"Black Tar/White Powder: Race, Class, Gender, and Heroin in New York and San Francisco 1966-77"

In February of 1971, *Rolling Stone* magazine announced "Coping with the junkie has become a way of life for residents of the traditionally liberal Upper West Side of Manhattan."[1] In the article, Peter McCabe described how "For the last three years, an ever-growing army of teenagers has been trekking day and night across the West Side, robbing apartments and stores, stealing cars, purses—anything that will provide them with the cash for heroin."[2] What historian David T. Courtwright calls "The Great Epidemic" was underway in the American city, and the media had taken note.[3] Mass-market media in the late 1960s and early 1970s used heroin as a vehicle to explore (and shape) fears that the traditional elements of America's middle class were under threat. By portraying different users in different ways based on their race, class, and gender the mass-market media was actually practicing a cultural critique that touted middle class ideals. These ideals consisted of a meritocratic notion whereby success in American society depended on hard work, conformity to "traditional" values and social roles, and the importance of institutions such as police forces, social programs, and education. The media's interpretation of the "epidemic"[4] highlighted middle class biases and perpetuated ideal social roles of the late 60s and early 70s.

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[1] McCabe, Peter. "School Days: Shooting in the Bathroom, Nodding in the Classroom." *Rolling Stone*, February 1, 1971.
[2] Ibid
[3] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise: a History of Opiate Addiction in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. pp. 165
[4] A brief aside about terminology is necessary. In order to avoid terms that contain some type of value judgment, certain words will be avoided. The term "epidemic" is troublesome and is used here as a perception rather than as an epidemiological fact. Using the term epidemic in its medical role places heroin usage as a disease. As a disease heroin usage is casted as a communicable medical issue that requires a medical solution. This role of disease also removes some of the agency of the user. Therefore, the usage of epidemic refers to the perception of those writing about the spike in heroin use. The term "addict" will purposefully be avoided when referring to a user. Following the example of Eric C. Schneider in his work *Smack: Heroin and the American City,* heroin users will be referred to as "users" rather than "addicts" because of

To understand media coverage of "The Great Epidemic" it is important to situate it in historical context, most importantly, the late 19th and early 20th century history of heroin. Patterns of use and perception in the 60s and 70s were the product of decisions made in earlier eras; most importantly, the shift from opium to morphine and finally to heroin took several decades and was caused by racially charged legislation, changes in medical practices, and economic necessity. Therefore, a survey of the history of opiates is necessary for further understanding.

All opiates are products of the same plant, the opium poppy. The opium poppy is a hardy plant grown in various regions around the world.[5] While often thought of for their illicit uses, opiates have not always been considered a black market commodity. The medical use of opium dates back to the ancients.[6] As far back as the Greek physician Galen, opium has been mentioned in medical texts for it analgesic properties.[7] Opium use as an analgesic dominated medical practice from ancient times until the 1860s and 70s, when it was overshadowed by morphine.[8] (Morphine had been isolated from the poppy plant in 1817, but its use had not become widespread until the advent of the hypodermic syringe in the 1850s and the US Civil War in the 1860s.[9]) During the 19th century doctors were the main source of opiate addiction.[10] Widespread use of opium and morphine among doctors as a simple analgesic led to a large amount of

the variations in the types of users.[4] This distinction allows for the incorporation of people addicted to heroin, regular users, periodical users, experimenters, first time users, and those with a different drug of choice into the same analytical category. The term addict will only be used when discussing the identification of a user as an addict by the writer of a source.

[5] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise* pp. 1

[6] Ibid, pp. 43

[7] Ibid

[8] Ibid, pp. 45

[9] Ibid, pp. 45-46

[10] Ibid, pp. 42

medical users. These medical users were mostly middle class women, the class and gender most associated with doctor visits.[11]

After the development of bacteriology in the 1860s, physicians' practices began to change and new types of therapeutics were created to combat illness.[12] The new study of bacteriology coupled with the burgeoning public health system, which caused an overall decrease in certain diseases, led to a decrease in doctor prescribed opiates.[13] Furthermore, prescription laws enacted in the early 20th century allowed for the restriction of unauthorized prescription refills.[14] While mostly helpful, these reforms did not stop people from self-medicating in other ways. Often patent medicines contained morphine or opium and could be bought from a pharmacy.[15] However, the passing of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906 began to bring this to an end as well.[16]

Heroin, first introduced in 1898 as a cough suppressant, avoided the same widespread medical addiction seen with morphine.[17] Heroin's late arrival into the doctor's bag partially explained the lack of widespread medical addiction. By the time of its introduction doctors were already aware of the addictive potential of opiates in general.[18] Additionally, heroin was originally only prescribed for respiratory illness, unlike the varied uses for opium and morphine.[19] Moreover, heroin was often prescribed for respiratory illnesses such as tuberculosis

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[11] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise,* pp. 36
[12] Ibid, pp. 51
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid, pp. 53
[15] Ibid, pp. 56
[16] Ibid, pp. 59
[17] Ibid, pp. 85 & 93
[18] Ibid, pp. 93
[19] Ibid

and pneumonia, and their high mortality rate limited addiction.[20] Furthermore, heroin was initially only used orally and not intravenously like morphine.[21] Intravenous use allows a higher concentration to pass the blood-brain barrier, thus causing a greater effect and also a higher addiction potential. All these factors led to the limitation of medical heroin addiction.

Although medical opiate addiction dominated the 19th century, illicit use dominated the 20th century. This illicit usage originated in opium smoking during the latter half of the 19th century. Originally practiced almost exclusively by Chinese immigrants during the 1850s and 60s, by the 1870s young white males had begun to adopt opiate smoking as part of a bachelor subculture that included drinking, gambling, and prostitution.[22] Social authorities looked at this type of user differently than medical users, who were often considered victims of a disease or specific predicament while opium smokers were often seen as morally corrupt.[23] By 1892 the *Journal of the American Medical Association* called for a ban on all smoking opium imports.[24] Thus, the American Medical Association (AMA) was calling for a ban of one type of opiate while simultaneously promoting the addiction of a substantially larger group of people with another type. Cities with larger Chinese populations often acted even faster than the AMA could; San Francisco, for example, enacted a ban on opium smoking in 1875.[25] Raids of opium dens in San Francisco were frequent and mostly took place in dens that catered to white users.[26] Furthermore, opium smoking caused a panic among the media who believed the next

[20] Musto, David F. *One Hundred Years of Heroin*. Westport, Conn.: Auburn House, 2002. pp. 5
[21] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise* pp. 93
[22] Ibid, pp. 62
[23] Ibid, pp. 63
[24] Ibid, pp. 61
[25] Ibid, pp. 77
[26] Ibid

demographic of user would be the upper class.[27] By 1909, Congress stepped in and banned the importation of smoking opium.[28]

The ban, however, simply caused many users to switch opiates. Users who once only smoked opium now began to use heroin or morphine.[29] After the opium ban, heroin usage thrived among opiate users. New York City, the center of pharmaceutical manufacturing at the time, led the way as excess product made it into the illegal markets.[30] However, in 1924 these sources dried up as the federal government made it illegal to produce heroin.[31] Yet heroin did not disappear; it had proven itself in the black market. As a relatively potent and easily smuggled commodity, it became the standard for illegal trade.[32] Thus, ironically, the prohibition of opiates actually led to the widespread use of illegal heroin as the opiate of choice of the dealer and user.

During the 1920s and 1930s heroin use spread through illicit markets around the country.[33] The typical user of the period were young white working class men, mostly the children of immigrants living in slum neighborhoods of large urban areas.[34] The ease with which heroin could be transported, coupled with the fact that it could be adulterated easily to double, or even quadruple, profits meant that it spread quickly through drug selling communities.[35] By 1932 the bureau of narcotics claimed "heroin has supplanted morphine to a considerable degree as the drug of addiction in every part of the United States except on the Pacific coast."[36] The

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[27] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise*, pp. 63
[28] Ibid, pp. 81
[29] Schneider, Eric C. *Smack: Heroin and the American City,* pp. 5
[30] Ibid, pp. 6
[31] Musto, David F. *One Hundred Years of Heroin,* pp. 3
[32] Ibid, pp. 7
[33] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise,* pp. 104
[34] Ibid, pp. 88
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid, pp. 105

creation of a larger market also had an effect on the route of administration. As there became more steps in the market and heroin purity decreased, users began to switch to intravenous use.[37] By 1940 heroin users predominately took the drug intravenously.[38]

Following the lull in drug trade during World War II, heroin became popular in the jazz scenes of American cities, especially New York.[39] Jazz greats such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, and John Coltrane all used heroin.[40] Following in the steps of the greats, many jazz musicians began experimenting with heroin. During the late 1940s and 1950s heroin became a drug of African American jazz musicians and hipster subculture.[41] The intermingling of races in jazz clubs, especially in Time Square, allowed for the heroin market to draw in a small number of white users.[42] This spread to whites caused the first large heroin panic in the 1950s.[43] This panic actually disproportionally represented the average heroin user as white and middle class even though the predominant users of the period were African American or Hispanic.[44] The reason these groups predominated use stems from the large availability of the drug among African American and Hispanic neighborhoods. This wide availability was due to lax policing in areas deemed "vice districts."[45] Social privilege therefore limited white access to heroin.[46] In fact the only large heroin market dominated by white users in the 1950s was San Francisco.[47] However, by the late 1960s heroin use began to spread to more white users.[48]

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[37] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise* pp. 107
[38] Ibid, pp. 109
[39] Schneider, Eric C. *Smack: Heroin and the American City.* pp. 23
[40] Ibid
[41] Ibid, pp. 24
[42] Ibid, pp. 25 & 30
[43] Ibid, pp. 51-54
[44] Ibid, pp. 57
[45] Ibid, pp. 44 & 49
[46] Ibid, pp. 91
[47] Ibid, pp. 93
[48] Ibid, pp. 98

Heroin, therefore, never fully captured an iatrogenic user base, like morphine, and became synonymous with illicit usage. The heroin market remained a segregated market. Usage of heroin had always revolved around immigrant communities and slum neighborhoods. Once immigrants moved out of “vice districts” and slum neighborhoods, and African Americans taking part in the great migration moved in, heroin usage became a problem associated with the black community. The legacy of stratified drug markets remained in the latter half of the 20th century. This stratified drug market clumped certain drugs with white licit markets, mostly prescription drugs, and other drugs with black illicit markets, such as heroin.

The story of heroin’s development as an illicit commodity is important to understanding heroin usage in the late 1960s and 1970s. Another important piece of context is the state of cities like New York and San Francisco during the late 60s and 70s. Both of these cities were in an era of flux. During the era, New York City experienced a severe economic downturn. San Francisco experienced a demographic shift, from working class white immigrants to a more liberal hipster and hippie demographics, during the period as well.

Due to later political posturing it has become hard to separate San Francisco from its liberal, hippie identity.[49] Whether this posturing was done for positive or negative purposes, it muddles the understanding of San Francisco as a city especially during the 1960s. During the 1960s San Francisco was a city in flux. With a population moving from more conservative European immigrants, largely Catholics who immigrated in the 1920s and 30s from Germany, Italy, Ireland, and Poland, to a more liberal hipster and hippie demographic.[50] With such a sudden change there was bound to be some social conflict. Hippies were identified as a weak,

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[49] Sides, Josh. *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 8
[50] Ibid, pp. 2

drug addicted, venereal disease carrying culture that was invading working class immigrant neighborhoods.[51] Their presence was unwelcomed by these working class populations. One resident, Fred Methner, claimed, "I have seen my beloved adopted city degenerate from something lovely and beautiful to something vile, vicious, and venomous."[52] The working class was not the only group to bemoan the hippie "invasion." On February 2, 1967, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published a story reiterating a panel discussion by a psychologist at Stanford University. The article claimed, "The love-seeking hippies of the Haight-Ashbury district could become the hate-filled Gestapo of America's tomorrow."[53] The city government itself also took notice of the influx of hippie residents. In May 1967, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved a resolution designed to "discourage a mass invasion of hippies."[54] The board tied hippies to "crime, delinquency, venereal disease, fire, and epidemic."[55] Even before the heroin epidemic truly began among San Francisco hippies, they were already being treated as a plague descending upon the city, a scapegoat for all the cities issues.

New York City, too, was confronting problems. In January of 1966, *U.S. News and World Report* asked the question, "Does New York City have a future?" and the question was warranted.[56] After years of high spending and decreasing revenue, New York City was on the brink of economic collapse.[57] Removal of manufacturing, white flight, and the removal of lower

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[51] Sides, Josh. *Erotic City,* pp. 2
[52] Ibid, pp. 4
[53] "'Tomorrow's Gestapo' A Psychiatrist's View of Hippies." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 2, 1967.
[54] Chapin, William. "Discouraging Word for The Hippies." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 9, 1967.
[55] Ibid
[56] Lankevich, George J. *New York City: A Short History*. New York: New York University Press, 2002. pp. 205
[57] Ibid, pp. 213

income housing in the late 1950s and early 1960s had begun to affect New York City by the late 1960s.[58] The lower tax income and increased spending, which grew even larger with the founding of the City University of New York in 1961, led to an inefficient and desperately troubled city.[59] In 1965 New Yorkers elected Mayor John Lindsay, but Lindsay's leadership brought even more inefficient spending and decision-making. [60][61] In some cases Lindsay's mayoral leadership was plagued by corruption as well. In February 1973, the *New York Times* reported that $73 million dollars worth of heroin and cocaine totaling 398 pounds, a fifth of the heroin and cocaine seized in the 12 previous years, had been stolen from police evidence.[62] A five-week audit and subsequent investigation showed that a small group of policemen were responsible for the theft.[63] Patrick V. Murphy, the Commissioner of the New York City police department, stated that the drugs had been stolen because of a complete "lack of managerial controls."[64] This theft was just an example of the inefficiency, lack of control, and corruption that plagued New York City at the time. The inefficiently run and expensive services led to a growing animosity between middle class whites and those they deemed part of the "welfare class."[65] Some of these disgruntled residents would join the nearly 800,000 middle class whites that left New York City between 1954–1965.[66] However, some would remain and continue to bemoan a class they believed benefitted disproportionally.

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[58] Lankevich, George J. *New York City: A Short History.*, pp. 191-192
[59] Ibid, pp. 197 & 205
[60] Ibid, pp. 200
[61] Ibid, pp. 208
[62] Burnham, David. "Police Drug Loss Now $73 Million." *The New York Times*, February 1, 1973.
[63] Ibid
[64] Ibid
[65] Lankevich, George J. *New York City* pp. 197
[66] Ibid

Therefore, both cities were in a period of flux. Demographics were changing and the cities were shifting from older rooted population bases to newer populations, which seemed foreign to the older populations. Often the new populations were treated as though they could not provide the cities with the support it needed to survive. These new populations, liberal hippies in San Francisco or blacks taking part in the great migration in New York City, were often condemned as the reason for the decline of the cities. In the eyes of older residents these groups were incapable of maintaining the social realities of the city and signaled the end of the cities themselves.

Studying mass-market media is an excellent gauge of what the middle class of a city thinks. Newspaper media was designed with middle class readership in mind. As a memo written in 1933 by William Randolph Hearst read, newspapers were designed for "the nicest kind of people for the great middle class."[67] This reality is also reflected in the early slogan used on the stationary at the Times Company, which read, "In many thousands of the best homes in New York City and Brooklyn, *The New York Times* is the only newspaper admitted."[68] Newspapers continued to sell to the middle class and pride themselves in conforming to and reiterating middle class values. Therefore, newspapers function as a tool of middle class society. Functionally the newspaper acts as a creator, reviewer, and amalgamator of middle class opinions. Newspapers blend together opinions of somewhat geographically disconnected people into systems of thought ready for mass consumption. These systems of thought create ideal roles, norms, and relationships that function as middle class ideals. In a sense newspapers are the voice of the middle class, reporting and reassuring readers through a biased viewpoint.

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[67] Wallace, Aurora. *Newspapers and the Making of Modern America: A History*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005. pp. 22
[68] Ibid, pp. 158

In the late 60s and 70s the media used heroin use as a point of critique. While on the surface the media spoke about heroin, they were really discussing ideas about race, class, and gender. Using heroin as a starting point the media critiqued different groups and their inability to conform to white middle class ideals. The media used heroin to explain why middle class African Americans would be unable to adopt white middle class norms. It was also used to explain why working class African Americans could not move into the middle class. The failure of the cities and white middle class institutions were wrapped up in heroin use among urbanites as well. The failure of African American working class women to conform to middle class ideals of motherhood was also implicit in newspapers depictions of heroin usage. Heroin was just a substance but its usage became a scapegoat for racism, classism, and sexism.

Media critiques about heroin usage were on the surface discussions about drug use, however, they also acted as a vehicle for discussing the perceived problems with large societal changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Newspapers used heroin as a way of speaking about the rapid changes of the American social landscape and the fears that arose when middle class values were in a perceived danger. The coverage of the story of Antoinette Dishman highlights the way middle-class rhetoric used cultural values to explain their exclusion of African Americans in a supposedly meritocratic system. The story of Walter Vandermeer underlines the differences between middle class and working class African Americans, a failure of black working class motherhood to conform to middle class ideals, and the failure of institutions touted by the middle class. Nicky Barnes and the success that he had in the drug trade emphasize the limitations of meritocracy, especially when applied to a market outside of those deemed “respectable” by the middle class. Furthermore, Barnes’ story insinuated that success could only come to African-American through nefarious ways. Finally, coverage of hippie heroin use highlights what people

believed happened to a group of white middle class youth when they eschewed middle class values. Their story, in the minds of the middle class, was one of an inevitable decline and loss of potential due to a failure to conform to middle class ideals.

All of these stories are, on the surface, coverage of an epidemic raging through New York City and San Francisco. However, a more in-depth look at the sources proves that anxieties about shifting middle class identities and changing urban demographics were more important than the surface content. As Jeremy Kuzmarov states in *The Myth of the Addicted Army,* drugs were "an easy scapegoat for deep-seated social problems."[69] Thus, heroin was used a vehicle for discussing the perceived problems with massive changes of the 1960s and 1970s.

In October of 1968, the *Chicago Defender* published a list of high school semi-finalists for the National Achievement Scholarship Program for outstanding black students[70]. Among the list was Antoinette Dishman, a student at Harlan High School in South Chicago's Roseland neighborhood. Dishman, a successful student, graduated as the salutatorian of her high school class and won a separate one thousand dollar scholarship from a local Chicago bank in 1969.[71] In the fall of 1969, Dishman began attending Barnard College in Manhattan's Morningside Heights neighborhood.[72] By February 1970, Dishman was dead of a heroin overdose.[73] The *New York Times* used her case as an example of an "epidemic" of heroin use among the country's youth. Her death would be used as an example, telling readers of the dangers drugs posed even to

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[69] Kuzmarov, Jeremy. *The Myth of the Addicted Army* pp. 102
[70] "Black Students Fare Well For Scholarships." *Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1968.
[71] "Article 1 -- No Title." *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 2, 1969, Daily Edition ed.
[72] Ibid
[73] Phillips, McCandlish. "Barnard Girl Dies After Heroin Party." *The New York Times*, February 1, 1970

African-American gifted youth. The men who helped Dishman acquire the drugs, meanwhile, were used as examples by a justice system eager to demonstrate it was addressing the problem.

Antoinette Dishman's death first appeared in an article on the front page of the February 1, 1970 edition of the *New York Times.*[74] Police claimed that the Bronx apartment where Dishman died was "a regular factory" for narcotics preparation.[75] The police arrested the men who rented the apartment and seized heroin, marijuana, drug paraphernalia and four guns.[76] The author of the article makes sure to point out that the men arrested were also college students. This fact pointed to the spread of heroin use to those deemed respectable by mainstream American society. The insinuation being that the spread of heroin use to "respectable people" was possible when African-Americans attempted to enter middle class social institutions. The police also claimed that Dishman had "no previous history of narcotics as far as we can tell."[77] This piece of conjecture, most likely based on Dishman's socio-economic status and gender, served as another way of pushing the idea that heroin was poisoning an uncorrupted youth. Furthermore, the article showed that even the most promising black youth were prone to this type of behavior. The author quotes several of Dishman's friends who claimed that she was "quiet, reserved, conservative" and a "good girl and good student."[78] Giving this story extensive coverage, a full column on page one and three additional columns later in the paper, allowed for the perpetuation of a drug panic. The article also alludes to the earlier drug-related death of Fairleigh S. Dickinson, a member of a prominent family that founded Fairleigh Dickinson

[74] Phillips, McCandlish. "Barnard Girl Dies After Heroin Party."
[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid
[77] Ibid
[78] Ibid

University in New Jersey.[79] Bringing this drug related death into the story allowed the paper to further connect heroin use to a wealthier, more affluent, "respectable" class of users.

A follow up article covering Dishman's death appeared in the February 2, 1970 edition of the *New York Times*, this time farther into the paper on page 24.[80] The article's placement is important to note because it is the farthest the *New York Times* every placed an article covering Dishman's death. It is also the only article the *New York Times* ran about Dishman that covered her political affiliations. The article stated that Dishman was a "black militant" and involved in the "Black Organization of Soul Sisters," a student club for black Barnard students.[81] The article painted a picture of Dishman as a socially aware young woman that made a mistake by hanging around the "wrong" kind of people. The author of the article opened with a juxtaposition of Dishman's actions, beginning by mentioning her involvement with a demonstration of students to force St. Luke's Hospital into opening a program for teenage heroin users. The author finished the lead by mentioning the "small apartment in a rundown area of the Bronx" in which Dishman died.[82] This lead was meant to evoke the loss of a promising young woman that left her social position and consequently lost her life. Furthermore, the linkage showed that even though Dishman seemed middle class her race continued to hinder her true acceptance into the demographic.

The author continued on to stress how "bright" and "articulate" Dishman was and how she came from a "happy family background."[83] This language stressed that while Dishman seemed like a middle class girl this was really a veneer and that her race set her far apart from the

[79] Ibid
[80] Montgomery, Paul L. "Barnard Mourns a Heroin Victim." *The New York Times*, February 2, 1970.
[81] Ibid
[82] Ibid
[83] Ibid

middle class world. Moreover, the language insinuated what was beneath the media panic: the fact that Dishman was not a delinquent from a broken home but from a nearly middle class family. However, because Dishman was African American she was given more responsibility for her surroundings than what would have been afforded to a white woman. While the author often claimed that Dishman had "no involvement with drugs – not even marijuana smoking" he added a quote from one of Dishman's friends as a caveat.[84] Dishman's friend claimed, "because we're black, we all know about heroin and its dangers and just because of this knowledge I always thought we were protected from it. It's not as if we're some white girl sniffing for the first time out of ignorance."[85] In this article the author simultaneously assigned innocence because of Dishman's gender and class while affording some leeway because of her race. It seems as though there are different scales for the agency of the user. The article also implied that Dishman was unable to conform to middle class ideals because of her race. While she attained success due to hard work and was attending college, her race, and its ties to drug use, prevented her from truly being middle class.

The article continued on to reassure readers that students from Barnard and its affiliated university, Columbia, claimed that they were rarely involved with heroin. However, the article then mentioned the ubiquity of marijuana on campus and a case of heroin use by two Columbia students just a semester earlier.[86] These connections surely would have frightened the middle class readers sending their children off to prestigious colleges.

[84] Montgomery, Paul L. "Barnard Mourns a Heroin Victim."
[85] Ibid
[86] Ibid

The next time the *New York Times* mentioned Dishman's death was February 26, 1970.[87] This article was not a rehashing of events but a report on the indictment of two men in relation to the case. These men were not the same college students identified in the earlier articles but rather two older men who seem to be drug dealers. The author makes sure to note that the men were "clad in leather jackets and denim trousers" as they stood impassively during arraignment.[88] This depiction undoubtedly conjured up the idea of rebellious delinquency in the minds of readers. The article is interesting because both men were indicted on charges of second-degree manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide. The two college aged men found in the apartment with Dishman were seemingly only charged with the drug and weapons violations mentioned in the earlier article. The homicide and manslaughter charges were only used in connection to the older dealers who would have been seen as "career" drug pushers. The article claimed that this was the first time these charges would be used to try dealers connected to the death of a user. The Bronx prosecutor, District Attorney Burton B. Roberts, claimed, "to give a person heroin is like feeding him rat poison and should be prosecuted in the same way."[89]

At this point heroin had been around for roughly 70 years but in seven decades no dealer had ever been charged with homicide in the connection to the death of a user. While other draconian laws covered the heroin trade, such as the death penalty for selling to minors in the 1950s, it was not until an aspiring middle class young woman at an elite university overdosed that the legal system would question the agency of the user and determine that the drug pusher was at fault rather than the drug user. District Attorney Thomas J. Mackell of Queens was

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[87] Perlmutter, Emanuel. "Two Indicted for Homicide In Girl's Death by Heroin." *The New York Times*, February 26, 1970.
[88] Perlmutter, Emanuel. "Two Indicted for Homicide In Girl's Death by Heroin."
[89] Ibid

excited to see how the new prosecution tactics would work out, stating, “A conviction based in negligence in this case would go a long way toward cutting the increasing number of narcotics deaths – all too often teenagers induced to try the drug by the real culprit.”[90] This prosecution tactic showed more about where the lawyers believed responsibility should lay for drug use and the dependency of this responsibility on the demographic of the user. Just another example of David Courtwright’s well-known formulation, “what we think about addiction very much depends on who is addicted.”[91] This statement extends to the agency allotted to the users’ as well.

While the February 26, 1970 article would be the last full-length article given to Dishman’s death, her case would continue pop up around the *New York Times* in various capacities. The next appearance the Dishman case makes in the *New York Times* is in an article on March 12, 1970 about a 15-year-old girl overdosing in a Harlem apartment.[92] The girl’s drug dealer in this case was also charged with homicide. The Dishman case had therefore set a precedent in the New York City legal community.

This article also mentioned the aftermath of Dishman’s death at Barnard and Columbia. After Dishman’s death the colleges’ students took action and began student organizations warning about the effects of drug use. In a statement the newly created student organization claimed, “Heroin overdose and abuse is occurring at Columbia, last semester a student suffering from heroin overdose was carried to St. Luke’s. Had he arrived three minutes later he would have died.”[93] This statement seemed to conflict with earlier statements made by students around

[90] Ibid
[91] Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise* pp. 4
[92] Narvaez, Alfonso A. "Narcotics Death Called Homicide." *The New York Times*, March 12, 1970.
[93] Ibid

the time of Dishman's death. The statement pushed the drug panic further by conceding that even students at the most prestigious universities in the country were not safe from heroin. Furthermore, the article insinuated that the spread of heroin to prestigious universities was the inevitable result of allowing the black middle class to enter into white middle class social domains.

At this point Dishman's case vanished from the *New York Times* for over a year until May 18, 1971. The next article was a report on the trial of the men accused of killing Antoinette Dishman. The men had entered a guilty plea.[94] Furthermore, the case was briefly restated to refresh the reader. However, in this retelling of the case Dishman is fully stripped of her agency. It is no longer stated that she took the drugs but rather that she was "given" the drugs.[95] While this shift in language may be subtle it also signals a shift in blame. Dishman had now been fully cast as a passive female user without the agency to decide whether she should have taken the drug or refused. By this time she was portrayed as prey to the villainous drug pushers that took away her young life. A later article on June 19, 1971 reported on the sentencing of the two men, both received three years in prison. This article also stated that Dishman was given the heroin not that she took the heroin.[96]

In the coverage of Dishman's death the media assigned Dishman a lower level of agency for her actions. Dishman's class and gender undoubtedly allowed for the media to explain away her usage as a single misstep in a life of an otherwise conforming young adult. However, Dishman's race allowed the media to explain her story as a uniquely African-American

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[94] "2 Plead Guilty in Bronx In Coed's Heroin Death." *The New York Times*, May 18, 1971.
[95] "Ibid
[96] "Two Given 3-Year Terms In Girl's Death From Drugs." *The New York Times*, June 19, 1971.

experience, not an experience of overdose but a failure in attaining true middle class status. Her race, in the minds of the media, was her undoing.

The story of Walter Vandermeer was slightly different. Vandermeer, a twelve year old African America boy from Harlem, died of an overdose on December 14, 1969 just a few months before Dishman. Vandermeer's age allowed the news media to assign a certain level of innocence to his story. This innocence was prevalent throughout the article's rehashing of events around his death. In the first article about his death on December 16, 1969 the level of innocence is apparent when the author, Barbara Campbell, writes "The boy was wearing a snoopy sweatshirt with the inscription on the back 'Watch out for me. I want to bite somebody to release my tension.'" [97] This quote embodied how the media treated the case, a level of innocence allotted to the boy because of his age while simultaneously depicting an angry, delinquent, working class child starved for attention and failed by the system. Vandermeer's story highlights the differences in depictions of working class and middle class African Americans, a failure of working class motherhood, and a failure of institutions.

While the media painted Dishman as an upstanding middle class student who merely made a single mistake that took her life, Vandermeer was depicted as a problem child. In the first article about his death Vandermeer was already treated with a wary lens. Almost immediately after the facts about his overdose were given the article brought up the fact that the medical examiner, Dr. Michael Baden, claimed "Walter [was] a successful seller of drugs who sold heroin to support his growing habit."[98] A fact that would later come into question at the end of a

[97] Campbell, Barbara. "Boy, 12, Dies of Heroin Dose in Harlem Bathroom." *The New York Times*, December 16, 1969
[98] Ibid

lengthy obituary published on January 12, 1970.[99] The medical examiner also claimed that Vandermeer had possibly been "addicted" for some time.[100] This statement came from Dr. Baden's professional opinion even though Vandermeer's body lacked marks from needle use. While Dr. Baden's professional opinion on how long Vandermeer used heroin differs from article to article, sometimes two months sometimes two years, he seemed sure that Vandermeer was an "addict."[101] Therefore, both Vandermeer and Dishman lacked the tell tale sign, in the minds of the media, of a heroin user – track marks. However, Dishman was immediately given the benefit of the doubt, while the media assigned Vandermeer the addict label. Furthermore, Vandermeer's case was often linked to his older brother serving jail time in Riker's Island for a narcotics charge.[102] The media often depicted Vandermeer's family in a negative light. In the eyes of the news media the Vandermeer family exemplified every ideal that ran contrary to the middle class. Vandermeer's mother, Lilly Price, bore the brunt of the criticism and the media often casted her as the villain of the story.

Lilly Price was a mother of 10, including Walter, and throughout the coverage of Vandermeer's death the media depicted her as a failed mother. In nearly every article covering her son's death the authors mentioned that Price received welfare payments, even going so far as to report the amount - $412 - of money she received each month.[103] In Vandermeer's full length obituary the author gives a brief history of Mrs. Price's life. In the course of the history the author mentioned that Price was "the nominal head of a growing, desperately disorganized

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[99] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12." *The New York Times*, January 12, 1970.
[100] Campbell, Barbara. "Boy, 12, Dies of Heroin Dose in Harlem Bathroom."
[101] "Death of a Child." *The New York Times*, December 21, 1969.
[102] Ibid
[103] Campbell, Barbara. "Boy, 12, Dies of Heroin Dose in Harlem Bathroom."

'multi-problem' family."[104] Here, along with the fact that she had been on welfare for 21 years, her motherhood was called into question.[105] The media also presented the fact that her ten children had four different fathers as another point of criticism.[106] Ignoring the fact that the last five of her children shared the same father (Sunday Togbah a Liberian immigrant) and the fact that Walter's father, Willie Vandermeer, had been deported back to his native Surinam in 1957, allowed the media to paint a picture of a promiscuous, neglectful mother.[107]

Furthermore, an eviction from an apartment for non-payment of rent added to the negative depiction of Price.[108] In reality, Price claimed that her failure to pay rent stemmed from the fact that her landlord refused to fix the toilet in her apartment for over a year and a half.[109] The media underreported the details of the eviction, which only appeared in the full-length obituary and a subsequent article dealing with the custody case that followed Vandermeer's death.[110] However, other details about the apartment permeate the articles. The New York Times reported "Six of her children were squeezed into one room of a three-room apartment… they somehow shared with a couple with two children of their own"[111] In fact the belief that she "kept a dirty apartment" was among the reasons for the custody hearing.[112] This coupled with the fact that during a visit from a welfare investigator, on the day of Walter's funeral no less, she was unable to explain where her other children were led to the custody hearing.[113] The size and

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[104] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12."
[105] Ibid
[106] Ibid
[107] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12."
[108] Campbell, Barbara. "Boy, 12, Dies of Heroin Dose in Harlem Bathroom."
[109] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12."
[110] Hunter, Charlayne. "Vandermeer Kin to Stay Together." *The New York Times*, February 28, 1970.
[111] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12."
[112] Hunter, Charlayne. "Vandermeer Kin to Stay Together."
[113] Ibid

cleanliness of her apartment were key to retaining custody of her other children after Vandermeer's death. In fact a social worker testified that Price could take care of her children but needed a larger apartment.[114][115] Luckily, a Harlem antipoverty group was able to furnish her with a seven-room apartment and thus helped her retain custody.[116]

A belief in middle class ideals about motherhood runs throughout Vandermeer's story. Price's value as a mother was called into question repeatedly due to her failure to conform to middle class norms. The "desperately disorganized" family she headed, the fact that she received welfare, and the level at which it was reported pointed to her failure to secure a male provider and called into question the ability to maintain her household. Her children having multiple fathers was used as a signifier of promiscuity. The fact that she was unable to tell a welfare investigator the location of her children led readers to believe she was neglectful. Finally, the apartment where she and her children resided, her eviction, and the apartments size all came into question on multiple occasions and even served as the basis of a custody hearing. However, the reality that nearly 15 percent of New Yorkers lived below the poverty line in 1970 and thus many people lived in similar conditions throughout the city escaped the middle class.[117] These conditions appalled middle class readers because of their unfamiliarity with living conditions outside of their class. In the minds of the middle class Price was an utter failure as a mother.

Vandermeer's story also exemplifies the belief that institutions were failing in New York City. This failure was not perceived as a systemic problem but rather a problem that occurred when society instituted white ideals on a non-white populace. The news media and politicians

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[114] Hunter, Charlayne. "Vandermeer Kin to Stay Together."
[115] "Mother of Boy Heroin Victim Wins Right to Keep Children." *The New York Times*, April 10, 1970
[116] Hunter, Charlayne. "Vandermeer Kin to Stay Together."
[117] "United States Census Bureau." Decennial Census: 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990 Censuses. Accessed May 1, 2015. http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/census/1960/index.html.

were critical of the school system as well as several social services departments. In an article appearing just three days after Vandermeer's death, on December 17, 1969, the *New York Times* reported that Assemblyman Hulan E. Jack claimed that the board of education was guilty of "gross negligence" in the death of Vandermeer. Jack claimed that Vandermeer began using after he was expelled from school and that "it was a 'grave situation' when the school system 'put a child out onto the streets.'"[118] Jack continued on saying "The mayor of New York City and various agencies that deal with child welfare and care have completely fallen down on their jobs."[119] This sentiment was echoed in Vandermeer's obituary, which claimed that Vandermeer's case "was handled by Family Court, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Department of Social Services and its Bureau of Child Welfare, the Board of Education's Bureau for the Education of Socially Maladjusted Children, the Wiltwyck School for Boys and the Office of Probation."[120] By commenting on the failure of this endless list of institutions the news media is actually condemning the failure of minority populations to adhere to these institutions and their values. The media thus bemoaned minorities for their perceived inability to benefit from systems formed outside of their value systems. The failure of these institutions is thus a failure of minority populations to adhere to middle class systems.

Vandermeer's story differs from Dishman's in that his character was in question. Not only was Vandermeer's character called into question but his mother's was as well, something that went completely unreported in Dishman's case. While Vandermeer's age allowed for a low level of agency, the assault on his character, and additionally the assault on his mother's character, stemmed from the fact that they did not conform to middle class ideals. The blaming

[118] Robinson, Douglas. "Hulan Jack Assails School Ouster of Boy Killed by Heroin." *New York Times*, December 17, 1969.
[119] Ibid
[120] Lelyveld, Joseph. "Obituary of a Heroin User Who Died at 12."

of institutions, such as the education system, for his death points to the belief that institutions responsible for instilling middle class values did not work when applied to an African American working class.

The story of Leroy "Nicky" Barnes was vastly different from both Dishman's and Vandermeer's. Barnes' story is that of a heroin seller, not a heroin user. While depictions of sellers in the media were fairly common, such as the two men tried in connection to Dishman's death, Barnes was not a street level "pusher." During the 1970s Barnes was a high-level narcotics trafficker and distributor. On June 5, 1977, *The New York Times Magazine* ran a feature claiming that Barnes was "Mister Untouchable."[121] His image adorned the cover as he stood defiantly in a tailored suit.[122] By the end of 1977 Barnes would be convicted of conspiracy and sentenced to life in prison.[123]

Nicky Barnes truly warranted the nickname "Mister Untouchable"; between 1973 and 1977 he beat four different charges of homicide, bribery, narcotics, and weapons violations.[124] He had a knack of eluding prosecutors' attempts at conviction. Due to this special talent, the lifestyle he led, and the business he ran, Barnes gained notoriety in the 1970s as "one of the nation's major drug traffickers."[125] While drug trafficking brought him notoriety, his business skills and level of success set him apart. Due to his business savvy and success, the media began an odd relationship with Barnes, both glorifying and demonizing him simultaneously. In a sense Barnes was the epitome of middle class success, a "self-educated" man who rose from nothing

[121] Ferretti, Fred. "Article 6 -- No Title: Nicky Barnes." *The New York Times Magazine*, June 5, 1977.
[122] Ibid
[123] Lubasch, Arnold. "Barnes Guilty In Drug Case." *New York Times*, December 3, 1977.
[124] Ibid
[125] Treaster, Joseph B. "Police Report Offer of $130,000 Bribe." *New York Times*, December 18, 1974.

through hard work and intelligence.[126] However, his business, running contrary to middle class values, meant that his glorification was reined in by demonization.

The obsession the media had with Barnes was fascinating. Details of his life in articles seem irrelevant, only existing to quietly applaud his success. The media continuously seemed enamored with this success. In one account of Barnes, Fred Ferretti claimed Barnes showed up in Harlem on Christmas dressed in “one of his 300 new suits, wearing one of his 100 pairs of shoes, one of his 25 hats” to hand out turkeys.[127] Another article claimed he was “a virtual folk hero.”[128] Throughout the stories about Nicky Barnes there were details like these speckled about. While the articles all maintained the same negative tone about his criminal activities his lavish lifestyle, folk hero status, and business savvy were all celebrated. This celebration of his folk hero status, business savvy, and lavish lifestyle all point to the belief that even the most successful and beloved figures in the African-American community, with qualities close to middle class ideals, could only exist in a criminal mastermind. The fact that he was a “folk hero” in the black community also showed readers that black culture was inherently dysfunctional and seemed drawn to glorifying the “wrong types.”

The media touted Barnes as a “self-educated man, highly intelligent, who taught himself to read,” a “legend,” and an “organizational genius.”[129] One federal prosecutor compared him to the president of General Motors.[130] His wealth extended into real estate where it was reported

[126] Ferretti, Fred. "Article 6 -- No Title: Nicky Barnes."
[127] Ibid
[128] Lubasch, Arnold. "Barnes Guilty In Drug Case."
[129] Ferretti, Fred. "Article 6 -- No Title: Nicky Barnes."
[130] Lubasch, Arnold. "U.S. Drug Case Against Barnes Reaches Midpoint." *New York Times*, October 25, 1977.

that he owned “90 percent of a $5 million Detroit housing project.”[131] An article claimed that he was a “voracious reader, particularly of the law” and that when he was in prison in the 1960s he “subscribed to 37 different law journals.”[132] Out of context his story sounds uplifting. Often the media included the fact that after an early arrest he kicked his own drug habit at the Lexington Narcotics Farm and, as one article added, “to this day he does not use drugs, nor does he drink.”[133] Without the qualification that he was the largest drug trafficker in New York City, his story reads like an ideal middle class success story, one of redemption and hard work.

The news media only perpetuated his legendary status reporting that police who worked on Barnes cases had an “admiration for Barnes’ lifestyle, a style which is consistently, wickedly flamboyant, and often humorous. They are professionals admiring a professional, without condoning what they believe him to be.”[134] The same article quoted a New York City detective who claimed that “his fans” treated him “like the goddam pope” and that they believed the Jim Croce song “Bad, Bad Leroy Brown” had been written for him.[135] All of these stories perpetuated the mythical nature of Nicky Barnes.

The media also obsessed over his luxurious lifestyle. Almost every article relating to him cites his taste in cars. One article claimed he owned “five or six cars, most of them Mercedes-Benzes.”[136] Another claimed he owned “at the very least, one Mercedes-Benz, perhaps more, and a Citroën Maserati, and is surrounded by gaggles of Thunderbirds, Lincoln Continentals, and

[131] Lubasch, Arnold. "U.S. Jury Indicts 18 on Heroin Charges." *New York Times*, March 17, 1977.
[132] Ferretti, Fred. "Article 6 -- No Title: Nicky Barnes."
[133] Ibid
[134] Ibid
[135] Ibid
[136] Lubasch, Arnold. "18 Indicted on U.S. Heroin Counts, Among Them Reputed Top Dealer." *New York Times*, March 17, 1977.

Cadillacs."[137] Another article claimed that along with the many cars he owned six homes two in New York and two in New Jersey.[138]

The obsession the media had with Barnes did not stem from a love for the man but rather came from a belief that the masters of black capitalism had perverted the system. The media through the endless reports on Barnes' wealthy lifestyle and overindulgence depicted the perversion of the capitalist system under black leadership. His rise captured a twisting of the middle class ideal of meritocracy. His violation of traditional values placed him in a villainous category. Furthermore, the high level of coverage given to Barnes seems to insinuate that the only way an African-American could attain success and acclaim was through nefarious means.

While the previous three cases dealt with people of color, their depiction in the news media, and how it related to middle class ideals. The hippie story comes from a slightly different background. The story of hippie heroin use is essentially the story of what middle class media thought of a group of middle class youth that became disenchanted with "traditional" values and began to cross racial boundaries and adopt values outside of middle class norms. Their story, through the medias' lens, was effectively a tale of a group that eschewed their parents' values, adopted non-white non-middle class values, began taking drugs associated with minorities, and therefore inevitably declined and failed to live up to their inherent potential.

The Hippies entered the San Francisco scene in the mid-1960s and immediately they found an unwelcoming attitude from the residents of San Francisco. Repeatedly called everything from an "invasion" to "tomorrow's Gestapo" the hippies entered the city's society as

[137] Ferretti, Fred. "Article 6 -- No Title: Nicky Barnes."
[138] Lubasch, Arnold. "U.S. Jury Indicts 18 on Heroin Charges."

an unwanted demographic.[139][140] The media extensively reported on their drug seeking behavior, often times entering absurdist territory. In 1967, two new hippie drug trends surfaced in the media, ingesting extract of wheat sprouts and smoking bananas.[141][142] While the absurdity of these "drug" trends is apparent to modern readers, the stories were presented with complete honesty. The authors of the article truly worried about the drug seeking values the hippies embraced, even fearing that household produce could be misappropriated to get high. These sensationalist stories only logically led people to think "If they are smoking bananas today, what will they do tomorrow?" This fear of escalation would undoubtedly end with experimenting with heroin.

The fear seemed apparent in articles that reported on the descent of hippies into the drug world. One article appearing on February 2, 1967 claimed, "3300 drug users… spend $283,000 a month on their habit."[143] The article reported on a study done by an antipoverty group in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, an area historically associated with vice, on drug users most of who were between the ages of 12 and 24.[144] One of the girls in the study claimed, "When I was 13 a couple of friends of mine turned me on to some weed."[145] The article continued on to state "her habit forced her to leave 'my straight parents'" and finished with the girl stating, "by the time I was almost 17, I had a $50 a day 'H' habit and had turned to prostitution and burglary."[146] The media often brought up this type of descent into the drug world, an

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[139] "'Tomorrow's Gestapo' A Psychiatrist's View of Hippies." *San Francisco Chronicle*
[140] Chapin, William. "Discouraging Word for The Hippies." *San Francisco Chronicle*
[141] "Wheat Sprouts: New Hippie Way of Turning On." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 1967.
[142] Wegars, Don. "Kicks for Hippies: The Banana Turn-On." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 4, 1967.
[143] "3300 on Drugs in A Tenderloin Trap." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 2, 1967.
[144] Ibid
[145] Ibid
[146] Ibid

inevitability of the hippies drug permissive culture. When reporting these descents their demographic status often followed as a warning to readers. In this case immediately following her story the article claimed, “others like her from all kinds of backgrounds mostly middle class… make up a hard core of about 400 chronic users among the 3000.”[147] This fear of middle class heroin use to the media was just the logical step in a history of hippies eschewing middle class values.

The media often reported on the hippies trampling of their own middle class values as much as their drug permissiveness. Many of the articles covering hippie lifestyles reported on them living as “tribes.”[148] The importance of this tribal label cannot be understated. By labeling hippies as a tribe the media casted them as being “uncivilized.” Therefore, this tribal label signifies that this group has given up middle class ideals and “traditional” roles. If the subtlety of the tribe label was not enough many authors just came out and explained the hippie’s renouncement of middle class values. One author claimed that the hippies lived in “phosphorescent ghettos.”[149] The same author called the hippies a “mini-state with its own un-codified laws.”[150] Both of these claims run contrary to middle class ideals. Middle class youth were not supposed to be starting their own mini-state with its own “laws” and mores in “ghettos,” they were supposed to be supporting their parents “traditional” mores, becoming business men, and living in the suburbs. Another author stated, “The hippies are in revolt not just against the war in Vietnam, but against the whole of the prevalent American way of life and

[147] "3300 on Drugs in A Tenderloin Trap." *San Francisco Chronicle*
[148] Gilbert, George. "I Was a Hippie: A Day with the Flower Children." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 17, 1967.
[149] Goldstein, Richard. "The Flower Children." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 5, 1967.
[150] Ibid

ideology."[151] These changing mores included drug permissiveness, which became the biggest issue with the hippie lifestyle.

Worries about drug permissiveness became apparent in articles such as "The Cool and Loaded," appearing in February of 1967. The article stated, "how rapidly and dramatically times and social mores had changed was revealed dramatically last week by a research report which disclosed that for hundreds of Oakland teen-agers – from both poor and wealthy classes – the use of drugs was now as 'common as eating breakfast.'"[152] Articles like this perpetuated middle class fears that the "prevalent" social mores would be replaced by drug user culture.

Explanations for use among this middle class demographic differed significantly from that of Dishman's and Vandermeer's. Dishman's usage was explained by pressure from less "respectable" peers of her own race. Vandermeer's usage was explained partly by his upbringing, partly by his own anger and delinquency, and partly by failures of institutions. However, the middle class hippie usage was explained in a way that removed much of their agency. An article appearing on June 17, 1967 discussed a new free clinic that often helped drug-using hippies. The article contained a brief interview with Bob Conrich, the manager of the clinic. Here Conrich stated that these users were "confused, searching young people whose immaturity has led them into the drug world."[153] This statement removed agency from the user, it explained middle class use as a result of adolescent angst. Furthermore, the connection between this adolescent angst, and thus hippie drug use, and their abandon of middle class ideals was made immediately after the first statement. Conrich claimed, "They're alienated from all the

[151] Toynbee, Arnold. "Hippie Revolt on War." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1967.
[152] "The Cool and Loaded." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 2, 1967, Letters & Science: Medicine sec.
[153] Perlman, David. "Happening House Clinic: Mission to the Hippies." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 17, 1967.

structures of society – from schools and families and even the world of straight jobs."[154] Thus, the connection between adolescent angst, abandonment of middle class values, and drug use became apparent to middle class readers. In the minds of the middle class adolescent confusion led these middle class children to eschew middle class ideals and thus led them towards a life that embraced drug use. The decline that came after their foray into the drug world was only an inevitable conclusion to their abandonment of middle class ideals. Abandonment they lacked responsibility for, as it was just the result of confusion and immaturity.

Heroin use was one of many worries the middle class had in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, the coverage heroin use received by the media and the way that they covered usage based on the race, class, and gender often said more about the middle class ideals they believed were in danger than drug usage itself. The level of agency given to users often differed by demographic and exposed beliefs the middle class had about who could rise to their status. The media often cast abandonment of (or failure to have in the first place) traditional middle class values as a reason for drug usage or as a reason to condemn their own meritocratic ideals. Race often played a role in explaining why some were, in a sense, too weak to join the middle class and too prone to the influence of less "respectable" peers. When heroin spread to a middle class demographic, such as the hippies, the middle class were quick to blame adolescent angst rather than any inherent failings of middle class values. During the late 1960s and early 1970s the media used heroin as a vehicle to critique perceived failures of American society. While the media believed they were reporting on an ongoing "epidemic" in actuality they quietly discussed the rapid changes of their social landscape and the fears that arose when middle class values were in a perceived danger.

[154] Ibid

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