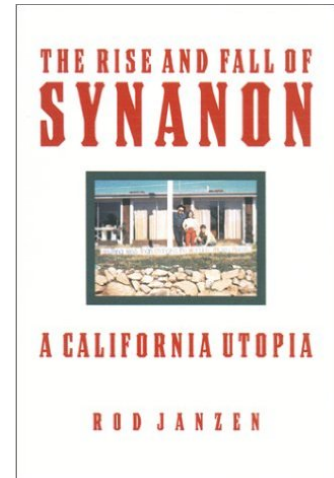


**Rod Janzen. *The Rise and Fall of Synanon: A California Utopia*.
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.**

Chuck Dederich--a former Alcoholics Anonymous member who coined the phrase "Today is the first day of the rest of your life"--established Synanon as an innovative drug rehabilitation center near the Santa Monica beach in 1958. Synanon evolved quickly into an experimental commune and "religion" that attracted thousands of nonaddict members and was strongly committed to social justice and progressive education. Over 25,000 people were members of Synanon at various times, including jazz musicians Charlie Haden and Stan Kenton; supporters of the group included Senator Thomas Dodd, comedian Steve Allen, and psychologist Abraham Maslow. In its later years, however, the group became involved in highly publicized violent actions--including putting a rattlesnake in the mailbox of a Los Angeles-area attorney--making the group's name synonymous with paranoid cults.



Based on extensive primary sources and interviews with former members, *The Rise and Fall of Synanon* explores how the institution evolved in the context of American social, political, and economic trends. Historian Rod Janzen argues that the group's downfall resulted from members giving too much power to Synanon's charismatic founder and a small group of top-level associates. Media attention focused on the group's cultlike activities, neglecting the community's significant successes in drug rehabilitation and social integration.

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