: a withdrawn look, tricks for maintaining social distance—like refusing to answer, appearing not to hear, keeping silent.

"Tall gets you nowhere," he said.

## Realistic Day Dreams

Beneath these exterior safety devices were fantasy scenes of cruelty and personal mastery. These images had become more impelling and complex with time. They seemed so vividly realistic at times that he came up with a start, reaching for his gun.

He did not always know whether he was asleep or awake.

For years it did not occur to him that one day he would break over these fantasies to become a real murderer. Even after the first murder which he admittedly committed for money "so that he and Carl could run away," he confessed a return to the murderous images.

Except for the murder of the filling station attendant for money, the killings were planless. His victims simply "got in the way."

He told me he "could never stop pulling the trigger" until the last cartridge was spent. It was humiliating to "miss the head."

The boy Robert Jensen, for whose murder Charles was convicted, was shot six times in and around the right ear.

The gun was a poor defeated ego's short road to power.

Power over others: that is what he wanted. This was the ego's answer to real or imaginary wrongs.

A former schoolmate had felt sorry for him at school. "He seemed lonely." She invited him to her house, introduced him to her parents, tried to help him with his math. Within the week, Charles was saying she was "my girl" and the other boys "had better stay away from her." The girl had to drop him cold.

As we talked at the prison, Charles said he loved Carl and had to hold on to her at all costs. "Carl and I got along fine together . . . she does everything that I want," he said.

Caril Ann Fugate, 14, accompanied Starkweather on his killing rampage. She also has been charged with murder and awaits trial.

Charles Starkweather was pow-



CHARLES STARKWEATHER  
He looks like a normal youth

erless to see the world as others see it, powerless to measure himself by the standards others use.

He was upset because he was forbidden to wear his cowboy boots to the trial. Day after day he showed up with his flaming red hair trickily groomed. At his preliminary hearing he was more interested in his tie than in the start, reaching for his gun.

In the courtroom, he was unmoved by the tears of the slain boy's father. His eyes followed the faces of the jury with intriguing curiosity as they looked at the picture of the nude, mutilated body of one of his victims. His muscles tightened with anger when his counsel sought to establish his mental incompetence.

He smiled occasionally when he spoke to his mother.

He appeared always aware of his own importance in the courtroom. After all Charles Starkweather was what it was all about.

When I told him that the insanity plea was perhaps his only and last dim chance, he replied: "I would rather burn."

He resisted the determination of his attorneys to use the insanity plea to the last. His ego could find nothing hard or cold or nerve

testing about the cruelties of an insane man.

He had shot his way into the annals of crime. For him this was not something to be bartered away for "the rest of my life in a stinkin' asylum."

It is difficult to find where society failed in this case.

His flaming red hair, arched legs and short stature invited legacies like "Bow Legs," "Pint," "Firefly," "Archie." One student said he looked like he was born riding a barrel.

For a time in school he had a lisp in his speech that apparently had an inhibiting effect upon his behavior.

Many another boy has overcome far more serious handicaps. Charles' interest in school was sporadic and unsustained. He did well in some subjects, poorly in others.

## Had Artistic Talent

A teacher who knew him well said that he had an artistic turn of mind and could have become an artist if that interest could have been cultivated. He liked to make things with his hands.

On Christmas and other special occasions, he spent endless hours

## What It Cost

The 20-year cost of all this was

helping the teachers make flowers and decorations.

His only sister LaVeta was 16 when her brother set out with his 14-year-old girl friend to shoot his way to "glory." LaVeta has wistful eyes and a winsome face.

LaVeta, he said, "is my special sister. I wish I could have painted her face just like it is."

It was the only face that could hold his attention long enough to finish the picture, although he did experiment with other subjects — wood scenes and animals.

His father reports: "He would be sitting painting a picture as if unconscious of everything around him, then suddenly he would look up, flip his pencil at somebody and walk out."

His father is a little taller, a little heavier and a little better looking than the average middle-aged American male. He is a carpenter by trade and has had a vacillating work record for the past 12 years.

He has been visited recurring with a mild arthritic ailment since 1946. His manner is unconventional, demonstrative and sometimes shocking.

After his condemned son was led from the courtroom for the last time and while the mother wept alone, he said: "I'd like to go out and have a steak dinner."

Yet in his case this is not the mark of a man without feeling. It is an unerring sign that tension has softened. He never exhibited to me any evidence of cold indifference.

In his own words: "I have spent sleepless nights . . . wondering . . . wishing for an answer . . . thinking about the people Charles has killed . . ."

## His Mother's Character

Charles Starkweather's mother is pretty. She is small. Her face looks tired and sad but no older than her years.

One neighbor said, "She works all the time. When not working away from home, she is ironing, sewing, washing or something."

From a teacher: "The parents have always co-operated with the school. They almost never miss a school function or a parent-teacher meeting."

Another teacher: "They are poor, and don't have as good clothes as some children, but they are always clean."

None of the teachers thought that Charles' brothers or his sister had been a disciplinary problem in school. One said: "They are better than the average."

A neighbor told me that the Starkweather children "are very nice and considerate. They never run through my house and never come in without being invited even if the door is open."

Charles' two older brothers are respectable, self-supporting law-abiding citizens. The Starkweather house is small and old and run down, out of place in the center of an attractive middle class neighborhood where it sits.

Such is the family and the home of Charles Starkweather.

Charles Starkweather had some laudable interests. Under the sustained stimulus of appropriate social rewards, these might have been turned to constructive ends.

But he turned to guns.

His only plaint after the sentence was that his attorneys had "tried me for all those murders instead of the one I was charged with."

He said that he thought he should have a new trial, but "I would be glad to go to the chair tomorrow if I could have Carl on my lap."

## THE GENTLE ART OF THE INSULT

### BY EMANUEL CELLER

In my 35 years' experience in Congress I have often found that a sharp tongue was a weapon of offense, and that biting words frequently accompany acid debate. Any member who was quick at disparagement or the quick retort seemed always to amuse and win admiration.

Even slander, for which there is immunity in Congress, never lacks for circulation. There has been much of vituperation and repartee. Timing, however, is always important. To me, however, it has always seemed that if the majority of the House is with you, that is the best kind of repartee. Sometimes it is well to be silent, especially in the face of great provocation. Sometimes to assume a quiet dignity causes all the verbal darts hurled at you to be deflected.

The situation is not dissimilar in general to the late lamented Fred Allen, in his many verbal combats with Jack Benny. Fred Allen was ribbing Benny unmercifully. Frankly, Benny was no match for him. Jack Benny moaned in a fit of despair at being unable to add effective retorts. Jack Benny said, "If I had my gag writers here, you wouldn't say that to me."

### Insults in Verse

Insults are often used as a weapon but insults are like bad coins. We cannot help them being offered to us but we need not take them. Some insults are witty and some are just mean and ornery. Some insults can be couched in excellent poetry as when King Lear relates some disgraced soldiers and says:

"I have seen better faces in my time  
Than stands on any shoulder  
that I see  
Before me at this distance."

I personally have been the subject of unintentional jolt. I remember at a dinner not so long ago, when a chairman leaned over me while coffee was being served, and said, "Shall we let them enjoy themselves with the school. They almost never miss a school function or a parent-teacher meeting."

A Senator once said of a member of the opposite party, whom he detested, that the particular Senator went into a room with a skunk and the door was shut. There was considerable scratching on the door and the skunk shot out of the door like blue lightning.

William Jennings Bryan, when in the House, was called the Boy Orator of the Platte, the Platte being the name of a river. Senator Foraker took care to define the Platte as follows: "The Platte—6 inches deep—and 7 miles wide at the mouth."

Some years ago Representative Johnson of Indiana called a fellow Representative from Illinois a jackass. A point of order was made immediately that the statement was unparliamentary. Johnson said he retracted his statement, and then added: "While I withdraw the unfortunate word, Mr. Speaker, I still insist the gentleman from Illinois is out of order." "How am I out of order?" quickly demanded the Illinois Congressman. To which Representative Johnson replied: "Probably a veterinary surgeon could tell you."

**Good and Bad Trusts**

A Republican Senator attacked our then President for making a distinction between good trusts and bad trusts. He was asked to set forth the difference between good trusts and bad trusts. He said: "Good trusts contribute to the Republican Party and bad trusts do not."

Former Gov. Alfred E. Smith once said of an opponent: "I know the color of his liver, and it is whiter—if that could be—than the driven snow."

Most Secretaries of the Treasury like to be compared in greatness and goodness with the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. That comparison is frequently heard. Recently a Democratic member said: "Secretary of the Treasury Anderson is the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Secretary Humphrey."

A certain American politician was asked if he expected to attend the funeral of a rival whom he cordially detested. He replied: "No, but I thoroughly approve of it."

the fiscal arrangements never were easy. Time after time, Baron Haussmann's projects were threatened by skepticism and fear.

Slum clearance was forced largely by the routing of new boulevards through slum areas, and clearance to make way for the big new parks and public buildings. Prof. Pinkney points out, however, that the great failure of the program was that it did not prevent the creation of new slums in place of those it wiped out. Many displaced slum-dwellers, for instance, overcrowded other run-down areas (another concern of today's developers). And the stress of building regulations was entirely on exterior building beauty and aesthetics. Builders could—and did—jam people inside.

### The Giant Haussmann

Napoleon's main concerns were his plans for the streets and parks which opened up Paris. The sewer and water projects, the author concludes, were the personal triumphs of Haussmann, a zealous giant who fought the conservative Paris bankers at every turn and won.

Ironically, the end of the 20-year period also ended the ambitious careers of both men. First, Haussmann was forced out of office, partly as a scapegoat of the anti-imperialists, and partly because of questionable credit machinations he invented to finance his projects. Soon after, Louis Napoleon, his shaky empire collapsed, was forced into exile.

Public clamor, however, forced continuation of the works program. And subsequent years proved the inherent value and soundness of the fantastic spending spurge.

If there are lessons for Washington in the century-old Paris experience, one is the necessity of bold plans—far bolder than most of those thus far produced. And another is the necessity for leadership strong and fearless enough to carry them out.



URBAN RENEWAL PARIS STYLE—Scene showing 1852 clearing of ramshackle old buildings from area between Tuilleries and the Louvre.