

# Impossible Criminals: The Suburban Imperatives of America's War on Drugs

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In the late 1990s at least fourteen white high school and college students died of heroin overdoses in the wealthy Dallas suburb of Plano, recently named the safest midsized city in America. The local newspaper proclaimed a “heroin epidemic sweeping Plano and the nation,” and media reports invariably described the illegal drug consumers as tragic victims, “clean-cut teenagers” from affluent families with a “bright future ahead of them.” The intense national coverage highlighted the innocent white children of a seemingly idyllic suburb corrupted by sinister outside forces that might strike anywhere, anytime. “Heroin in Suburbia,” an *ABC World News* exposé, explained that Plano’s gated communities faced “a new enemy that has invaded their city and is threatening their children. . . . People thought it couldn’t happen here, but it did.” *Dateline NBC* warned that heroin, an inner-city drug, “has jumped the tracks and has been killing kids in some of our most prosperous suburbs.” CNN opened a special Plano broadcast with the searching question, “Is your town ripe for picking by drug dealers?” The Plano police blamed illegal immigrants who “peddle Chiva [heroin] to rich suburban kids,” and the U.S. district attorney pledged zero tolerance for the Mexican cartels “preying on this community.” The federal Drug Enforcement Administration announced a major operation to protect Plano’s youth, culminating in the indictment of twenty-nine “drug pushers” charged with conspiracy to commit murder. Sixteen of these defendants were local white teenagers who sold heroin (and marijuana) to other high school students; each agreed to a plea bargain and most received probation or limited jail time. The Mexican “kingpins”—in reality, low-level couriers in the cross-border trade—received mandatory-minimum sentences of twenty years to life for what prosecutors labeled their “calculated and cold-blooded” decision to “target young people in Plano as a new market.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deann Daley Holcomb, “Heroin and the Kids: Police Chief Sheds Light on Drug Epidemic,” *Plano Star Courier*, Oct. 10, 1997, pp. 1A, 13A; Shannon Womble, “29 Indicted in Heroin Deaths,” *ibid.*, July 23, 1998, pp. 1A, 10A. For the “clean-cut teenagers” and “bright future” quotations, see “Our Town: Plano, Texas, Deals with Heroin Epidemic amongst Teenagers,” *Dateline NBC* (NBC, Jan. 14, 1998). “Heroin in Suburbia: It Can’t Happen Here,” *ABC World News Sunday* (ABC, Jan. 18, 1998). “Heroin Traffickers Target Texas Suburb,” *CNN Today* (CNN, July 22, 1998); “Drug Crisis in America: Who’s to Blame for the Influx of Illegal Narcotics?,” *CNN Talkback Live* (CNN, July 22, 1998). “Suburban Heroin,” *CNN & Company* (CNN, July 23, 1998). Mike Gray, “Texas Heroin Massacre,” *Rolling Stone*, May 27, 1999, pp. 32–36; Pamela Colloff, “Teenage Wasteland,” *Texas Monthly*, 27 (Jan. 1999), 102–9, 133–34, 178–79.

Since the 1950s, state institutions and American political culture have repeatedly constructed the war on drugs through the framework of suburban crisis and positioned white middle-class youth as innocent victims who must be shielded from both the illegal drug markets and the criminal drug laws. Scholars primarily have analyzed the U.S. drug war as a racial system of social control of urban minority populations, an extension of the punitive war on crime and the foundation for the “new Jim Crow” in the contemporary era of mass incarceration. Numerous studies have documented the systematic disparities generated by racially and geographically targeted enforcement policies, which have insulated most white youth from the carceral state. By 2000, according to Sentencing Project data, African Americans and Latinos represented three-fourths of all drug offenders in state prisons, even though whites constituted a large majority of illegal drug users and dealers in the United States. Recent national surveys confirm that urban and suburban teenagers sell and consume illegal drugs at nearly identical rates and that inner-city black residents are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated for violations involving marijuana, long the most popular recreational drug among affluent white youth. Exploration of the deep historical roots of these contemporary disparities demonstrates that the exemptions created for white middle-class participants in the underground marketplace were not merely epiphenomenal but rather constitutive of the expansion of the carceral state. Situated on the real and imagined landscapes of affluent suburbia, white teenagers have represented the most sympathetic victims of the narcotics trade, the distinctively illegitimate targets of law enforcement crackdowns, and the chief beneficiaries of public health prevention campaigns.<sup>2</sup>

As a racial state-building project, the U.S. war on drugs developed as a thoroughly bipartisan enterprise during the second half of the twentieth century, reflected in the overwhelming legislative majorities that supported every landmark policy shift. Closer attention to the suburban imperatives of the war on drugs helps explain why policy formation in this area generally has operated within a framework of consensus, especially when political and cultural forces converge around the issues of protecting middle-class communities from external threats, subduing narcotics traffickers in urban and international markets, and keeping law-breaking white youth out of prison. Recent scholarship has emphasized the bipartisan origins of punitive drug policy, a necessary revision of the tendency to fixate principally on the racial projects of law-and-order Republicans during the Richard M. Nixon and Ronald Reagan eras. Democratic leaders in Congress collaborated with GOP administrations to craft mandatory-minimum sentencing laws that passed with near unanimity in 1956, 1970, and 1986, just as liberal and conservative regimes alike have endorsed the racially coded position that “otherwise law-abiding” middle-class

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, 2010); Doris Marie Provine, *Unequal under Law: Race in the War on Drugs* (Chicago, 2007). For the Sentencing Project data, see Marc Mauer, *The Changing Racial Dynamics of the War on Drugs* (Washington, 2009), [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/dp\\_raceanddrugs.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/dp_raceanddrugs.pdf). Human Rights Watch, “Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs,” May 2000, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/usa/>. Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, “Sex, Drugs, and Delinquency in Urban and Suburban High Schools,” Jan. 2004, *Manhattan Institute for Policy Research*, [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp\\_04.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_04.htm); American Civil Liberties Union, “The War on Marijuana in Black and White,” June 2013, <https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/aclu-thewaronthemarijuana-rel2.pdf>. Michael Javen Fortner demonstrates that black middle-class organizations in communities such as Harlem also deployed pusher-victim binaries in pursuit of punitive enforcement policies; but with few exceptions national political and cultural discourses have reserved victim status in the war on drugs for white youth. See Michael Javen Fortner, “The Carceral State and the Crucible of Black Politics: An Urban History of the Rockefeller Drug Laws,” *Studies in American Political Development*, 27 (April 2013), 14–35.

drug consumers should not encounter the criminal justice system. In an updated version of the Progressive Era ideology traced by Khalil Muhammad, the modern war on drugs has operated through the reciprocal criminalization of blackness and decriminalization of whiteness, grounded in the differential policing and discursive framing of pathologized urban spaces and idealized suburban spaces. The racial and spatial logics of the drug war reflect not only the bipartisan mandate for urban crime control but also the balancing act required to resolve the impossible public policy of criminalizing the social practices of tens of millions of white middle-class Americans.<sup>3</sup>

The imperatives of suburban political culture have made cyclical “epidemics” of pot smoking by white middle-class youth a crucial foundation of America’s long war on drugs, inspired by the grassroots mobilization of parents’ movements at three key stages between the 1950s and the 1980s. While historians are belatedly examining crime politics and mass incarceration, which have clearly shaped the inequalities of the metropolitan landscape, the role of social movements and interest groups in the formation of drug policy remains underexplored. During the 1950s, as mass suburbanization intensified anxieties about the delinquency of affluent teenagers, political culture hyped a marijuana-as-a-gateway-to-heroin narrative and middle-class groups demanded severe penalties to prevent urban and foreign “pushers” from corrupting white youth. Starting in the late 1960s, when generational revolt rather than external villains explained the dramatic increase in illegal drug use in affluent suburbs and on college campuses, similar forces promoted a selective marijuana decriminalization policy to keep “otherwise law-abiding” youth out of jail. A decade later, amid widespread concerns about latchkey children and middle-class family breakdown, the suburban-based National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth (NFP) re-centered the war on drugs on the alleged calamity of teenage pot smoking and influenced the embrace of zero-tolerance policies by the Carter and Reagan administrations. As with the invading-“pusher” trope and the marijuana-as-gateway mystique, the “just say no” campaign of the late 1970s and 1980s helped institutionalize two inter-linked but spatially distinct approaches: public health campaigns in white middle-class neighborhoods and militarized interdiction in urban minority areas. Policy makers have proved extremely responsive to the demands of safeguarding the young middle-class drug victim, an impossible criminal in modern America and a constitutive element of the carceral state.<sup>4</sup>

The cultural and political script of racialized pushers and white middle-class victims informed the enactment of mandatory-minimum laws in the federal war on narcotics during the 1950s, two decades before the developments of the Nixon–Nelson Rockefeller era that have received far more attention from scholars. In 1951 Commissioner Harry Anslinger of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) collaborated with Senate investigators to juxtapose African American and Puerto Rican “dope pushers” with “pretty blonde” girls seduced into junkie prostitution across the urban color line. Popular culture hyped

<sup>3</sup> Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “‘The Attila the Hun Law’: New York’s Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of a Punitive State,” *Journal of Social History*, 44 (Fall 2010), 71–95; Kathleen J. Frydl, *The Drug Wars in America, 1940–1973* (New York, 2013). Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History*, 97 (Dec. 2010), 703–34.

stories of shady pushers luring white teenagers from marijuana experimentation into the “living nightmare” of heroin addiction, a fundamental and enduring misrepresentation of the social practices of illegal drug users in the suburbs. The Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime concluded that for “the peddler who is willing to wreck young lives . . . no penalty is too severe.” With little dissent, the U.S. Congress established harsh mandatory-minimum sentences for distribution and possession of marijuana and heroin in the Boggs Act of 1951. A half-decade later, middle-class magazines again began circulating marijuana-as-gateway tragedies about white youth “hooked” by dope peddlers targeting “children of well-to-do” suburbs. The FBI and its Senate allies again orchestrated the racial and gender categories of the sinister urban pusher and the innocent middle-class victim: Mexican, African American, and Italian American traffickers on one side of the law; helpless white prostitutes and desperate suburban addicts on the other. In the Narcotics Control Act of 1956, Congress unanimously doubled the mandatory-minimum sentences for selling heroin and marijuana, providing five to ten years for the first offense and ten to forty years without the opportunity for parole for the second, and a maximum of life in prison or the death penalty for providing narcotics to a minor.<sup>5</sup>

California’s war on narcotics during the 1950s reveals the state-level potency of the pusher-victim and marijuana-to-heroin-gateway narratives, along with the strength of concerted grassroots pressure for tough supply-side punishment from suburban parents and middle-class civic organizations. In postwar Los Angeles, local media and law enforcement blamed “Mexican pushers” for the narcotics trade and perpetuated exaggerated stories of Mexican American “juvenile gangsters” invading white suburbs to provide marijuana and heroin to teenagers. The nonpartisan California Federation of Women’s Clubs demanded harsh deterrents for pushers who sought “new converts” in affluent suburbia, an explanation that shifted blame for the postwar delinquency crisis from white law breakers to external villains. Neighborhood groups and middle-class networks representing more than 1 million citizens petitioned for lengthy penalties and revealed considerable sentiment for life without parole or the death penalty. In 1953 the state legislature unanimously increased mandatory-minimum sentences for heroin and marijuana distribution, with a discretionary probation loophole for first-time possession violations (aimed at youth “from a good environment” arrested for marijuana). Gov. Goodwin Knight, a moderate Republican, insisted that “no punishment is too great for a dope peddler who deliberately creates a craving for narcotics among our young people.” California’s biparti-

<sup>5</sup> Harry J. Anslinger statement, March 27, 1951, folder NB, box 926, Records of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, RG 46 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.). *Drug Addiction* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, 1951), Prelinger Archives, <https://archive.org/details/DrugAddi1951>; Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, *Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce: Final Report* (Washington, 1951), esp. 4. “Senators Given Sordid Story by Dope Users,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1951, p. 19; “Truman Signs Bill for Narcotics War,” *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1951, p. 32; Boggs Act, 21 U.S.C. sec. 174 (1951); *The Terrible Truth* (Davis Productions, 1951), Prelinger Archives, <https://archive.org/details/Terrible1951>. See also John C. McWilliams, *The Protectors: Harry J. Anslinger and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1930–1962* (Newark, 1990), 107–11; and Eric C. Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia, 2008), 51–64. For the “hooked” and “children of well-to-do” quotations, see “The Peddler of Living Death,” *Coronet*, 38 (Oct. 1955), 85–100; “Synthetic Dope Floods City,” *New York Sunday Graphic*, June 13, 1955, pp. 1, 3, esp. 3. Frederic Sondern Jr., “We Must Stop the Crime That Breeds Crime!,” *Reader’s Digest*, 68 (June 1956), 21–26. Detroit Hearings—Witnesses folder, Detroit Hearings, box 922, Chapter 13—Records of the Committee on the Judiciary and Related Committees, 1816–1968: Records of the Special Subcommittee on Improvement of the Federal Criminal Code, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46 (National Archives); California Hearings—Points to Be Emphasized folder, Los Angeles Hearing, box 920, *ibid.*; Chicago Hearings: Points to Be Emphasized folder, Illinois, Chicago, box 921, *ibid.* Narcotics Control Act, chap. 629, 70 Stat. 567 (1956); “Narcotics Bill Calls for Death Penalty,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1956, pp. 1, 22; McWilliams, *Protectors*, 112–16.

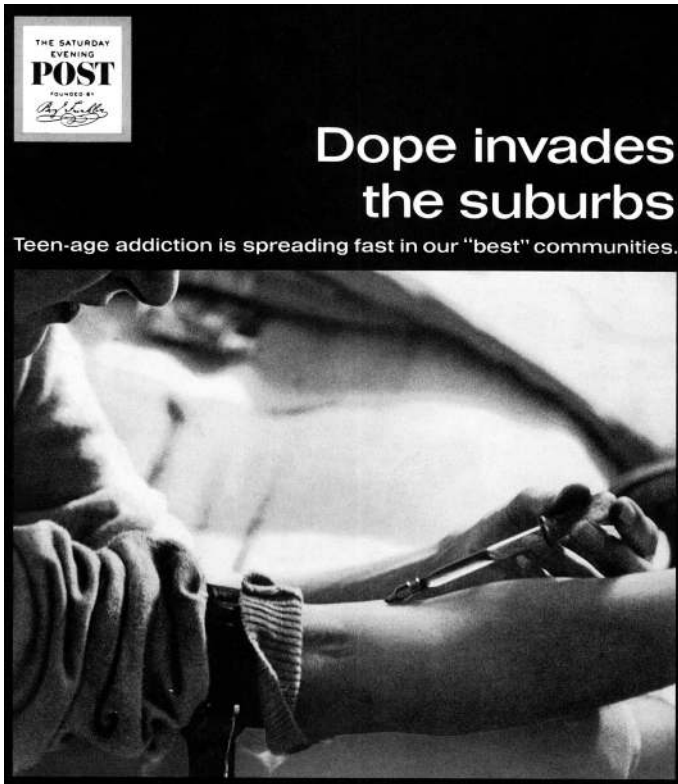
san war on narcotics reignited in the late 1950s, following another media-inflamed panic about white middle-class victims of Mexican gangsters, and with minimal dissent the legislature again enhanced the maximum penalties. New governor Pat Brown, a liberal Democrat, promised to dismantle the “murderous enterprise” of narcotics trafficking and proclaimed that “in this war, we can never declare a truce.”<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-1960s the liberal shift toward medicalizing rather than criminalizing heroin addiction depended in part upon the continued framing of the narcotics crisis through images of runaway white daughters and hopeless suburban junkies. In “Dope Invades the Suburbs” (1964), the *Saturday Evening Post* chronicled yet another “tragic and frightening” epidemic of white teenage addiction as marijuana users graduated to heroin and barbiturates. Senator Thomas Dodd, the Connecticut Democrat who chaired the Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee, demanded tougher penalties for pushers who lured “victims from the well to do ‘white collar’ areas” but advocated therapeutic rehabilitation for “sick” addicts who did not deserve “merciless prison sentences.” In 1965 *Life* searched New York City’s “Needle Park” for charismatic white junkies to represent the national “narcotics epidemic,” culminating in the poignant saga, “Karen and John: Two Young Lives Lost to Heroin.” Additional media exposés featured other desperate addict-prostitutes “from well-to-do” suburban backgrounds working the Lower East Side for a fix. In his 1965 declaration of “war on crime,” President Lyndon B. Johnson urged Congress to modify the mandatory-minimum sentencing structure by allowing civil commitment for “narcotic and marihuana users likely to respond to treatment.” The Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act of 1966 provided the prosecutorial option of hospitalization for defendants arrested for possession, while maintaining “full criminal sanctions against those ruthless men who sell despair,” as the president explained.<sup>7</sup>

The acid “craze” on college campuses triggered a markedly different policy response because the “generation gap” interpretation of hallucinogenic drug use situated white

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Williams, “I Trapped a Dope Ring: Part III,” *American Weekly*, June 14, 1953, pp. 12, 28. On “juvenile gangsters,” see Bob Will, “Youthful Gangs Active in All Parts of the City for Many Years,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 16, 1953, pp. 2, 24; and Bob Will, “Gangs Operate in Specific Districts,” *ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1953, pp. 2, 12. California Federation of Women’s Clubs to Goodwin Knight, May 14, 1956, folder 16, box 36, Goodwin J. Knight Papers (California State Archives, Sacramento). See also other letters and petitions in box 36, *ibid.* For the “new converts” quotation, see Bess M. Wilson, “FWC Leader Backs Dope-Law Tightening, Blasts Apathy,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1951, p. C1. Norma H. Goodhue, “Stiffer Narcotics Laws Needed in California, Says GRWC Officer,” *ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1955, p. B1. Kenneth Hahn statement, March 31, 1960, folder 6, box 403, series 6.4.5.19, Collection of Kenneth Hahn (Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.); “Senate Votes Stiffer Dope Penalties,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1953, p. 6. For the “from a good environment” quotation, see Southern California Advisory Committee on Crime Prevention minutes, June 8, 1953, folder LA, box 72, Records of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Goodwin Knight speech, Dec. 13, 1954, folder 18, box 36, Knight Papers. Gene Sherman, “Mexico’s Big Dope Dealers Known; Seizure Is Difficult,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1959, pp. 2, 14; Gene Sherman, “Boys—and Girl—Tell Drug Addiction Story,” *ibid.*, July 15, 1959, pp. 2, 19; “State Senate Passes ‘Last Resort’ Dope Bill,” *ibid.*, April 27, 1961, pp. 1, 26. Edmund G. Brown testimony, Aug. 7, 1962, folder GB, box 70, Records of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency.

<sup>7</sup> Robert P. Goldman, “Dope Invades the Suburbs,” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 4, 1964, pp. 19–25. Thomas J. Dodd press release, Sept. 28, 1962, folder 4781, box 196, series III, Thomas J. Dodd Papers (Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries, Storrs); Dodd press release, Aug. 24, 1961, *ibid.*; Dodd statement, Aug. 23, 1961, folder 4634, box 193, *ibid.* James Mills, “Karen and John: Two Young Lives Lost to Heroin,” in *The Drug Takers* (New York, 1965), 6–29; James Mills, “Drug Addicts, Part 2,” *ibid.*, 57–65. Martin Arnold, “Narcotics a Growing Problem among Affluent Youth of City,” *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 1965, pp. 1, 24. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice,” March 8, 1965, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26800>. Narcotic Addict Rehabilitation Act, 80 Stat. 1438 (1966). “Statement by the President upon Signing Bills to Aid in the Crusade against Crime,” Nov. 8, 1966, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28013>.



Published on April 4, 1964, this *Saturday Evening Post* article featured two of the most potent warnings of the era's drug-crisis discourse: the corruption of innocent white suburbs by dope "pushers" and the marijuana-to-heroin gateway tragedies of young upper-middle-class victims. The story begins with a "well-dressed" high school senior from White Plains in Westchester County who resides in an "expensive house on the kind of nice, maple-lined streets found in many commuter towns." Through this framework of white adolescent victimization, the magazine urged politicians to treat drug addiction as a medical illness, not a "crime to be punished by law." *Courtesy Archie Lieberman Estate and Curtis Licensing/The Saturday Evening Post.*

distributors and consumers of LSD in a cultural and political context rather than a criminal framework. Starting in 1966, media reports began hyping a marijuana-to-LSD gateway progression and warned of "disastrous psychological effects" for young white victims. The *New York Times* identified college-age marijuana and LSD users as suburban rebels filled with "distaste for split-level society" and "disenchanted with American policies in Vietnam, agitated because there are Negro ghettos." *Look Magazine* concluded that "we cannot arrest them into submission. . . . Using drugs is how they wish to live their lives, seek experiences, search for meaning." FBN officials labeled LSD "a problem worse than the narcotics evil," but the absence of the racial imaginary of urban and foreign pushers worked against calling for punitive law enforcement. In 1966 Johnson administration officials resisted congressional pressure to criminalize both LSD use and distribution, warning against "filling up our jails with a bunch of college students." Media coverage of the 1967 "Summer of Love" altered the equation by highlighting run-away suburban hippies adrift in urban slums, especially teenage girls hospitalized for

LSD-induced psychosis or victimized by sex predators. President Johnson soon demanded tougher punishment for LSD “peddlers,” and in 1968 Congress imposed a maximum five-year term for distribution and also criminalized possession, but only as a misdemeanor.<sup>8</sup>

The dramatic increase in marijuana use by white youth on college campuses and in affluent suburbs, and the law enforcement encounters of some of these impossible criminals, made repeal of felony possession laws a bipartisan imperative in the late 1960s. California provides a striking example of the shifting racial and socioeconomic profile of the population arrested on drug charges during the decade. Around 1967, recreational pot smoking became widespread in many upscale white suburbs, often involving more than one-third of older teenagers. Los Angeles County responded by declaring “all-out war” against marijuana pushers, who turned out to be entrepreneurial suburban teenagers or recreational users sharing with friends. The police launched undercover operations in multiple suburban high schools, which prompted angry protests from parents and created a racial-political crisis for California’s war on drugs. In 1960 half of narcotics arrests statewide involved heroin, and the typical defendant was a twenty-five-year-old working-class Mexican American user. Marijuana arrests predominated by 1967, with white Californians accounting for 68 percent of adults charged and 73 percent of juveniles, with the median drug criminal a nineteen-year-old white middle-class male busted for possession. Concentrated enforcement in the suburbs and on college campuses created a criminal class that judges and juries were unwilling to convict—successful prosecutions of marijuana defendants fell from 93 percent in 1960 to 48 percent by 1967. Given these realities, the California legislature revised the marijuana possession penalty in 1968, giving judges the discretion to sentence first-time offenders to probation. The police in many prosperous suburbs adopted a more informal policy of “arresting young users to frighten them but not filing charges,” according to the narcotics officer for the Los Angeles beachfront communities of the Palos Verdes Peninsula.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Dodd press release, April 5, 1966, Drug Smuggling-Abuse folder, box 203, Records of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Albert Rosenfeld and Barry Farrell, “The Spread and Perils of LSD,” *Life*, March 25, 1966, pp. 28–33, esp. 29; “Psychiatry: An Epidemic of Acid Heads,” *Time*, March 11, 1966, pp. 44–46. John Corry, “Drugs a Growing Campus Problem,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1966, pp. 1, 27, esp. 27. Jack Shepherd, “Drugs on the Campus: Potheads in Missouri,” *Look Magazine*, Aug. 8, 1967, pp. 14–17. Rosenfeld and Farrell, “Spread and Perils of LSD,” 33. U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization, *Organization and Coordination of Federal Drug Research and Regulatory Programs: LSD* (Washington, 1966), 38. “Youth: The Runaways,” *Time*, Sept. 15, 1967, pp. 48–49; “Runaway Kids,” *Life*, Nov. 3, 1967, pp. 18–29. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President upon Signing Bill Relating to Traffic in or Possession of Drugs such as LSD,” Oct. 25, 1968, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29206>.

<sup>9</sup> G. Thomas Gitchoff, *Kids, Cops, and Kilos: A Study of Contemporary Suburban Youth* (San Diego, 1969); Michael Brown, “Stability and Change in Drug Use Patterns among High School Students,” typescript, 1968–1971, High Schools folder, box 225, ACLU of Southern California Records (Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles). For the “all-out-war” quotation, see Kenneth Hahn press release, Jan. 24, 1967, folder 2B, box 55, series 1.43.2.11, Hahn Collection. Laurie Howell, “Narcotics: A Challenge to the South Bay,” *South Bay Daily Breeze*, Oct. 22–29, 1968, pamphlet, folder 1a, box 212A, series 1.24.2.1, *ibid.*; Boris Yaro, “Police Seize 92 in Roundup of Narcotics Rings,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 6, 1966, pp. 3, 18; “Policewoman Poses as Coed in Drug Arrests,” *ibid.*, June 9, 1967, p. OC8; Barry Rumbles, “Report on 19 Students Expelled from the Pasadena Schools,” 1968, folder 2, box 2, Lu Verne La Motte Papers (Pasadena Museum of History Research Library and Archives, Pasadena, Calif.). Michael R. Aldrich, Tod H. Mikuriya, and Gordon S. Brownell, “Reasons for Escalating Enforcement Costs: California Drug and Marijuana Arrests, 1960–67,” in *Preliminary Report: Fiscal Costs of California Marijuana Law Enforcement, 1960–1984*, by Michael R. Aldrich, Tod H. Mikuriya, and Gordon S. Brownell (Berkeley, 1986), *Schaffer Library of Drug Policy*, <http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/moscone/chap1.htm>. National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, *Marijuana: A Study of State Policies and Penalties* (Washington, 1977), 141. David Roe, “Palos Verdes Drug Use Spreads to 6th Graders,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 18, 1968, pp. G1, G2, esp. G1.

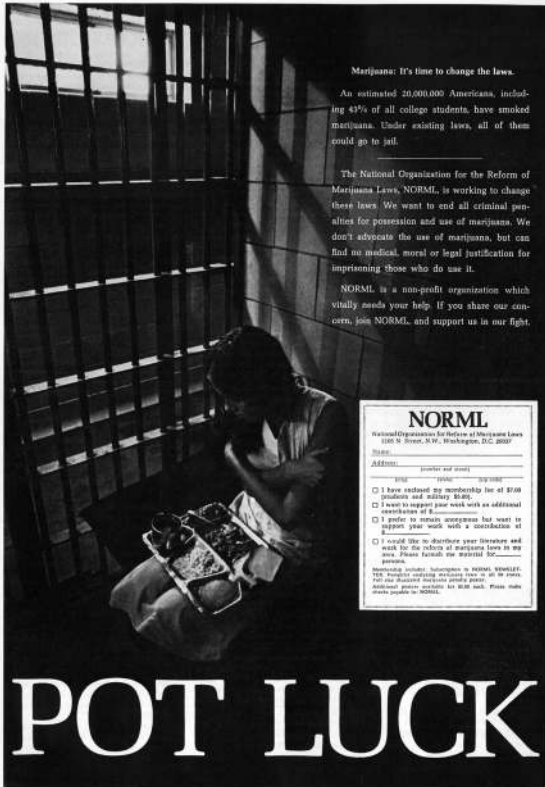
Enforcement of drug laws against white middle-class pot smokers set the stage for national policy reform, based on the “generation gap” interpretation that marijuana prohibition had politically alienated and wrongfully criminalized “otherwise law-abiding young people.” In 1968 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) launched a campaign to legalize marijuana for adults, while restricting access for minors based on the alcohol model. The ACLU explicitly pitched its initiative to “middle-class America”—while privately conceding civil rights criticism that the group had delayed addressing the injustices of drug prohibition until “marijuana use spread to white middle-class society.” The founding of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), which defined its constituency as middle-class college students and professionals, enhanced the strategy of framing legalization as a mission to rescue white victims of the war on drugs. NORML’s initial public relations campaign, titled *Pot Luck*, featured a forlorn white teenage girl locked inside a cell with an untouched plate of prison food on her lap. A 1969 CBS-TV special similarly asked if incarceration remained an appropriate punishment for “laws broken so often by so many normally law-abiding people,” contrasting drug use among Mexican immigrants and in black ghettos with a white “career girl” who smoked pot to relax, a white suburban teenager who said “the kids don’t see any problem,” and a charming white bohemian facing a twenty-year sentence.<sup>10</sup>

The American political system resolved this dilemma by reducing penalties for marijuana possession while increasing mandatory-minimum sentences for “dope pushers,” positioning white middle-class youth as the primary victims of both the organized narcotics trade and the drug-enforcement laws. In 1969 Senator Thomas Dodd introduced legislation to restore judicial discretion to federal sentencing, particularly for “victims” who were “not hardened criminals,” a group he defined as “college students and young people of middle and upper economic status.” The Nixon administration publicly maintained its tough-on-drugs rhetoric but quietly collaborated with Dodd on the possession reform. One Justice Department official acknowledged that middle-class parents were imploring the government to “throw the book at the trafficker, but don’t lock up my kid.” The White House domestic policy office strategized to alert Americans that the drug crisis was “infecting suburban areas,” while distinguishing between the “casual user,” who was not really a criminal, and the “pusher,” guilty of “using our youth as their prey.” President Nixon announced that illegal drugs had “moved to the upper middle class,” a claim he illustrated with a pusher-gateway story about a church-going girl “from a good family” in San Diego who started smoking marijuana in junior high, next tried LSD, and “was now hooked on heroin.” With only six dissenting votes, the U.S. Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, offsetting the “soft” reduction of marijuana possession to a misdemeanor with the “hard” escalation of mandatory-minimum sentences for “drug peddlers.” Nixon characterized the bipartisan legislation as a mission to “save the lives of hundreds of thousands of our young people.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, “Marijuana,” [1970], pamphlet, folder 28, box 229, ACLU of Southern California Records; American Civil Liberties Union, “Policy Statement on Marijuana,” Dec. 15, 1968, Marijuana folder, *ibid.*; American Civil Liberties Union, “Marijuana Repeal Campaign: Legislative Manual,” Jan. 1972, folder 26, box 10, Texas Civil Liberties Union Records, AR121 (Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington). National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, “Pot Luck,” 1971, advertisement, folder 28, *ibid.* “Marijuana,” *CBS Reports* (CBS, Sept. 17, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas J. Dodd, “Youth and Drugs,” [1970], typescript speech, folder 4240, box 170, series III, Dodd Papers; Dodd statement, Sept. 15, 1969, folder 4236, *ibid.* “Compromise Provisions between S. 1895 and S. 2637,” Nov. 3, 1969, folder 6540, box 243, series IV, *ibid.* For the “throw the book” quotation, see Jack Rosenthal, “A Fresh Look at Those Harsh Marijuana Penalties,” *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1969, p. E8. Jeff Donfeld, “Summary of Agenda Proposals,” [1969], Governor’s Conference folder, box 77, Egil Krogh Papers, White House Special Files





Marijuana: It's time to change the laws.

An estimated 20,000,000 Americans, including 43% of all college students, have smoked marijuana. Under existing laws, all of them could go to jail.

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, NORML, is working to change these laws. We want to end all criminal penalties for possession and use of marijuana. We don't advocate the use of marijuana, but can find no medical, moral or legal justification for imprisoning those who do use it.

NORML is a non-profit organization which vitally needs your help. If you share our concern, join NORML, and support us in our fight.

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I have obtained my membership for \$1.00 (includes one year's subscription)

I want to support your work with an additional contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_

I prefer to donate anonymously but want to support your work with a contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to distribute your literature and mail to the offices of marijuana laws in my area. Please forward me material for \_\_\_\_\_

Membership includes: Subscriptions to NORML, MARIJUANA, NORML's magazine, including materials from us or other people. All amounts given include the \$1.00 each. Please make checks payable to NORML.

# POT LUCK

In this 1971 advertisement, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) highlighted the young white casualties of the war on drugs through imagery that paralleled the victimization tropes deployed by the Nixon administration and the mainstream media. In the accompanying text, NORML avoided the more controversial issue of trafficking penalties and instead emphasized its position that there is “no medical, moral or legal justification for imprisoning” any of the approximately 20 million Americans, in particular college students, guilty of nothing more than marijuana possession and use. *Courtesy National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.*

In 1971 Nixon’s formal declaration of war on drugs deliberately linked urban crime control to the suburban marijuana subculture by portraying narcotics pushers and heroin addiction as universal threats. Although heroin markets remained urban centered, the White House sought to generate panic about a nationwide “pandemic” based on the invalid assertion that narcotics addiction “directly afflicts the educated, middle-class, churchgoing stereotype of the average American just as it afflicts the black, poverty-stricken ghetto dweller.” The administration requested that network television programming

(Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, Calif.). For the “casual user,” “pusher,” and “using our youth” quotations, see Jeff Donfeld, “Suggested Remarks,” [1969], Narcotics folder, *ibid.* Richard Nixon, “Remarks at the Opening Session of the Governors’ Conference at the Department of State,” Dec. 3, 1969, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2353>. Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act, 84 Stat. 1236 (1970). Richard Nixon, “Remarks on Signing the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970,” Oct. 27, 1970, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2767>. Warren Weaver Jr., “Senate Approves Narcotics Curbs by 82-to-0 Vote,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1970, pp. 1, 29; Marjorie Hunter, “House Approves Stiff Drug Curbs by 341-to-6 Vote,” *ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1970, pp. 1, 31; Marjorie Hunter, “Curbs on Crime and Drug Abuse Gain in Congress,” *ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1970, pp. 1, 31. On “drug peddlers,” see Stuart Auerbach, “Nixon Signs Drug Bill, Calls for Public Support,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 28, 1970, p. 12. Nixon, “Remarks on Signing the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970.”

enlighten middle-class parents on the danger, resulting in specials such as ABC-TV's "Crisis in Suburbia: The Hooked Generation." The president also denounced marijuana legalization, which he said would encourage youth "to start down the long dismal road that leads to hard drugs." In June, when Nixon officially launched the federal government's "all-out offensive" against "public enemy number one," he asked for "compassion" for the "victims" as well as justice for the "peddlers." *Time's* coverage revealed the effectiveness of the administration's strategy, as the magazine reproduced the trope that "once confined to black urban ghettos," drug abuse "has come to invade the heartland of white, middle-class America." In New York, Governor Rockefeller adopted similar tactics, visiting wealthy communities in Westchester County to warn that heroin afflicted the suburbs and city alike. In fact, the suburban county had recorded seven narcotics-related deaths that year, compared to 582 in New York City. Harlem community groups criticized politicians for obsessing about "white kids" and ignoring their demands for both neighborhood treatment facilities and arrests of urban "pushers."<sup>12</sup>

The marijuana decriminalization movement of the 1970s revolved around the forthright view that white middle-class Americans should not have their futures ruined by policies designed to protect them from international trafficking and urban drug markets. In 1972 the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse advocated a philosophically incoherent but politically feasible policy of decriminalization that called for no legal sanctions for personal use or casual sale but the retention of felony penalties against for-profit distribution. The commission justified supply-side criminalization in large part because outright legalization would exacerbate public anxieties about the so-called amotivational syndrome of psychological dependence, laziness, and anticapitalist behavior among white middle-class youth. Although Nixon repudiated the report, eleven states decriminalized simple marijuana possession during the 1970s, and most of the rest adopted the federal misdemeanor model. Most states also shifted to discretionary penalties for marijuana dealers and added the elastic "possession with intent to distribute" category, which enhanced the racial double standard separating a recreational white middle-class subculture from a criminalized urban market. Combined federal and state marijuana arrests actually increased from 292,179 in 1972 to 445,600 in 1974, largely through street-level narcotics sweeps in urban centers. Texas provides a particular revealing illustration of the soft-hard dynamics of racial and spatial discretion in marijuana enforcement. In 1973, after suburban Dallas parents protested the arrests of pot-smoking children, a Republican legislator introduced a bill to rescue these "very fine families" from a war that should focus on "pushers of hard drugs." This new misdemeanor possession law retained severe mandatory-minimum sentences for marijuana distribution, with a discretionary loophole for white dealers in the recreational market. The reform calculus in the

<sup>12</sup> "President's Drug Abuse Program, Steering Group Minutes," June 10, 1971, folder PDAP, box 52, Krogh Papers, White House Special Files. On the spatial concentration of heroin markets, see Schneider, *Smack*. Untitled article, *Broadcasting*, April 13, 1970, clipping, tv folder, box 77, Krogh Papers, White House Special Files; Egil Krogh to Eugene Rossides, July 2, 1970, *ibid.* On "Crisis in Suburbia," see Fred Ferretti, "Broadcasters Aid Crusade on Drugs," *New York Times*, June 23, 1970, p. 65. For the "long dismal road" quotation, see Joseph Kraft, "No Verdict Yet on Marijuana," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1971, p. A8. Richard Nixon, "Remarks about an Intensified Program for Drug Abuse Prevention and Control," June 17, 1971, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3047>; Richard Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control," June 17, 1971, *ibid.*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3048>. "The New Public Enemy No. 1," *Time*, June 28, 1971, pp. 30–31. Frank Lynn, "Rivals for Governor Cite Drug Issue," *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 1970, p. 13. "Blacks Declare War on Dope," *Ebony* (June 1970), 31–40.

conservative political climate was straightforward, the *Texas Monthly* concluded: “Too many of the wrong kids were being arrested.”<sup>13</sup>

In the late 1970s the federal government intensified the discretionary war on marijuana in response to pressure from the zero-tolerance “parents’ movement,” a nonpartisan network of white groups from affluent inner-ring suburbs. The Carter administration initially endorsed federal decriminalization of marijuana possession and prioritized a public health focus on urban heroin addiction. The White House reversed course following the mobilization of local antidrug activists who attributed marijuana experimentation by preteen children to the “commercialized drug culture” (a new version of the outside pusher) and absentee parenting caused by divorce, working mothers, and middle-class family breakdown. Marsha “Keith” Schuchard, a liberal Democrat and mother of three from an upscale Atlanta suburb, threatened a mass parental uprising against the administration’s promotion of the “new mythology of ‘harmless marijuana’” and the federal government’s failure to halt the flood of drugs into “ordinary mainstream American neighborhoods.” Because policy makers were “so preoccupied with heroin addicts,” Schuchard argued, the government had neglected a marijuana epidemic that was destroying the psychological health and career prospects of “nice kids from nice families.” In 1978 Schuchard and other grassroots antimarijuana crusaders founded the National Parents’ Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) to rally “parent power” against “dope power.” The Carter administration embraced PRIDE’s agenda by announcing that marijuana interdiction would be the top priority of the war on drugs and launching an adolescent prevention campaign, featuring Schuchard’s manual on forming zero-tolerance neighborhood groups and a shock-value documentary, *For Parents Only*, about preteen stoners and permissive/oblivious mothers in tree-lined suburbs.<sup>14</sup>

The war on drugs during the Reagan administration solidified the federal government’s alliance with the suburban parents’ movement, and it continued the Carter administration policy shift of positioning the twelve-to-fourteen-year-old white pot smoker at the moral core of the national crusade. In the spring of 1980 PRIDE joined forces with suburban groups from thirty states to establish the National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth, which designated itself “pure Middle America” and labeled teenage marijuana

<sup>13</sup> National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse, *Marihuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding: First Report of the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse* (Washington, 1972), 86–102, 127–67. On “amotivational syndrome,” see *ibid.*, 86–102. David Parker to Charles Colson and Krogh, March 10, 1972, folder 16, FG 308 Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse, White House Central Files (Nixon Library); “Transcript of the President’s News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1972, p. 12. National Governors’ Conference Center for Policy Research and Analysis, *Marijuana: A Study of State Policies and Penalties* (Washington, 1977), 27, 83–111. Federal Bureau of Investigation data compiled in Common Sense for Drug Policy, “Nixon Tapes Show Roots of Marijuana Prohibition: Misinformation, Culture Wars, and Prejudice,” March 2002, <http://www.csdp.org/research/shafernixon.pdf>. State Program on Drug Abuse, *Texas Drug Scene* (March 1973), folder 11, box 11, Betty Andujar Papers, AR125 (Special Collections); Betty Andujar to Mrs. Lovick Hightower, Feb. 12, 1973, folder 11, box 17, *ibid.*; Andujar to Charles Ferguson, Feb. 12, 1973, *ibid.* Griffin Smith Jr., “How the New Drug Law Was Made,” *Texas Monthly*, 1 (Sept. 1973), 66–69.

<sup>14</sup> Jimmy Carter, “President’s Message on Drug Abuse,” Aug. 2, 1977, folder ODAP-3, box 247, Stuart Eizenstat Papers (Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Ga.). Marsha Keith Schuchard to Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter, Feb. 28, 1978, 1/20/77–8/31/78 folder, box HE-12, White House Central Files (Carter Library). “The Family versus the Drug Culture,” May 1978, typescript speech, Drug Abuse-2 folder, box 18, Jim Mongan and Joseph Onek Subject Files, *ibid.*; “Background Information on P.R.I.D.E.,” PRIDE folder, OA 13748, Carlton E. Turner Files (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, Calif.). Strategy Council on Drug Abuse, *Federal Strategy for Drug Abuse and Drug Traffic Prevention, 1979* (Washington, 1979), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/63288NCJRS.pdf>. Lee Dogoloff to Stuart Eizenstat, “1979 Drug Abuse Campaign,” Feb. 5, 1979, 2/1/79–4/30/79 folder, box HE-11, White House Central Files (Carter Library); Marsha Manatt, *Parents, Peers and Pot* (Rockville, 1979); *For Parents Only: What Kids Think about Marijuana* (Vision Associates, 1980).

use “the most massive and pervasive drug epidemic in human history.” This powerful, nonpartisan interest group captured the policy-making process under both parties and guaranteed that recreational pot smoking by young white “victims” would remain at the center of the federal war on drugs, eclipsing heroin addiction and crack cocaine as public health priorities and justifying marijuana interdiction as a permanent state project. The NFP and its government supporters denounced the “soft” policy of marijuana decriminalization but operated within its racial and spatial logics of insulating white youth from criminal drug enforcement while militarizing the fight against the supply side of the market, from urban policing to international controls. Reagan appointed Carlton Turner, an NFP board member, to head the White House drug office, and the president praised the suburban confederation for its demand-side campaign to “take the customers away from the drugs.” Across the imagined divide, the president pledged tougher sentences and intensified interdiction for “drug pushers” who “prey on the innocent.” Not to be outflanked, prominent Democrats in Congress also applauded the NFP’s vigorous work while repeatedly attacking the Reagan administration for its inadequate commitment to the supply-side war on trafficking.<sup>15</sup>

The perceived marijuana crisis in the white middle-class suburbs guided, and in key ways dominated, the Reagan administration’s war on drugs. In *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander argues that Reagan’s “drug war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public concern about race. By waging a war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined ‘others.’” While bipartisan anticrime policies and the Republican administration’s neglect of urban public health certainly shaped the repressive crackdown in minority neighborhoods, this analysis cannot account for the NFP’s considerable influence on political institutions and the responsiveness of government officials to the marijuana-driven anxieties of the suburban parents’ movement. During Reagan’s first year in office, NFP leaders repeatedly criticized federal inaction in the face of the pot-smoking “epidemic” and implored the president to “join the parents in declaring war” on marijuana traffickers. The White House responded that marijuana represented its top interdiction and public health priority because heroin addicts were “statistically insignificant,” whereas pot smoking harmed “all socioeconomic groups” and marijuana operated as a “major gateway drug.” Nancy Reagan’s campaign for drug-free youth, launched at a 1981 NFP summit, formalized the administration’s alliance with the parents’ movement. By spring 1982 the NFP boasted three thousand local affiliates at a follow-up White House conference on the marijuana crisis, which the director of a Washington, D.C., treatment center rebuked for its segregationist strategy “aimed at the white drug problem only.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “Special Meeting to Organize a National Federation,” April 3, 1980, folder PRIDE-5-6, OA 16999, Donald Ian Macdonald Files (Reagan Library). Hilary DeVries, “Parents Band Together to Push Back Drug Tide,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 1982, p. 12; Ellen Hume, “Network of Parent Groups Formed to Combat ‘Massive Drug Epidemic,’” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1980, p. B19; *NFP Newsletter* (Fall 1981), folder-SSADA-1, OA 12587, Richard L. Williams Papers (Reagan Library). Ronald Reagan news conference transcript, March 6, 1981, folder News Conference, OA 9432, Turner Files, *ibid.*; Ronald Reagan speech to International Association of Chiefs of Police, Sept. 28, 1981, Drug Policy-5 folder, OA 19057, Drug Abuse Policy Office Subject File, *ibid.* Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, “Recommendations for a Comprehensive Program to Control the Worldwide Problem of Drug Abuse,” 1981, pp. 13–17, 46–48, folder sc, OA 12587, Williams Papers; Lynn Norment, “Charles Rangel: The Front-Line General in the War on Drugs,” *Ebony*, 44 (March 1989), 128–34.

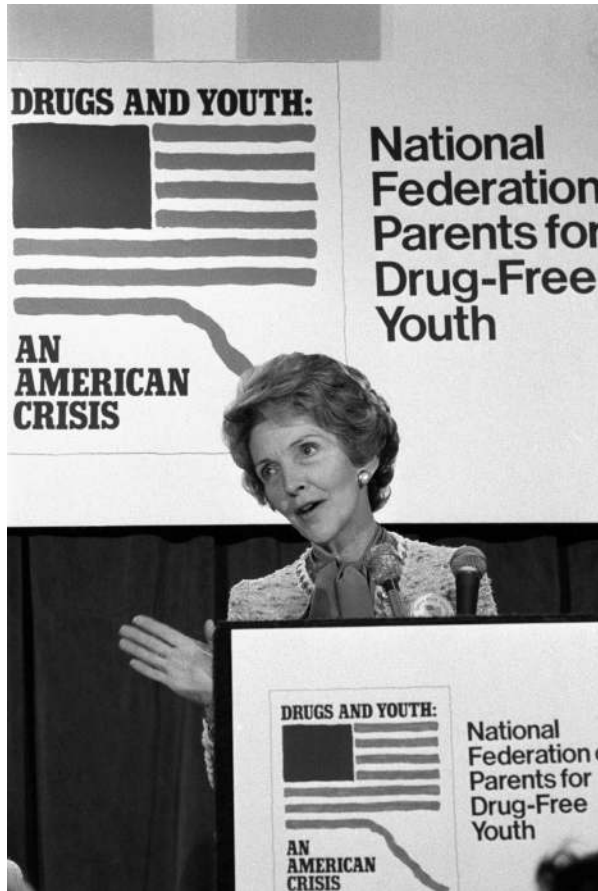
<sup>16</sup> Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 49. Michael Massing, *The Fix* (New York, 1998), 155–90. Marsha Keith Schuchard, “Examination of the Health and Educational Effects of Marijuana on Youth,” in *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, U.S. Senate, October 21, 1981*

In October 1982, when President Reagan formally declared war on drugs, he started by asking his wife to recount her visits to antimarijuana parents' groups across the nation. After Nancy Reagan painted a dystopian portrait of pot-smoking burnouts and dead teenage addicts in middle America, the president praised the NFP for turning the tide on the prevention front and then promised to incarcerate the "pushers" who trafficked marijuana and cocaine. Leading Democrats such as Senator Joseph Biden criticized Reagan for not seeking even harsher mandatory-minimum penalties, while Rep. Charles Rangel of Harlem attacked the White House for "losing the battle against drug abuse on nearly all fronts." The administration's response demonstrated its inherently white middle-class construction of the drug crisis, as executive branch officials boasted of stopping elementary school children from smoking marijuana and "beautiful people" from snorting cocaine. In 1983 the White House and NFP collaborated on *The Chemical People*, a PBS special that resurrected gateway and pusher tropes from the 1950s and 1960s to mobilize American parents against the marijuana "epidemic." Suburban teenagers recounted how experimenting with pot turned them into LSD burnouts and heroin addicts, including the requisite cute white girl who ended up a twelve-year-old junkie prostitute on the Chicago streets. The other centerpiece of the NFP-White House campaign, a comic book curriculum for grades 4-6, featured innocent victims on stereotypical suburban landscapes, corrupted by malicious pushers who enticed their prey from marijuana "addiction" to the death traps of LSD and cocaine.<sup>17</sup>

Even during the "crack epidemic" of the mid- to late 1980s, the binary of white suburban addict-victims and minority ghetto predator-criminals continued to structure the political context of the war on drugs and spur the bipartisan stampede to intensify mandatory-minimum sentences. Although President Reagan often receives the credit, Democratic drug warriors such as Joseph Biden and Charles Rangel played leading roles in crafting the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Congress enacted the law with minimal dissent, despite the racial and spatial inequities of its 100-to-1 crack to powder cocaine sentencing disparity, with 500 grams of cocaine triggering the same penalty as only 5 grams of crack. During this pivotal phase in the expansion of the carceral state, Ronald and Nancy Reagan persisted in lumping recreational pot smoking with heroin addiction and crack

(Washington, 1981), 115, 120-24; Carla Lowe to Ronald Reagan, Nov. 9, 1981, folder Polls/Surveys-General, OA 13748, Turner Files. Carlton Turner statement, Nov. 18, 1981, folder Drug Policy-3, OA 19057, Drug Abuse Policy Office Subject File; Carlton Turner, "Briefing Remarks," March 21, 1983, Chemical People-4 folder, box 15, *ibid.* NFP Newsletter (Fall 1981), Drugs/Alcohol folder, OA 11221, Michael E. Baroody Files, Office of Public Affairs (Reagan Library); "Background Memorandum Mrs. Reagan/Drug Project," [1981], *ibid.* ACTION Update (April 1982), folder WH Briefing, OA 12590, Williams Papers; Enid Nemy, "Drugs' Economic Impact Outlined at White House," *New York Times*, March 23, 1982, p. A16; Mahmoud Baptiste to James Rosebush, Feb. 9, 1982, ACTION-1 folder, box 5, Turner Files.

<sup>17</sup> "Radio Address of the President and the First Lady," Oct. 2, 1982, folder ccwg—Drug Abuse Health Issues, OA 12590, Williams Papers (Reagan Library); "Fact Sheet: President Reagan's Campaign against Drug Abuse," Oct. 5, 1982, *ibid.* Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Controlling Crime: A National and International Necessity," Nov. 15, 1982, folder 109675-112529, box 16, Office of Policy Development (Reagan Library); "Prepared Statement by Chairman Charles B. Rangel, Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control," Nov. 1, 1983, in *Hearings before the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, House of Representatives, Ninety-Eighth Congress, First Session, November 1 and 2, 1983* (Washington, 1984), 49. "Press Briefing," Oct. 5, 1982, folder 097901-099999, box 15, Office of Policy Development. *The Chemical People: The Chemical Society*, ex. prod. Dale Bell, WQED Pittsburgh (PBS, Nov. 2, 1983); *The Chemical People, Program 2: Community Answers*, ex. prod. Dale Bell, WQED Pittsburgh (PBS, Nov. 9, 1983); NFP Newsletter (1983), Chemical People-1 folder, box 14, Turner Files. *The New Teen Titans: Plague!* (New York, 1983), folder DAP Comic Books-3, OA 16996, Williams Papers; *The New Teen Titans: Problem Child* (New York, 1983), *ibid.*; *The New Teen Titans: Battle!* (New York, 1983), *ibid.*



First Lady Nancy Reagan championed the suburban antimarijuana crusade at the second annual conference of the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth (NFP), held in Arlington, Virginia, on October 11, 1982. Leaders of local affiliates throughout the nation attended the gathering, with its striking logo of a fraying American flag to symbolize the youth drug epidemic, just a week after President Ronald Reagan officially launched his administration's war on drugs and embraced the NFP priorities of marijuana interdiction and prevention. *Courtesy Jacques Haillot/CORBIS.*

cocaine as the multifaceted epidemic that was “killing our children.” They reminded parents that “no one is safe” and urged teens to fight pushers by joining Just Say No clubs. In American political culture, with the exception of the shocking death of African American college basketball star Len Bias from a cocaine overdose, white middle-class youth disproportionately figured as the most sympathetic victims of cocaine traffickers. A 1986 *Newsweek* exposé, “Kids and Cocaine: An Epidemic Strikes Middle America,” featured marijuana-to-crack gateway tragedies about white suburban youth, including a fourteen-year-old cheerleader rescued from an inner-city crack house by the police and her desperate parents. In “Crack’s Destructive Sprint across America,” the *New York Times Magazine* warned in 1989 that the scourge “has leaped across the city lines into the middle-class suburbs” as Jamaican traffickers invaded “the heartland.” *Crack USA*, a 1989 HBO documentary about Palm Beach County, Florida, portrayed a once-utopian suburb infiltrated by the “crime and violence of the big cities” and juxtaposed a black male street dealer

boasting of the “money in the drug game” with two white fifteen-year-old girls confessing cocaine addiction from the safety of a private treatment facility.<sup>18</sup>

From the narcotics crisis of the 1950s through the crack epidemic of the 1980s, the political and cultural construction of the white middle-class victim operated alongside the racialized threats of the urban pusher, foreign trafficker, and predatory ghetto addict to sustain the war on drugs and expand the American carceral state. In 1988 *Time*'s “Kids Who Sell Crack” cover story introduced “Frog,” a remorseless, incarcerated thirteen-year-old gangster-dealer from the East Los Angeles barrio. HBO's *Crack USA* documentary depicted a similar yet radically different teenage dealer, a cute and innocent-seeming fifteen-year-old white boy named “Barry” who started “working for, like, big-time people” selling cocaine to his suburban classmates. An impossible criminal, Barry spoke to the nation from a West Palm Beach rehabilitation center, joined by his conscientious parents and surrounded by other white middle-class casualties of the crack invasion. The divergent paths of Frog and Barry captured the ways enforcement of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 continued the discriminatory racial and spatial policies of the American war on drugs writ large. In 2006 an ACLU investigation revealed that African Americans represented more than 80 percent of crack cocaine defendants even though whites made up almost two-thirds of the market. The selective criminalization of marijuana has remained at the center of U.S. drug policy—with possession accounting for almost half of all drug-related arrests by 2010—and the discretionary targeting of urban black residents continues despite growing public support for legalization. The contours of the war on drugs may be shifting yet again, but the criminalization of blackness and decriminalization of whiteness remains deeply entrenched in American political culture, as does the long-standing divergence between a public health strategy in the white middle-class suburbs and a crime-control agenda in urban minority neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> “The National Legislative and Law Enforcement Response to Cocaine,” in *Special Report to the Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy*, by U.S. Sentencing Commission (Washington, 1995), <http://www.ussc.gov/report-cocaine-and-federal-sentencing-policy-2>; Reginald Stuart, “O'Neill Proposes Congress Mount Attack on Drugs,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1986, pp. A1, A9; Anti-Drug Abuse Act, 100 Stat. 3207 (1986); Provine, *Unequal under Law*, 91–139. Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan, “Speech to the Nation on the Campaign against Drug Abuse,” Sept. 14, 1986, *Miller Center*, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/5465>. On Len Bias, see “Drug War Urged after Bias Death,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 26, 1986, p. C2; and Michael Weinreb, “The Day the Innocence Died,” June 24, 2008, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=bias>. Tom Morganthau, “Kids and Cocaine: An Epidemic Strikes Middle America,” *Newsweek*, March 17, 1986, pp. 58–65. See also Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham, N.C., 1994). Michael Massing, “Crack's Destructive Sprint across America,” *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 1, 1989, pp. SM38–SM41, SM58, SM60, SM62, esp. SM60. *Crack USA: County under Siege*, dir. Vince DiPersio and Bill Guttentag (HBO, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Jacob V. Lamar, “Kids Who Sell Crack,” *Time*, May 9, 1988, pp. 20–24, 27, 30, 33. *Crack USA*. American Civil Liberties Union, *Cracks in the System: Twenty Years of the Unjust Federal Crack Cocaine Law* (New York, 2006), [https://www.aclu.org/files/pdfs/drugpolicy/cracksinsystem\\_20061025.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/files/pdfs/drugpolicy/cracksinsystem_20061025.pdf). American Civil Liberties Union, “War on Marijuana in Black and White”; Pew Research Center, “Majority Now Supports Legalizing Marijuana,” April 4, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/2013/04/04/majority-now-supports-legalizing-marijuana/>.