Crack as a moral panic: The racial implications inherent to crack and powder cocaine sentencing

Deena R Trueblood

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CRACK AS A MORAL PANIC: THE RACIAL IMPLICATIONS INHERENT TO CRACK AND POWDER COCAINE SENTENCING

by

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1994

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Dean of the Graduate College
ABSTRACT

Crack as a Moral Panic: the Racial Implications Inherent to Crack and Powder Cocaine Sentencing

by

Deena R. Trueblood

Dr. Richard McCorkle, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis explores the nature and extent of the print media’s coverage of crack cocaine to determine whether a moral panic ensued during the late 1980’s. A content analysis was conducted on the Los Angeles Times from 1985 to 1990, examining both the nature and extent of the Los Angeles Times’ coverage of crack cocaine as well as the relationship between this drug and its association with Blacks. The findings of the content analysis provided support for the hypothesis that a moral panic did in fact take place in the late 1980s with respect to crack cocaine. Further, that this panic was brought about, in part by particularly high profile events covered extensively in the media, as well as the intense scrutiny afforded this subject by legislators and the President of the United States during that period of time.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"‘Two summers ago,’ began a 1988 *New York Times* editorial, ‘America discovered crack and overdosed on oratory’ (*New York Times*: 10/4/88; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 15.) The emergence of the crack cocaine “epidemic” in this country was unprecedented in its media coverage, its immediate and vehement public response, its law enforcement response, and particularly its political and legislative response. Like no other drug before it, or since, crack became a metaphor for America’s fear of crime and public order during the late 1980's.

Fueled by lurid and often sensationalized media accounts in the American news media, news magazines, and television networks, crack cocaine became a “plague” that suddenly and unexplainably descended upon a defenseless nation. Using crack as their weapon, politicians from both parties made increasingly strident calls for an all-out “war on drugs,” going so far as to challenge each other to take urine tests to provide chemical proof of their moral purity and fitness for office (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115; Belenko 1993: 1,2.) Despite the dearth of scientific or verifiable information pertaining to crack cocaine at that time, crack instantaneously became the target of an unsurpassed legislative and law enforcement response, previously unparalleled in the history of “drug scares.” Such efforts
ultimately culminated in the omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988, implementing, among other penalties, mandatory prison terms, a 100-to-1 quantity ratio for crack to powder cocaine sentencing, the death sentence, and massive funding for new drug enforcement efforts (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115.)

Similar to previous "drug scares," crack cocaine was seized upon by politicians and policy makers in the mid and late 1980's not only to deflect attention from the increasing intractability of the pressing social inequalities, but also as the impetus to accelerate a movement toward the social control of its users (Belenko 1993: 6, 7; Kleiman 1986; Zimmer 1987.) This movement was clearly organized around punishment and control of crack users, with the bulk of the federal anti-drug budget allocated to interdiction, eradication, and enforcement efforts, rather than to treatment or research. As a result, this enormously expensive response filled our nation's jails and prisons to overflowing with crack users and low-level street dealers - so much so at times, that violent convicted criminals had to be released to make room (Currie: 1993: 15, 16.)

Equally problematic, drug scares typically associate a subordinate group - generally a racial or ethnic minority, or youth - as the scapegoated class upon which all other social problems can be blamed (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 116, Belenko 1993: 9.) In the case of cocaine, particularly its derivative, crack, this class was poor, inner-city, young, Blacks. In so doing, politicians were able to divert the nation's attention from the growing social and economic inequalities endemic to the urban underclass precipitated primarily by Reaganomics, to the "true cause" of those problems - the crack use of its inhabitants.

1The term "drug scare" is used to designate periods when anti-drug crusades have achieved great prominence and legitimacy (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115.)
In addition to the barrage of political attention, the media, played a particularly critical role in defining crack use by the urban underclass as a problem of “epidemic” proportions, imbuing it with a sense of national urgency unseen in previous drug scares. According to Jenkins, the media’s fury of daily coverage of the crack issue, marked by strong moralistic rhetoric and increasingly sensationalized stories, served to “nationalize” and “objectify” the crack epidemic (Jenkins 1994:26), thereby creating a “moral panic” of unprecedented dimensions. Among these stories, early media accounts portrayed crack as the “scourge of the inner-city,” increasingly associating its use with urban minorities and tremendous increases in violent crime. These accounts further served to fuel stereotypes among whites that crack-smoking Blacks and Hispanics from the nation’s inner cities were running amok committing “random” acts of violence that could soon spread to their middle- and upper-class neighborhoods (Goldstein 1989:24.)

Our nation’s “war on drugs” in the mid to late 1980’s, therefore, can be equated to its former “cold war” of the early 1980’s against the Soviet Union. Crack, like the former USSR, became the illusive “enemy,” poised to annihilate our nation without warning, while we stood defenseless to retaliate. Indeed, by mid-1989, at the time when this particular “war” was at its peak, crack became a threat to the very fiber of our society, functioning to distinguish those who were good, law-abiding citizens (the white majority), from those who were fundamentally deviant (the urban underclass.)

In response to this threat to our internal solidarity, as George Herbert Meade suggested, we isolated the threat to our collective identity and employed specialized agencies (our legislators who initially created the threat, and our law enforcement agencies who
ultimately benefitted therefrom though additional funding and personnel) to assist in the social control of these errant groups (Farrell and Swigert 1988: 7-8.) What resulted was the incarceration of an entire generation of young, urban, Black, males.

Indeed, according to Elliot Currie,

Nationally, in 1989, about 40% of all arrests for all drug violations were of blacks, who are only 12% of the population. The proportion of jail inmates charged with a drug offense who were Black or Hispanic rose from 55% in 1983 to 73% in 1989. The disproportion is even greater in areas where hard-drug use is heavily concentrated: In New York State, over 90% of those sent to prison for drug felonies in 1988 were Black or Hispanic, and the figure was even higher - about 95% - for the lower-level felonies (Currie 1993:31)

The question remains, however, given that the trends in usage as measured by the National Institute of Drug Abuse reflected that cocaine use peaked among young adults (those most likely to engage in drug use) in 1982 and has been declining ever since, was the objective threat posed by crack equivalent to its perceived harm? Equally troubling, given that crack use - even at its apex during 1986 and 1987 - affected only 4 percent of this population, was crack cocaine truly a problem of such epidemic proportions that the Los Angeles Times alone devoted almost 2000 articles (1921) to its coverage from 1985 until 1990. The conclusion on both accounts is a resounding “no.”

Statement of the Problem

This is not to deny, however, that the media and policy makers at that time did, in fact, create a moral panic with respect to crack cocaine. Indeed, several authors have previously provided support for the existence of such a hypothesis. Similar to this study,
these authors similarly utilized a content analysis to empirically measure the nature and extent of the coverage of crack cocaine in the "New York Times" throughout the mid to late 1980's (See Belenko 1993; Reinarman and Levine 1988; and Reinarman and Levine 1989; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994.) The results of the foregoing, however, may not have indicated a national moral panic, but rather, may simply have been illustrative of the fact that crack cocaine was an artifact of localized attention. A reflection of attitudes relegated primarily to the east coast, rather than a manifestation of a nationwide panic. Given these concerns, it was determined that further support for a nationwide moral panic hypothesis could be provided through a replication of this previous research by examining the "Los Angeles Times" as measure of this phenomena on the west coast.

This paper, then, discusses the so-called crack "epidemic" from several perspectives. First it will review the prevailing literature on moral panics as well as the history of Legislative Anti-Drug Efforts from 1800-1985 and the "drug scares" attendant thereto. Noteworthy among these is the manner in which elites, social movements and moral entrepreneurs throughout history have linked drug use with a specific suppressed stratum of society, particularly minority groups and youth. Moreover, it examines the manner in which this moral majority utilizes such suppressed groups as the scapegoated class upon which a variety of social problems can be blamed. It is suggested that an identical phenomenon occurred with crack cocaine.

Second, it will review the birth and spread of crack cocaine in the mid-1980's from a few inner-city ghettos to a national "epidemic." It also traces the media coverage of this "crisis" and summarizes the core claims made about the destructiveness of this supposed
panic, examining also the chief U.S. government data on which nearly all statistical claims about the prevalence of drug use and abuse were purportedly based. It is concluded that the official statistical evidence measuring the trends in usage of crack cocaine does not support the prevalence claimed by the media and legislators alike during this time.

Third, this paper reviews the history and development of the Federal Anti-Drug policy and the political context within which it was forged. This will include a discussion of the impact of the role of the media as a driving force in the creation of this legislation as well as the media's creation of a "moral panic" with respect to crack's purported criminogenic effects.

Finally, utilizing a content analysis of the Los Angeles Times, the ultimate objective of this study is to conduct a replication of research of previous noted social scientists in the area of moral panics and crack cocaine. Specifically, this research will examine the prevalence of media attention attendant to crack as well as its association with the urban underclass - Blacks in particular - by examine the number of articles (specifically in Parts "A" and "B") devoted to the coverage of crack cocaine. It is concluded that - consistent with the previous findings of social scientists such as Belenko, Reinarman and Levine, and Goode and Ben-Yehuda - the intense media and political coverage surrounding crack cocaine in the Los Angeles Times contains the necessary conditions of a moral panic as defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994.) This finding is strongly supported by the nature and extent of the media's coverage of crack cocaine from 1985 until 1990, examined in six-month segments.

In conclusion, while crack cocaine does appear to be a dangerous drug, the extent to which the government response and the attendant media coverage portrayed its threat was
far overreaching and disproportionate to both the prevalence of its use as well as its criminogenic and psychopharmacological effects.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crack Cocaine: The Drug Panic of the 1980's

The Social Construction of a Social Problem

In determining whether the reaction to crack cocaine was a moral panic, the recent work by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) was relied upon heavily. According to the authors, five crucial elements or criteria define a moral panic, the first of which is a heightened level of concern regarding the threat posed by a clearly identifiable group. That concern must be accompanied by an increased level of hostility toward the group in question, engendered by the creation and promotion of stereotypes that distort and exaggerate the dangers posed by the group. Though this antagonism need not be universally held throughout society, there must be substantial consensus that the threat posed by the group is, in fact, real. Moral panics are further characterized by a disproportionate reaction to the menacing group in light of the objective threat posed. The criterion of disproportionality is evidenced by the exaggeration or fabrication of figures purporting to measure the scope of the problem, and fluctuation in attention to the condition without corresponding changes in its severity.
Finally, moral panics are distinguished by their *volatility*. A panic erupts suddenly only to subside abruptly at some later time. Some moral panics fade quickly without a trace; in others, the moral concern is institutionalized and persists in the form of new laws, policies, and governmental agencies (McCorkle and Miethe 1998: 41 *citing* Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994.)

The moral panic literature further suggests that an evaluation of such panics is bifurcated by two dichotomous approaches to the study of social problems: objectivism and constructivism. Proponents of the former model suggest that a condition becomes a social problem when it threatens the quality or length of life of a substantial number of people (Manis 1974: 305; McCorkle and Miethe 1998:41.) It ignores or minimizes the subjective nature of social problems and assumes that empirical measures of a condition accurately reflect the objective threat it poses. Paradoxically, constructionists argue that the objective status of a condition is largely irrelevant in determining what comes to be defined as a social problem. Instead, a social problem is more accurately understood as a product derived from the “activities of individuals or groups making assertions or grievances and claims with respect to some putative condition” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:205.) It is not the actual nature of the condition, then, that is important, but rather, it is what claims-makers say about that condition that defines a social problem. More specifically, a condition becomes defined as a social problem as a result of the strategies, organizational structure, and resources of claims-making groups (McCorkle and Miethe 1998: 42 *citing* Spector and Kitsuse 1973), not because of the relative objective threat posed by this problem.
The Inspiration for the Crack Panic

Consistent with the patterns established in previous studies of moral panics, the reaction to crack cocaine in the mid- to late 1980s can clearly be categorized as a drug "panic," "crisis," or "scare" (see e.g. Reinarman and Levine 1987, 1988; Reinarman and Levine 1989; Goode 1990; Belenko 1993; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994.) Public concern regarding drug use, although it had been building throughout the 1980's, fairly exploded in late 1985 and 1986. And the drug that was the special target of public concern was cocaine, more specifically crack cocaine. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, in fact, suggest "it is possible that in no other decade has the issue of drugs occupied such a huge and troubling space in the public consciousness. And it is possible that no specific drug has dominated center stage in this concern as crack cocaine did between 1986 and, roughly, late 1989 to early 1990" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:205.)

In examining the creation and cultivation of the crack panic, it is important to consider the social, political, and economic motivations leading up to and surrounding this phenomenon. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), many ways, the crack panic was intriguing because it was so unexpected. The 1970's, in fact, represented somewhat of a constructionist’s dream with respect to public tolerance and use of illegal drugs. At a time when drug use was at an all-time high (consider that in 1979, six of ten high school seniors had used marijuana at least once during their lifetimes; half or 51 percent had used it during the previous month, and one out of ten used it every day) (Johnston, O’Malley, and Backman 1989: 48-50), public opinion as measured by Gallup polls, demonstrated a substantial decline in the significance of drugs as an important social problem in this country: between
the early 1970's (February 1973, 20 percent) and the late 1970's (February, May, and October 1979, no mention at all.)

The Decade of the 1980s: Measures of Public Concern

With the introduction of the core conservatism of the Reagan administration in the early 1980's, however, public tolerance for the use of illegal drugs began to decline. In fact, as the belief that the harm of use of illegal drugs began to increase throughout this era, the previously held position that use, possession, and sale of illegal drugs should be decriminalized or legalized began to decline correspondingly. Use of illegal drugs also declined during this time (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:206.)

Notwithstanding this slow decline in the use and public tolerance for drugs, public opinion of this problem remained relatively low consistently throughout the early 1980's (between 1979 and 1984, drug use and abuse did not appear at all in the Gallup polls among the most often mentioned problems facing the country.)

Indeed, it was not until January, May, and October of 1985 (2 to 6 to 3 percent, respectively) that the proportion of those polled mentioning drug abuse as the nation's number one problem even received enough responses to constitute reporting. By July 1986, however, only eight months following the word "crack's" first mention in the national media, this figure increased to 8 percent, placing it fourth among major America social problems. Finally, by November 1989, at the height of the media's coverage of crack, including a barrage of network news programs on drug abuse as well as a presidential address by George Bush in which he declared yet another "war on drugs," this figure jumped
to an astounding 38 percent—(64 percent in a set of parallel polls, conducted by the New York Times and CBS News) a figure that represented one of the most intense preoccupations by the American public on any issue in polling history (see e.g., Reinarman and Levine, 1989; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994.) (See Table 1 below.)

Table 1: Public Opinion about Drugs\(^2\): 1985-1994

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<th>Date of Poll</th>
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<td>April 1987</td>
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As is demonstrated in the table above, just as quickly as the crack panic appeared, its prominence as the nation’s number one concern all but disappeared, its rankings plunging to between 8 and 11 percent in 1991. Such volatility is consistent with the literature regarding moral panics. Specifically, it is supportive of the hypothesis that concern regarding the issue of crack cocaine constituted a moral panic, in that the public areas in which social problems are framed and funded have limited “public space” or “carrying


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capacities." As such, claims makers, such as the government, the media, political organizations and other institutions can accommodate only a certain number of issues at any given time (McCorkle and Miethe 1998: 43; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 207; Best 1990: 15-16; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988.) By the early 1990's, in this case, the war in the Persian Gulf and the economic recession suddenly became "hot" in the media, and crack was all but passe. In other words, just as social problems can be constructed, they can also be deconstructed.

**Role of the Media in Creating the Crack Panic**

Another concrete measure of how certain conditions or phenomena are perceived as social problems at a particular time is the focus of the media on those conditions. According to Brownstein (1991), the reality of everyday life is a social construction (Brownstein 1991:85 citing Berger and Luchmann, 1966; Schutz, 1962.) Moreover, when the news media report stories as news, they objectify reality (Brownstein 1991:85 citing Lichter et al., 1986; Koch, 1990.) The process of making news, then, is inevitably value-based (Barak, 1988:573.) Brownstein further argues that news is necessarily constructed in a political context. He, and others suggest that,

the primary purpose of the contemporary American news media is to make a profit. . . News reporting, therefore, is as likely to sensationalize events as it is to report them, as likely to serve as an instrument of propaganda as it is to be a source of information. . . To obtain information needed to make news, the media rely on experts and public officials whose control over knowledge makes them the gate keepers of that information. To construct news that is not favorable to those with that power, is to risk being cut off from the information that is needed to be able to construct news at all (Brownstein 1991:86; citing also Reinarman and Levine 1989: 535; Lee and Lee, 1939; and Koch, 1990.)
Accordingly, the amount of media attention given to a specific issue is not always relative to its objective threat (see e.g. Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 208; Belenko 1993:24; Reinarman and Levine 1989.) Indeed, the literature regarding drug “scares,” suggests that media coverage of these occurrences are independent phenomena, not necessarily related to actual trends or patterns in drug use or trafficking. In illustration, at a time when illegal drug use was actually declining, 1986, Reinarman and Levine estimated that, in the months leading up to the 1986 elections alone, more than 1000 stories appeared on crack cocaine in the national press, including five cover stories each in Time and Newsweek.

Amazingly, however, despite the orgy of media coverage pertaining to this drug during 1986, there were absolutely NO official statistics distinguishing crack cocaine from powder cocaine use available until two years later. In fact, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) did not even begin to gather statistics on the use of crack cocaine (as differentiated from powder cocaine) until 1988, a time during which the data indicated that only .5 percent of the general population was using crack at least once a year, only .2 percent were using crack monthly, and only 1 to 2 percent of respondents had ever used crack in their lives (National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1991; Belenko 1993:13.) Indeed, as media coverage increased throughout the late 1980's and into the early 1990's, longitudinal data suggested that annual crack use actually declined from 1988 until 1992 (from .5 percent to .4 percent.) These findings have led Reinarman and Levine (1989) and others to conclude that the response of the media during that time clearly appears to have been greatly disproportionate to the actual dimensions and seriousness of the crack problem (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115-116; Brownstein 1991:94 Williams and
The disproportionality of the coverage of crack cocaine vis-a-vis its objective threat, therefore, was a calculated attempt by the media and politicians to focus this country's attention on this particular issue, rather than the underlying inequalities which may have given rise to them. According to moral panic experts, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), such techniques are typical during the construction of a moral panic. According to these noted authors, given the inherent conflict between the number of potential social problems and the limited "public space" for addressing them, claims-makers, like the media, utilize various techniques to distinguish their issues from the crowd, presenting them in terms of symbolic representations that distort and dramatize their respective conditions. Such exaggerations, they argue, can be regarded as an indicator of whether a society is in the throes of a moral panic. These exaggerations typically involve the use of metaphors - disease or wars being the most popular - to describe the condition of the social problem and to prescribe an appropriate response (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:208.)

Typified by its heated rhetoric and repeated allusions to America's figurative war on drugs, then, the crack panic fits snugly within such a framework. In April 1988, for example, an ABC News "Special Report" termed crack "a plague" that was "eating away at the fabric of America." This documentary, like others before and since, made a long series of provocative claims: that American businesses have lost "sixty billion" dollars a year in productivity because their workers use drugs; that "the educational system is being undermined" by student drug use; and that the "family" was "disintegrating" in the face of this epidemic."
According to Reinarman and Levine, such a powerful *vocabulary of attribution*, led millions of viewers to regard drugs, especially crack, as responsible for the destruction of virtually every institution in American life - jobs, schools, families, national sovereignty, community, law enforcement, and business (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115-116.) As such, utilizing a methodology that these authors refer to as *routinization of caricature* - worst cases framed as typical cases, the episodic rhetorically re-created into the epidemic - the media created an epidemic of seemingly ever increasing proportions, which, according to all official statistics, was actually on the decline (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 115-116.)

Moreover, by focusing exclusively on the abusers, dealers, crimes, and casualties of crack cocaine, the mass media and the politicians decontextualized the drama, making it appear as if the story had no authors aside from its users (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 126; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 559.) In this manner, the issue takes on a narrative quality, suggesting not only that the condition has grown more severe, but also that dire consequences will result if immediate action is not taken (McCorkle and Miethe 1998: 40.)

A final technique utilized by the media to construct a drug panic, according to Jenkins, is the "nationalization" of a localized issue; or the projection of an issue of local importance as if it were of wider, national significance (Jenkins 1989: 20.) During the crack "epidemic," for example, crack cocaine began as a small localized problem in the inner cities of Los Angeles and New York. The nationalization of this problem by the media, however, imbued crack cocaine with a significance never before experienced in the creation of other previous drug panics.
Blacks - The Target of the Panic

Finally, a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a moral panic is some level of public fear toward certain minority groups. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) refer to this condition as the “raw material” for moral panics (McCorkle and Miethe 1998: 42.) Again, the crack panic, clearly meets this criteria of a moral panic. Indeed, from the very first article reporting the explosion of rock cocaine sales to the Black inner-city, through its first association with the sudden deaths two popular young athletes who overdosed on cocaine barely a week apart in June 1986 (University of Maryland basketball forward Len Bias, and Cleveland Browns’ defensive back Don Rogers) to the arrest and conviction of the Nation’s Mayor, Marion Barry, in early 1990, crack has always been associated with minorities - inner-city, young, Blacks in particular. Even as the crack panic was redefined in 1990, focusing more on the public harms attributed to crack rather than the inherent dangers of its widespread use, the association with Blacks increased correspondingly. Suddenly, crack-smoking Blacks were responsible for increases in violent crime, gang warfare, and other issues of public health such as increased risk of HIV.

According to Levine and Reinarman, such associations were necessary for the press, politicians, and other moral entrepreneurs to deflect attention from structural ills such as economic inequality, injustice, and the lack of meaningful roles for young people that were increasingly marked throughout the Reagan and Bush administrations - quite simply scapegoating (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 127.) Crack, therefore, became a metaphor not only for Blacks, but also for a subculture typically associated with the underclass found in inner-cities across the country. Moreover, since the values and lifestyles of this underclass
are perceived as antithetical to those of the larger community, its apparent resistance to state and market-oriented interventions only intensified public fear and anger (McCorkle and Miethe 1998, citing Magnet 1993). Crack then, served as a media icon of the urban underclass - flaunting the values perceived to be endemic to the underclass culture itself: the rejection of the work ethic, irresponsible sexuality, and drug abuse.

In sum, the social construction of crack cocaine as a major problem in the late 1980's, functioned to serve the political and economic agendas for the powers that be (including the media.) By defining crack as a Black, underclass, drug, politicians and the media alike were able to maintain the status quo and profit from doing it.

A Historical Perspective of Drug Scares and Drug Laws as Weapons in Social Conflict from the 1800's Through the 1970's

Throughout history, Americans have long made complicated symbolic connections between dangerous, forbidden substances and suppressed strata of the population. We have scapegoated a variety of drugs, blaming them for many social problems whose sources lie in larger political and economic forces and patterns (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 123 citing Levine 1984, 1985; Gumshield 1963.) This was not always the case, however. Indeed, up until the end of the 1800's in the United States, policymakers and public sentiment could have been characterized as having had a laissez-faire attitude toward drug use and addictive behavior (Levinthal 1996:49.) Indeed, consumption of such highly addictive drugs as opium and cocaine was widespread and well accepted throughout Britain and the United
States during this time. In one survey of thirty-five Boston drugstores in 1888, 78 percent of prescriptions refilled three or more times contained opium (Levinthal 1996:154.)

Similarly, consumption of a variety of popular cocaine-based products, including throat sprays, lozenges, tonics, and wines, enjoyed widespread middle-class popularity throughout the late 1800's (Murray 1986:245 citing Becker, 1963; Peterson, 1977b; Ray, 1983.) Use of various forms of cocaine quickly gained acceptance for both its anesthetic and psychopharmacological properties during this time, and, by 1883, cocaine was indexed in 50 scientific papers (Murray 1986:246 citing Petersen 1977b; Schartzman, Sabbadini & Forti, 1976..) Among its uses, cocaine was prevalent as an anesthetic for ophthalmological surgery, and widely prescribed for such respiratory ailments as asthma, whooping cough, and tuberculosis (Sentencing Commission 1995:8; citing J. Murray 1986: 243-264; D.F. Allen and J.F. Jekel 1991.)

Notable among its most ardent supporters was Sigmund Freud. In his publication, “Uber Coca” written in 1884, Freud enthusiastically proposed cocaine as an antidote for morphine addiction and alcoholism. He further advanced cocaine as an aphrodisiac as well as a cure for asthma (Murray 1986:246 citing Musto, 1968; Ray, 1983.)

By 1890, cocaine had become the primary ingredient in many elixirs and other “restoratives” alleging relief from a variety of disabilities, including colds, asthma, headaches, influenza and depression. It was also found in cigars, cigarettes, chewing gum, and various “tonics,” and most notably, Coca-Cola (Sentencing Commission 1995: 8 citing C.Van Dyke, et al 1978:211-213; G. Das 1993: 296-310.)
Following the Civil War and through the remainder of the 19th century, this laissez-faire sentiment changed, however, and strong opposition began to develop toward the smoking of opium, an attitude directed principally toward Chinese immigrants brought to the Western states in the 1850's and 1860's (Levinthal 1996:49,154; Sentencing Commission 1995:112-113 citing U.S. Department of Justice 1992:78-80.) Chinese immigrants had been brought in as “coolies” to help build the railroads and work the mines. Many practiced opium smoking. As the gold ran out and the railroads were completed, the nation entered a recession and white middle-class workers found themselves competing with Chinese workers for scarce jobs. Chinese workers were suddenly viewed as an economic threat (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124)

The campaign against opium smoking - as opposed to opium drinking in the form of laudanum and similar legally prescribed products - soon became associated with criminal activity including lurid newspaper accusations of Chinese men drugging white women and forcing them into sexual slavery (Levinthal 1996:155; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124 citing Sandmeyer 1939; Musto 1973; Morgan 1978.) The result of this media scare was the first recorded drug law in the United States: a municipal ordinance in San Francisco banning opium dens passed in 1885 (Sentencing Commission 1995: 112-113 citing U.S. Department of Justice 1992:78-80.) To quote a newspaper at that time, such an ordinance was passed for fear that “many women and young girls, as well as young men of respectable family, were being induced to visit the dens, where they were ruined morally and otherwise”(Levinthal 1996:155; Brecher, E 1972:42-43.)
This piece of legislation against opium smoking was one of several repressive laws
designed to control the Chinese minority, and to assuage the xenophobic anxieties of whites.
Among these, in 1887, the federal government prohibited the importation of opium by
Chinese nations, and, in 1905, restricted opium smoking in the Philippines. In the
following years, the United States launched a series of international conventions designed
to foster narcotics control activity, including the Shanghai Opium Convention of 1909 and
the 1911 International Conference on Opium at The Hague (Sentencing Commission 1995:
113 citing U.S. Department of Justice 1992:78-80.)

Other drug scares emerged under similar broader political and racial issues. Just as
the crack cocaine scare of the 1980's peaked after its association with lower class and inner-
city Blacks and Hispanics, so did class and racial fears fuel the first cocaine scare. Driven
by sensationalistic press accounts linking drug use to blacks, prostitutes, criminals, and
transient workers, white politicians at that time incited public reaction for their own political
purposes, culminating in the first federal law against opiates and cocaine -the Harrison Act
of 1914 (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124; Sentencing Commission 1995: 9; D. Musto
1973:6-10, 67-68.) Although there was no evidence that Black Americans used even as
much cocaine as whites, and the actual number of opiate addicts was probably declining
when the Harrison Act was passed, anti-drug crusaders repeatedly spread unsubstantiated
suspicions that cocaine induced Black men to rape white women (Reinarman and Levine
1989:124; D. Musto 1973:6-10, 67-68.) Indeed, in this 1913 article which headline read,
"Drug Crazed Negroes Fire at Every One in Sight in Mississippi Town," cocaine was said
to bestow such brut strength upon these Black "animals" that they were impervious to any
and all efforts at social control, including bullets (Goldstein 1989:48.) Some Southern sheriffs even said they had switched from .32 to .38 caliber pistols because they believed that their guns could not stop the “cocaine-crazed” Negro (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124.)

According to medical historian David Musto, this first cocaine scare was not primarily a response to cocaine use or opiate addiction, or to any drug-related crime wave; rather, it was animated by “white alarm” - by ungrounded but deep-seated fears - about “Black rebellion” against segregation and oppression (Musto, 1973:3; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124) By 1914, 46 states had enacted legislation regulating the use and distribution of cocaine in an effort to control crime (Sentencing Commission 1995: 9 citing D. Musto 1991.)

Although the Harrison Act did not make cocaine and opium illegal, it severely restricted the dissemination of these drugs, permitting only physicians, dentists, and veterinarians to prescribe them “in the course of their professional practice only” (Sentencing Commission 1995: 113 citing D. Musto 1991.) Levinthal (1996) proposed that the profound significance of this Act, however, was that it was the impetus for the paradigmatic shift in this country’s attitudes toward the field of drug abuse - shifting the focus from a medical problem to that of a criminal one (Levinthal 1996:50.)

Almost immediately following the enactment of the Harrison Act, this country again turned to legislation to cure the drug use that was thought to be responsible for most of the nation’s poverty, crime, violence, mental illness, moral degeneracy, “broken” families, and individual and business failures - this time, the drug was alcohol (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 123 citing Levine 1984, 1985; Gumshield, 1963.) For a young country in the throes
of industrialization, the first two decades of the 20th century were quite possibly one of the most tumultuous in American history. Riddled with class, racial, cultural and political conflict, the temperance ideology appealed to a broad middle class seeking explanations for the pressing social and economic problems of that time (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 123.) The corporate elite, too, found a convenient scapegoat in alcohol, blaming working-class drinkers with the interruption in the rhythms of the modern factory’s productivity and profits, and blaming saloons as breeding grounds of immorality and places where unions organized, and where leftists and anarchists found new recruits. Indeed, prohibitionists promised that a Constitutional amendment banning alcohol would empty prisons and asylums and ultimately ensure permanent prosperity (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 124.) In short for the corporate and political elite, and for much of the new professional middle class, clamping down on drinking and saloons was part of a much broader quest for “order” (Levinthal 1996: 233; Levine 1984, 1985, 1986; Rumbarger, 1989.)

More than a decade later, Congress began enacting a series of laws further restricting the use and distribution of illegal drugs, simultaneously creating a bureaucracy attendant to its regulation and enforcement. In 1930, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) was created. The FBN was charged with enforcing drug laws excluding alcohol laws, and the nation’s first “drug czar,” Harry J. Anslinger, was appointed at its first commissioner (Levinthal 1996:51.) Anslinger was a staunchly conservative member of the Treasury Department during the prohibition era, who garnered the support of several important conservative U.S. Congressmen during his 32-year tenure - not the least of whom was Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (Levinthal 1996:51.)

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Although Anslinger's stern conservative agenda enjoyed relatively widespread support, in the midst of the Great Depression and the end of the Prohibition Era, the bureau had endured four straight years of budget cuts, placing severe constraints on his spending. According to Donald Dickson (1968), with the waning of narcotics as an issue, Anslinger believed he needed a new villain to justify the Bureau's existence (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 125; Becker 1963; Dickson 1968.) In desperation, Anslinger seized upon several unsubstantiated rumors in the 1930's of "degenerate Spanish-speaking residents" in the Southwest engaging in criminal rampages while smoking marijuana. Circulating these accounts to the newspapers, Anslinger held up the clippings to Congress as evidence of the need for new federal legislation. The "killer weed," as it was dubbed, was identified as the next major public menace. According to law enforcement, this "killer weed, aroused sexual excitement and led to violent crimes." (Goldstein 1989:8.) It was said to not only make Mexicans especially violent, but also to cause youth to lose their achievement ethic, making them unpatriotic. It was called the "assassin of youth" - not because it was used by a dangerous class, but because it was making an entire class of youth "dangerous" (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 125; Levinthal 1996:51.)

These exaggerated reports, combined with the hysteria and moralistic rhetoric surrounding the movie *Reefer Madness*, depicting the moral decline of innocent young people unwittingly enticed into a deviant subculture of marijuana smoking youth, ultimately resulted in the first federal law again marijuana - the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, which regulated and taxed marijuana at the federal level (Sentencing Commission 1995: 113; D. Musto 1991: 44; Levinthal 1996:50.) Similar to the current crack cocaine scare, although
there was virtually no evidence to support widespread marijuana use, nor the outlandish claims of the horrid physiological and psychological consequences of marijuana use as presented in *Reefer Madness*, Congress received widespread support for the passage of this legislation. In fact, a series of state laws followed this Act, further criminalizing Marijuana Possession (Sentencing Commission 1995:113.) Here, too, a drug provided a functional symbol of an essentially political conflict between cultures and generations.

In what would become a continuing theme in the history of drug-enforcement legislation, the Marijuana Tax Act and the state laws attendant thereto failed to reduce drug consumption patterns of marijuana and public concern waned as many of the proposed evils of marijuana failed to materialize. Following World War I, however, drugs again became a national concern and Congress enacted The Boggs Act of 1951 and the Narcotics Control Act of 1956. These Acts increased maximum criminal penalties for violations of the import/export and internal revenue laws relating to drugs and also established mandatory minimum prison sentences (Sentencing Commission 1995: 113 citing U.S. Department of Justice 1992, 78-80.)

Thereafter, as new drugs came onto the scene, the 1960's saw a number of amendments to the enforcement laws then in effect. Feeling threatened by the diffusion of modernist values, behaviors, and cultural practices - particularly by what they perceived to be the interconnected forms of hedonism involved in sex outside (heterosexual) marriage and consciousness alteration with illicit drugs, Congress again sought to enact a series of legislative initiatives to control another suppressed stratum of the population - this time, it was an errant group of youth, or "hippies" (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 560.) In 1961, for
example, the United Nations adopted the single convention on Narcotic Drugs, establishing regulatory schedules of psychotropic substances (Sentencing Commission 1995: 114.) Thereafter, in 1962, the Bureau of Narcotics became the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and Anslinger retired at the urging of President John F. Kennedy (Levinthal: 51.) Following Anslinger's retirement in 1963, the Prettyman Commission recommended the imposition of strict federal control for certain drugs, and the transfer of federal law enforcement responsibilities to the Department of Justice. And finally, in 1965, the Drug Abuse Control Amendment was enacted to regulate the manufacture and distribution of amphetamines and barbiturates.

Unable to slow the tide of drug usage, or for that matter the "hedonistic" behavior of the nation's youth during that time, in 1966 and 1968, the emphasis previously placed on law enforcement began to shift to treatment and education, and legislation was enacted that began to provide for new treatment programs (Sentencing Commission 1995: 114; U.S. Department of Justice 1992, 78-80.)

Generally disheartened with the success of curbing previous drug use through the scare tactics of punitive legislation, Congress, in 1970, overhauled the federal drug control laws in the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970. This Act included a general repeal of the mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses and moved the administration of drug enforcement from the Treasury Department to the Department of Justice, thereby ending attempts to regulate drugs through taxation (Sentencing Commission 1995: 114; Levinthal 1995: 52.) This Act also sought to reorganize the control of drugs under five classifications called schedules, based upon their potential for abuse. The
Schedules are arranged hierarchically, with Schedules I and II referring to drugs presenting the highest potential for abuse, and Schedule V referring to drugs presenting the least (Levinthal 1996:52.) In these schedules, cocaine was designated as a Schedule II narcotic - having a high potential for abuse, but having some accepted medical use.

A review of the general legislative history of the Drug Abuse Act reveals that its authors expressed a general concern that the “increasingly longer sentences that had been legislated in the past had not shown the expected overall reduction in drug law violations” (Sentencing Commission 1995: 114 citing S. Rep.No 613, 91 Cong., 1st Sess. 1969.) Moreover, Congress was concerned that mandatory minimum penalties hampered the “process of rehabilitating offenders” and infringed “on the judicial function by not allowing the judge to use his discretion in individual cases” (Sentencing Commission 1995: 114 citing S. Rep.No 613, 91 Cong., 1st Sess. 1969.) Accordingly, this Act appeared to signal a shift away from law enforcement and control approaches and toward more social and liberal ideologies regarding drug abuse and dependence.

As President Richard Nixon needed a political platform to deflect attention from the devastation of the Vietnam War, however, the pendulum quickly swung back toward law enforcement and control. As such, in 1971, a Presidential Cabinet Committee for International Narcotics Control, chaired by the Secretary of State, was formed and President Nixon officially declared the first “U.S. war on drugs” (Levinthal 1996:54.) Due to the belief that a shift from retail to wholesale drug distribution would hold more potential, with the support of the President, enforcement efforts began to shift from penalties directed at drug users, to those directed at drug suppliers and dealers. To that end, Congress enacted
the Foreign Assistance Act of 1971, authorizing assistance to countries to control drug trafficking and production, and the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act of 1972, creating the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention. Finally, in 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration was created (Sentencing Commission 1995: 115.)

The Emergence of Crack Cocaine and the Political Context Within Which it Appeared; The Legislative Response; and the Role of the Media in Shaping Public Opinion

The Political Context During the Emergence of Crack Cocaine

Similar to previous drug scares, to fully understand the crack cocaine scare, it is important to interpret it as a phenomenon in its own right, and specifically, to understand the broader social, political and economic circumstances under which it occurred (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 126, 559 citing Lindesmith 1965; Duster, 1970; Duster, 1970; Brecher, 1972; Musto, 1973; Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1976; Morgan, 1978, Bakalar and Grinspoon, 1987.) With the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 - an extreme conservative who had come to prominence as governor of California by taking a hard line against the liberalism of the 1960's - came the rise of the “new right,” an extreme right-wing political organization of fundamentalist Christian groups who formed a core constituency for President Ronald Reagan. This group, with the support of the President and his appointees, set about to restructure public policy according to a radically conservative
ideology. Through this lens, social problems during the 1980's appeared to be simply the consequences of *individual moral choices* (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 561; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 126-127.) People in trouble were reconceptualized as people who *made* trouble (Gumshield, 1985); and social control replaced social welfare as the organizing principle of state policy (Reinarian, 1988.)

The culmination of these reform efforts was realized in the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. This Act created the United States Sentencing Commission and Determinant Sentencing. Specifically, this Act directed the Sentencing Commission to promulgate "a system of detail, mandatory sentencing guidelines to assure more uniform federal court sentencing decisions." In addition, the Act abolished parole for defendants sentenced under the sentencing guidelines (Sentencing Commission 1995: 115.)

The reemergence of Determinate Sentencing, a sentencing policy which had been gaining acceptance in the states throughout the late 1970's, was indicative not only of a decreasing public tolerance for crime and a growing skepticism toward policies of rehabilitation, but also of an increasing acceptance of individual accountability and more retributive and incapacitation ideologies as a means of controlling crime as propounded by the Reagan administration and the new right (Belenko 1990:11, *citing* Blumstein et. al. 1983.) As programs and research that had for many years been directed at the social and structural sources of social problems were systematically de-funded and de-legitimized, social problems such as unemployment, poverty, urban decay, and school crises, crimes, and all their attendant forms of human troubles were spoken of and acted upon as a result of
individual deviance, immorality or weakness (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 561; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 126-127.)

Drug problems fit neatly into this ideological agenda and allowed conservatives to engage in what Reinarman and Levine referred to as *sociological denial* (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 561.) For the new right, individuals did not abuse drugs because they were jobless, homeless, or poor; they were jobless, homeless, and poor because they were weak, immoral, and used drugs.

It was at this time that the spread of crack became the social problem of the 1980's. According to Dr. Steven Belenko, what made the crack phenomenon unique among drug scares was that it emerged into the drug subculture at a time when momentum was indeed building toward strict punishment of drug users and dealers, with a presidential administration that had a strong ideological bent toward individual accountability and an aversion for sociological or economic explanations for social problems (Belenko 1989:9.) Crack indeed became a godsend to the new right, and was used as the ideological fig leaf to cover the panoply of urban ills that had increasingly marked the Reagan administration's social and fiscal policies (Reinarman and Levine 1989:127.)

The crack crises also had utility in another more specific political platform. As Nancy Reagan, crisscrossed the nation in her highly visible anti-drug crusade telling school children to “Just Say No” to drugs, her image rose dramatically. Faced with repeated criticism in the press for spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on new china for the White House, lavish galas for wealthy friends, and high-fashion evening gowns during a time when her husband’s economic policies had induced a sharp recession, raised joblessness...
to Depression-era levels, and cut funding for virtually every program designed to assist the underclass, Mrs. Reagan’s “p.r. conscious operatives,” according to *Time* magazine, convinced her that these “serious-minded displays” made her appear “more caring and less frivolous.” *Time* noted, however, that “the timing and destinations of her anti-drug excursions were coordinated with the Reagan-Bush campaign officials to satisfy their particular political needs (*Time* Jan. 14, 1985:30.)

**Legislative Response**

For President Reagan and the new right, drug problems, and particularly crack cocaine, functioned as an opportunity for the synchronous imposition of an old moral agenda, guised under the appearance of new social concern. Indeed, at a time when most social problems were viewed as intractable and solutions as costly, the crack crisis “rode to the rescue.” It was the one “safe” issue on which all politicians could take a dramatic stand without losing a single vote or campaign contribution. It simultaneously avoided all questions about the economic and political sources of America’s more pressing social problems, while providing a “hot” issue after years of dull debates on budget balancing - just in time for a crucial election.

As such, crack also functioned to promote a highly conservative ideology at a time when Democrats comprised a majority of Congress. By symbolically couching the crack epidemic in terms of the “fight to save middle America,” Reagan shrewdly put many Democrats on the defensive, causing even the staunchest democrats to maneuver to the right on this issue (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 563.) As the election campaign of 1986 became
a forum for politicians attempting to out-platform one another in their efforts to demonstrate their concerns and the need for swift Draconian measures of social control with respect to drug abuse, despite the dominance of a liberal Congress during that time, the development of a conservative agenda ensued with widespread bi-partisan support. With conservatives and liberals alike quickly acknowledging the newest drug "menace," many going so far as to challenge each other (and even their spouses) to urine tests, silence regarding this issue would too readily be interpreted as being "soft" on drugs (Brownstein 1991:85; Belenko 1993:9; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 563.)

As the election year progressed, the media, police, and politicians provided a seemingly endless supply of heated rhetoric and unverifiable assertions respecting the widespread use and abuse of crack cocaine (Johnson, Golub and Fagan 1995:276.) Some of the assertions made in these reports were not only not supported by scientific data at the time, in retrospect, many were simply untrue (Sentencing Commission 1995: 122.) Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of this anti-crack crusade, was that, unlike previous anti-drug efforts, it occurred in a vacuum of extant research and qualitative knowledge regarding its psychopharmacological and behavioral effects (Belenko 1993:8.) According to noted social scientists Johnson, Golub and Fagan, legislators, relying exclusively on purely anecdotal information derived from media and law enforcement accounts, linked crack became linked to a wide variety of social problems, including violent crimes, escalation of drug abuse, child abuse and neglect, and prostitution. According to Johnson et al,

Paramount [among these accounts,] were myths that crack was ‘instantly addictive’, that ‘drug innocent’ persons were being converted into compulsive crack smokers, that use was inevitably leading persons to robbery and violent crime, that
women were becoming prostitutes to support their habit, that juveniles were being enticed into crack sales and addiction, that persons were dropping full-time jobs to become crack sellers, that crack sellers were becoming fabulously wealthy, and that crack gangs were controlling the neighborhoods of the city (Johnson, Golub and Fagan 1995:276.)

Though primarily unsubstantiated, such accounts enjoyed public widespread acceptance during this era. Even the U.S. Sentencing Commission admitted that, “the media played a large role in creating the national sense of urgency surrounding drugs generally, and crack cocaine specifically” (Sentencing Commission: 121.)

The Response of the Media and Its Role in Shaping Public Opinion

It was this sense of national urgency that was primarily responsible for the media’s role in shaping public opinion pertaining to crack cocaine. Crack, or “rock” cocaine as it was originally referred to, first trickled into the national American media in November 1984. The first printed article regarding “rock” cocaine described it as the drug of choice appearing in the barrios and ghettos of Los Angeles. “South Central Cocaine Sales Explode into $25 ‘Rocks’” (Los Angeles Times, November 25, 1984:II, 1.) Similar to previous drug scares, this article quickly linked what would later be known as crack to a suppressed strata of the population - inner-city, poor Blacks. Latent references were also made in this article to gang violence.

By late 1985, the New York Times made the first specific reference to the word “crack” in the national media in a story regarding adolescents seeking treatment for cocaine abuse after having used crack (New York Times, November 17, 1985:B12; Reinarman and
At the start of 1986, therefore, crack was primarily a localized issue known only in a few impoverished neighborhoods in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. Within six months' time, however, between the major newspapers, news magazines and television networks, a virtual barrage of almost daily media attention focusing on crack use flooded into American households, catapulting concerns regarding illicit drug use to the forefront of the public agenda.

The ensuing raging fury of media coverage apexed in June and July 1986 surrounding the coverage of the death of Len Bias in June 1986. Bias died of cocaine intoxication the day after he was the second player drafted by the Boston Celtics in the National Basketball Association's college draft in 1986. Although the method of cocaine ingestion that killed Bias was not known at the time of his death, Bias' death was followed a flurry of newspaper stories containing a quote from Dr. Dennis Smyth, Maryland's Assistant Medical Examiner, that “Bias probably died of free-basing cocaine.” (Sentencing Commission 1995: 122.) Among these newspapers were the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, the Chicago Tribune, the Atlantic Constitution, and the Washington Post. As an illustration, in a July 1, 1986, headline story in the Los Angeles Times, the author wrote, “Bias died of cocaine intoxication after ingesting an unusually pure dose of cocaine that stopped his heart...Crack, or smokable cocaine, is a form of almost pure cocaine...and is considered by health offices to be the source of the fastest-growing - and potentially the most serious -- drug epidemic in the nation” (Los Angeles Times, July 1, 1986, II, pg 1.)
According to Dr. Belenko, noted expert on this subject, during July 1986 alone, there were 74 evening news segments pertaining to crack cocaine, many of which were fueled by the belief that Bias' death was due to a crack cocaine overdose (Reinarman and Levine 1989:117; Belenko 1989:25; Sentencing Commission 1995: 123.) It was not until a year later, however, during the trial of Brian Tribble, who was accused of supplying Bias with the cocaine, did Terry Long, a University of Maryland basketball player who participated in the cocaine party that led to Bias death, testify that he, Bias, Tribble, and another player snorted powder cocaine over a four-hour period. Tribble's testimony, however, received limited media coverage (Sentencing Commission 1995: 123.)

As previously mentioned, Reinarman and Levine estimated that in the months leading up to the 1986 elections, more than 1000 stories appeared on crack cocaine in the National Press, including five cover stories each in *Time* and *Newsweek*. ABC News termed crack a “plague that was eating away at the fabric of America.” NBC News ran 400 separate reports on crack cocaine, accounting for an unprecedented 15 hours of air time in the seven months leading up to the 1986 elections (Belenko 1989:23; Reinarman and Levine 1989: 117; Inciardi 1987:481; Trebach, 1987:6.) *Time* called crack cocaine the “issue of the year” (September 22, 1986.) *Newsweek* called crack cocaine the “biggest news story since Vietnam and Watergate (June 16, 1986.) And, in the fall of 1986, CBS News aired a documentary entitled “48 Hours on Crack Street,” showing New York Senator Alphonse D’Amato, incognito, purchasing a vial of crack in order to dramatize the brazenness of street-corner sales in the ghetto. “48 Hours on Crack Street” became the most watched documentary in television history, earning the highest Nielsen rating of any similar new

Three days following the original CBS show on “Crack Street,” NBC followed with its own prime-time special, “Cocaine Country,” which asserted that cocaine and crack use had gone beyond epidemic to become pandemic (Reinarman and Levine 1989:542.) President and Mrs. Reagan joined in the fray, asserting that drugs, especially crack, were “killing...a whole generation of ...our children.” Drugs, they said, are “tearing our country apart” (Time 9/22/86:25.) In short, the crack hyperbole was tossed around by the media and politicians like grass seed, framing our fears of a country at war, yet defenseless to fight back.

The Legislative Response to the Crack Scare

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986

Faced with this sense of urgency and overwhelming popular media accounts, politicians wasted little time jumping on the “anti-crack” bandwagon with a great deal of heated rhetoric as they decried the dangers of crack cocaine (Belenko 1993:14.) As the “War on Drugs” increasingly became couched in terms of the fight for the survival of the very fabric of America, the ensuing reactionary agenda toward drug users and traffickers resulted from a constellation of forces: social, political, and ideological (Brownstein 1991:98.)
The legislative result of this barrage of media and political attention was the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. This Act created the basic framework of mandatory minimum penalties that currently apply to federal drug trafficking offenses (Pub L. No. 99-570, 100 Stat. 3207 1986; Sentencing Commission 1995: 116.) Enacted on October 27, 1986, just before Election Day, this $2 Billion Act whizzed through the House (392 to 16) just in time for members of Congress to go home and brag to their constituents. The emphasis of this Act clearly focused on the use of punishment and social control to fight drug abuse, establishing two tiers of mandatory prison terms for first time drug traffickers - a five-year and ten year minimum sentence (Belenko 1993:15.) Under this statute, prison terms were triggered exclusively by the quantity and type of drug involved in the offense (Sentencing Commission 1995: 116.) The Act further expanded funding in the area of policing and correction, leaving only 14 percent allocated for treatment and prevention (Johnson, Golub and Fagan 1995:28.) According to Belenko (1993), the 1986 Act authorized $1.7 Billion in new money to fight drug abuse; this was in addition to the previously authorized $2.2 Billion (Belenko 1993:14)

This Act was distinguished from all prior anti-drug legislation through the differentiation between two forms of cocaine with an IDENTICAL chemical makeup - powder and crack - and isolated crack for more severe punishment. This differential was implemented through the requiring of substantially lesser quantities of crack than powder cocaine to trigger the five-and ten-year mandatory minimum penalties applicable to both forms of cocaine, thereby imposing an inconceivable 100-to-1 quantity ratio of powder to
crack cocaine (i.e., it takes 100 times as much powder cocaine as crack cocaine to trigger the mandatory minimum penalties) (Sentencing Commission 1995: iii.)

Specifically, the contemporary federal criminal code provides the following penalties for first offense cocaine trafficking.

5 grams or more of crack cocaine

Or = Five (5) years mandatory minimum penalty

500 grams or more of powder cocaine

50 grams or more of crack cocaine

Or = Ten (10) years mandatory minimum penalty

5,000 grams or more of powder cocaine

In examining this Act in terms of moral panics, it is relevant to pay a great deal of attention to the general legislative history of the 1986 Act: not for what it reveals, but for the limited nature of the record contained therein. The 1986 Act was expedited through Congress, leaving in its wake a very limited legislative record to which we can refer to explain either the differentiation in the sentencing in crack and powder cocaine or the speed attendant to its enactment. The history of the 100-to-1 quantity ratio that emerged from this Act, therefore, can only be understood in the context of the individual members’ floor statements pertaining to the Act. (Sentencing Commission: 118.) Senator Hawkins, for example, spoke in support of the 1986 Act in terms of the urgency of this legislation:
Drugs pose a clear and present danger to America’s national security. If for no other reason we should be addressing this on an emergency basis...This is a bill which has far-reaching impact on the future as we know it as Americans and as we mature into the next century (132 Cong Rec. 24, 436 September 26, 1986.)

The legislative history, as evidenced mainly by individual legislator’s statements, suggested four specific areas of congressional purpose.

- To the extent that Congress saw the drug problem as a national “epidemic” in 1986, it viewed crack cocaine as at the very forefront.
- The decision by Congress to differentiate crack cocaine from powder cocaine in the penalty structure was deliberate, not inadvertent.
- The legislative history, primarily in the form of member’s floor’s statements, show (1) that Congress had concluded that crack cocaine was more dangerous than powder cocaine and (2) that this conclusion drove its decision to treat crack cocaine differently from powder cocaine.
- While Congress determined that the greater danger of crack cocaine warranted “special” heightened penalties, Congress also generally intended that the quantities triggering drug mandatory minimum penalties for crack cocaine would be consistent with the 1986 Act’s overall drug mandatory minimum scheme (Sentencing Commission 1995: 118.)

Driven by the heightened media coverage of the then-recent deaths of sports stars Len Bias and Don Rogers, Congressional members repeatedly described the dimensions of the crack problem in such dramatic terms as “epidemic.” (Zimring, Hawkins 1991:105.) As the 1986 elections grew near, the heightened public concern and the media-driven national sense of urgency surrounding the crack problem created a political context in which Congress was pressured to act quickly and definitively (Belenko 1993:14.) Because of this heightened concern and sense of urgency, Congress dispensed with much of the typical deliberative legislative process, including its most fundamental process, committee hearings (Sentencing Commission 1995: 117.)
Congress quickly initiated the sentencing provisions of the Act in August 1986. The original version of the house bill, HR 5484, actually contained a quantity ratio of 20-to-1, and was introduced on behalf of the Reagan Administration by Senator Robert Dole (Sentencing Commission 1995: 117.) As the 1986 Act quickly advanced through the legislative process in late summer and early fall, the Senate, using only the anecdotes of law enforcement professionals for consultation, the Senate set specific quantity levels for the entire range of illegal drugs, including powder and crack cocaine, that would trigger the five- and ten-year mandatory minimum penalties (Sentencing Commission 1995: 120.) Emphasizing again that no congressional hearings whatsoever were held, the resulting legislation increased the originally proposed powder cocaine-to-crack ratio from its original form of 20-to-1 to an incredible 100-to-1.

As previously mentioned, unlike previous anti-drug efforts in which quantitative and qualitative research existed about the effects of the drug, the enactment of the 100-to-1 sentencing ratio occurred at a time when systematic evidence regarding the effects of crack had not been published in one single scholarly journal. In fact, the earliest in-depth studies related to crack did not start to appear in scholarly publications until 1989 (Johnson, Golub and Fagan 1995: 277 citing Fagan 1989; Holden 1989; Hser and Anglin 1993; Ratner 1992.) This amazing departure from convention, compounded by the lack of information available from Committee Hearings, led even some congressional leaders to express concerns regarding the speed with which the 1986 Act was considered.

'It is historical for the Congress to be able to move this quickly.' See 132 Cong. Rec. 31,329 (Oct 15, 1986)(Statement of Sen. Chiles); 'I know it seems to some that we are moving too fast and frenetically passing drug
legislation.' See 132 Cong. Rec. 26,449 (Sept 26, 1986) (statement of Sen. Rockefeller); ‘Very candidly, none of us has had an adequate opportunity to study this enormous package. It did not emerge from the crucible of the committee process.’ See 132 Cong. Rec. 26,462 (Sept 26, 1986) (statement of Sen. Mathias) ‘In our haste to patch together a drug bill - any drug bill - before we adjourn, we have run the risk of ending up with a patch-work quilt...that may not fit together into a comprehensible whole.’ See 132 Cong. Rec. 26,658 (Sept 10, 1986) (statement of Sen. Lott) (Sentencing Commission 1995:121.)

Despite the numerous admitted anomalies present throughout the enactment of this Bill, notwithstanding the meek complaints proffered above, the Act received very little resistance, and the initial set of guidelines ultimately became law in November 1987.

Thereafter, in January 1989, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Sentencing Commission and the guidelines in Mistretta v. United States, 488 U.S. 361 (1989) *(Sentencing Commission 1995: ii.)* Significantly, all federal circuit courts addressing the constitutionality of crack cocaine penalties have upheld the current federal sentencing scheme, including the 100-to-1 ratio*. In applying a “rational basis” level of

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*See 28 U.S.C. § 995(a)(8), (9), (12)(c), (13)-(16), (20), (21.)

scrutiny, the Courts have held that Congress had such a basis for the penalty distinction, and that the penalty distinction was created out of the legitimate congressional objective of “protecting the public against a new and highly potent addictive narcotic that could be distributed easily and sold cheaply.” (Sentencing Commission 1995: 118.)

The Resurgence of the Role of the Media and Politics 1987-1988

Not surprisingly, the heated media coverage of crack surrounding the elections of 1986 leveled off significantly following the enactment of the 1986 Act. And, while continued occasional coverage about crack appeared in the national media in 1987, particularly earlier in the year, (e.g New York Times 1/12/87, 2/9/87, 2/15/87, 3/8/87; Christian Science Monitor 8/13/87; Newsweek 4/27/87), these stories tended to be relegated to the inside pages, and the tone of the coverage less urgent and sensationalistic (Belenko 1993:25 citing also Reinarman and Levine 1989.)

As media coverage waned, then, so too did public concern regarding drug abuse: “The New York Times/CBS polls during 1987 indicated that only 3 to 5 percent of the public viewed drugs as the most pressing social problem” (Belenko 1993:25.)

1988, however, saw a resurgence in media and political attention toward crack. Fueled by the 1988 presidential election, candidates again attempted to gain attention and to demonstrate their “toughness” against crime and drug use by enacting strict penalties for...

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988

Despite a continuing dearth of research regarding the effects of crack, two years after the enactment of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, Congress decided that it was time to again "get tough" on drugs, drafting its second omnibus drug bill: the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. Among other features, the Act established a new cabinet-level White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, charging its Director, William Bennett, to submit to Congress an annual National Drug Control Strategy (Belenko 1993:15)

Specifically, with respect to crack, Section 6371 of this Act established increased Federal penalties for "serious" crack offenses. It amended 21 U.S.C. § 844 to make crack cocaine the only drug under the Act with a mandatory minimum penalty for a first offense of simple possession. The Act made first time possession of more than five grams of a mixture or substance containing cocaine base punishable by at least 5 years in prison. Second or third time offenders were subject to similar penalties for possessing as little as three or one grams, respectively (Sentencing Commission 1995: 123.)

Fueled by renewed media interest and presidential debates, it was clear that crack was still considered a particularly dangerous drug in 1988, both in absolute terms and relative to powder cocaine. In fact, review of the legislative history of this Act reveals that the initial version, especially as enacted in the House of Representatives, were even more punitive (Zimring 1991: 105.) In separate votes prior to the enactment of the final versions
of the 1988 Act, both houses of Congress, perhaps sensing a need to escalate the "War on Drugs" to new heights, enacted laws which provided for the Federal death penalty for drug-related murders (Belenko 1993:16.) This legislation, termed by Zimring as a "temper tantrum masquerading as an act of government," was simply political posturing, and would have little or no impact on drug trafficking. (New York Times 9/16/88:A35) According to Belenko, since the federal death penalty would override those states that had no death penalty, and it was unlikely that any one would have been put to death under this law, the federal death penalty simply acted as another mechanism for Congress to demonstrate its toughness on crime to members' constituents (Belenko 1993: 16.)

Since there was little debate on the amendments establishing the mandatory minimum crack cocaine possession penalties, statements on the floor of the House and Senate by proponents provide the clearest indication of Congressional intent (Sentencing Commission 1995: 124.) In debating the amendments, three reasons were given by proponents for distinguishing crack cocaine and marking it for severe penalties.

First it was argued that the supply of cocaine was greater than ever. Second, it was argued that crack cocaine, causes greater physical, emotional, psychological damage than any other commonly abused drug." Finally, repeated concerns expressed during the debates pertaining to the 1986 Act, it was argued that "crack cocaine has been linked to violent crime." Of particular note, was the association between the crack cocaine trade and gang activity (Sentencing Commission 1995: 125.)

The 1988 Act passed the Senate by an overwhelming 87-3 vote on October 14, 1988, and shortly thereafter in the House by a vote of 346-11. Thereafter, on October 22, 1988, a compromise bill softening the earlier bill was approved by both houses (Belenko 1993:17.)
Unlike the 1986 Act, the 1988 Act placed somewhat more emphasis on treatment and prevention, "...including the establishment of the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, funding of a new treatment waiting list reduction program, and increased drug education programs targeting at-risk populations (Sentencing Commission 1995:123.)

National Drug Control Strategy Reports of 1989 and 1991

It was within the context of these false media assertions, and at the very height of the crack scare, that Congress formed the Office of National Drug Control.

In what would become the cornerstone of the Bush Administration’s approach to combating drug abuse, the ONDCP published the National Drug Control Strategy reports of 1989 and 1991 (Belenko:18 citing The White House 1989, 1991.) In its selection of William Bennett as the first director, the President Bush could be assured that a strong statement against drugs and an emphasis on enforcement and control would continue to emanate from the White House.

Mirroring and reaffirming the heightened coverage of the media with respect to this issue, in his first report to the White House - the 1989 National Drug Control Strategy - Bennett would come to epitomize the conservative Republican political ideology, emphasizing law enforcement and punishment for illicit drug use, rather than treatment and intervention (Zimring and Hawkins 1991: 106.) Although the 1989 strategy was only 90 pages long, excluding appendices, this report was notable for its heated moralistic rhetoric - the majority of which could be found in the 14-page introduction authored personally by
Bennett - and the manner in which it portrayed the losing battle against the war on drugs, crack cocaine in particular (Belenko:19.)

In his introduction to the 1989 Strategy, Bennett reveals his “good news” by citing findings of the most recent National Survey on Drug Abuse conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) that there has been a “dramatic and startling” decline in the use of illegal drugs, decreasing 37 percent from 1985 to 1989 (Zimring and Hawkins 1991:104.) According to Bennett, however, this “good news” is “difficult to square with common sense perceptions.” Americans, he stated have good reason for being convinced that “drugs represent the gravest present threat to our national well-being” (The White House 1989:1-2.) Bennett further asserted that, the “fear of drugs and attendant crime are at our all-time high;” reports of bystander deaths . . . continue to climb; drug trafficking, distribution, and sales in America have become a vast, economically debilitating black market”; and that in every State in America “drugs are cheap, and available to almost anyone who wants them” (Belenko 1993:19.)

In support of these contentions, Bennett maintains that there has been a “wealth of evidence that suggests that our drug problem is getting worse, not better.” The 1989 Strategy, however, cites only one source of specific evidence relating an increase in drug-related hospital emergency hospital administrations between 1985 and 1989, and further fails to relate those findings to the prevalence of crack use and its effects on crime (Zimring and Hawkins 1991:104.)

Crack, however, is clearly the central theme of this document. According to Belenko,
In its ninety pages of text, crack is mentioned twenty-nine times, or once every 3.1 pages. Cocaine is referred to another sixty-nine times, or once every 1.3 pages. More importantly, the crack references tend to be concentrated in the beginning of the report, with ten mentions in the fourteen-page Introduction (once every 1.4 pages), and another seventeen mentions in the next three chapters (or one mention every 2.1 pages.) (Belenko 1993:19.)

More important than the number of references, however, is the manner in which Bennett portrays crack as the potential scourge of America, framing it in its most deleterious and starkest terms (Zimring and Hawkins 1991: 107) The following quotes are found in the Introduction of the Strategy (Belenko 1993:19):

What then, accounts for the intensifying drug-related chaos that we see every day in our newspapers and on television? One word explains much of it, that word is crack (White House 1989:3.)

Crack is, in fact, the most dangerous and quickly addictive drug known to man (White House 1989:3.)

Crack is responsible for the fact that vast patches of the American urban landscape are rapidly deteriorating beyond effective control by civil authorities (White House 1989:3.)

Our most intense and immediate problem is inner-city crack use (White House 1989:3.)

And crack use is spreading - like a plague (White House 1989:3.)

Almost every week, our newspapers report a new first sighting of crack - in the rural South or in some Midwestern suburb for example." (White House 1989:4.)

America is faced with an 'appalling, deepening crisis of cocaine addiction' (White House 1989:5.)

Clearly representative of a distillation of three years of lurid and sensationalized media coverage, this strategy's terminology and use of picturesque and frightening metaphors (or vocabulary of attribution) framed the efforts to control crack as essentially
a struggle between life and death (Belenko 1993:20.) In the report, drug use was indeed defined as a “moral” problem dividing the forces of good and evil between drug users and “the vast majority of American who had never taken an illegal drug (Zimring and Hawkins 1991: 108 citing White House 1989:52.)

Consistent with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, Bennett also targets the casual drug user as the “essence” of the drug problem, stating that the “highest priority of our drug policy” must be an attack on “drug use nationwide - experimental first use, ‘casual’ use, regular use and addition alike” (Zimring and Hawkins 1991: 107.) The report goes on to stress the importance of incarceration for these casual and non-addicted users, “...because it is their kind of drug use that is most contagious, and it will promise still greater future reductions in the number of Americans who are recruited to join their dangerous ranks” (White House 1989:7,12.)

In sum, the 1989 Strategy epitomized the popular media views about crack and the level of media coverage that characterized the period between 1986 and 1989. Additionally, given the extremely limited references to empirical research or the observations of experts in the field, as well as the heated and metaphorical rhetoric replete within this strategy, supports the hypothesis that the crack “epidemic” and the attendant focus on large scale enforcement responses by Congress were, in large measure, media driven (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 128.)

Within two years, however, as the emphasis on crack in the media diminished considerably, the 1991 National Drug Control Strategy was correspondingly representative of the diminution in media and political attention toward crack. According to Reinarman
and Levine (1989), review of media coverage during this time reveals that crack was clearly no longer a problem of “epidemic” proportions (Reinarman and Levine 1989: 530.) Thus, the 1991 Strategy contained only three references to crack in the entire 122-page document, only one of which is found in the Introduction and is made in a “relatively benign fashion.” Not once in the 1991 report, in fact, was crack referred to as a dangerous drug, or a threat to society (Belenko 1993: 20.)


That is not to say, however, that coverage of crack during the intervening period between 1989 and 1991 was non-existent. Constantly competing for the limited arenas in which public policies are discussed, the issuance of the first National Drug Control Policy in 1989, by the Office of National Drug Control, and a major televised speech about drug abuse by President Bush on September 5, 1989, again brought crack to the forefront of public concern. In an attempt to illustrate the rampant proliferation of crack, during his presidential address, President Bush waved vials of crack in front of the television cameras, claiming that DEA agents had seized the drugs from a dealer in Lafayette Park, right outside the White House (Jenkins: 12.) Several days later, however, it was discovered that the DEA, in fact could not find any crack dealers in Lafayette Park, and instead, had to lure an uncooperative dealer there and make the arrest. According to the article, since the speech was written prior to the arrest, the DEA was directed to take whatever steps were necessary to provide the appropriate evidence needed by the President to substantiate these claims (Washington Post 9/22/89:A1.) Although an extreme example, this obvious “exaggeration
of the facts" is illustrative of the hype and political hyperbole surrounding the crack epidemic during this time.

Following this period, during the 1990-1992 time frame and until the present, also, the focus of coverage of crack began to concentrate more on the secondary health effects of crack use such as AIDS and sexually transmitted disease among crack users, crack babies, and lung problems among crack smokers, as well as coverage for drug treatment issues (Belenko 1993:28.) These issues, too, have been portrayed in their exaggerated forms, implying that crack is slowly taking over middle America.

Media’s Coverage of Crack and Gangs

During 1988 and 1989, media coverage further intensified the nation’s fears regarding crack by centering on the involvement of gangs (always Black or Hispanic), and their tendency toward randomized violence, and the spread of crack into all corners of the nation - including white middle class America (Newsweek 11/28/88:65.) Articles regarding gangs and violence almost always quoted local or national law enforcement officials as the sources of information about gang involvement and their role in the spread of crack. For example, a Washington Post article dated February 22, 1988, described how the Jamaican posses had introduced crack to Washington, D. C, and quoted a narcotics Task Force officer as stating that “crack is just taking over”(Belenko 1993:27.) Similarly the authors of two separate major Time magazine stories, relying almost exclusively on reports from police, concluded that the crack “war,” was being lost to gangs (Time 3/14/88:21 and 12/5/88:32.)
Such accounts however, were soon contradicted by research in the area of gangs, violence and crack. Indeed, despite accounts of nationally syndicated, highly centralized street gangs dominating the crack cocaine distribution, review of the empirical data in this area in fact supports an alternative hypothesis. Specifically, researchers have found that street gangs neither played a predominant role nor appeared to have brought much extra violence of organizational character to crack distribution. Rather, it was concluded that crack distribution could be attributed to drug dealers, not street gangs (Klein, Maxson and Cunningham 1991:626; citing support from Belenko and Fagan 1987; and Mieczowski 1988.) In New York City, for example, researches reported: despite a systematic effort to locate vertically organized crack distribution groups in which one or two persons control the actives and gain the returns from labor of 15 or more persons, no such groups have been located, and no distributors report knowing of such groups. Instead, freelance crack selling dominates most drug street scenes (Sentencing Commission 1995: 66.)

Media’s Coverage of Crack and Random Violence

Similar media accounts associating crack and random violence were also a central theme to media stories in 1988 and 1989 (Brownstein1991: 85.) The CBS network, in fact, in an effort to capitalize on the revived crack hysteria, inaugurated its 1989-90 season on “48 Hours” with a three-hour special, “Return to Crack Street.” This documentary constructed a compelling picture of the realities of drug-related violence that was spreading and becoming random in its selection of victims (Belenko 1993:27.) Return to Crack Street, and
other media reports of its time, typified the media’s attempt to present crack as being out of control, extending its reach into white middle America.

Throughout the remainder of 1989, the media continued to develop this theme, drawing attention to the vulnerability of the white middle-class. For example, on May 28, 1989, *The New York Times* published a full-length editorial called “Crack - A Disaster of Historic Dimensions,” in which the author portrayed crack as “uniquely destructive,” and a threat that had “spread to middle America,” endangering the very fabric of society itself (*New York Times*, May 28, 1989:E14.) Also, in its Sunday edition, *The Times* began a two-part series with a front page article entitled “The Spreading Web of Crack,” stating that “Crack, which has been devastating entire inner-city neighborhoods, has begun to claim significant numbers of middle - and upper class addicts, experts have found.” (*The Times* October 2, 1989:2.)

Similarly, the media played on white America’s fears associating random drug violence with crack. According to Sherman and his associates,

Bystander deaths violate the routine assumptions necessary for conducting daily life...An increase in such killings, even a small proportion of all homicide, suggests a threat of spilling of street violence from the underclass to the middle and upper classes (Sherman et al 1989:299-300)

By 1990, the theme of random violence in the crack trade had been objectified, and the news media continually sought to support that position by reporting stories that purported demonstrated its validity. These authors suggest that innocent bystanders in middle and rural American were now the targets of drug-related violence.
Contrary to these assertions, however, the research on drugs and violence suggests that most drug-related violence is confined to people who, by choice or circumstance, live in or near drug communities and neighborhoods (Brownstein 1991:96.) Indeed, very few people are likely to be innocent-bystander victims of violence. According to police statistics from New York City during the first half of 1990, 1.4 percent of all homicide victims were innocent bystanders (Brownstein 1991:95.) Supporting these conclusions, Sherman’s comprehensive study of random shootings of bystanders in four U.S., cities in 1988 similarly found that “bystander shootings are a rare event” (Sherman et al., 1989:303.)

Finally, although it appears from the research that drugs and violent crime are clearly related, the extent to which that relationship may be causally related is the subject of much discussion. Contrary to the assertions by the media that crack-related crime is primarily associated with random violence, empirical findings suggest that violent crime surrounding crack use is primarily confined to the inner-cities and is a result of the violence attendant to the marketing and distribution of crack cocaine (Baumer 1989:311.)

In his seminal paper regarding a tripartite conceptual framework for the relationship between drugs and violence, Dr. Paul J. Goldstein suggests three models of that relationship. Psychopharmacological (i.e. crime resulting from behavioral effects of the drug), economically compulsive (i.e. crime committed by persons who are financially driven to support their drug habits), and systemic (i.e. crime related to the market and distribution of a drug) (Goldstein 1989:24.) At a sentencing commission hearing on crack cocaine, a panel of noted researches including Steven Belenko, Senior Research Fellow at the New York City Criminal Justice Agency; Jerome H. Skolnick, Professor of Law at the University of
California, Berkeley; and Paul J. Goldstein, Associate Professor at the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, uniformly agreed that currently, "the primary associated between crack cocaine and violence is systemic. It is the violence drug associated with the black market and distribution" (Sentencing Commission, Hearing on Crack Cocaine 1993:67; Sentencing Commission 1995: 95.)

Media's Coverage of the Proliferation of Crack Use

Tom Brokaw reported on NBC Nightly News (May 23, 1986) that crack was "flooding America," that it had become "America's drug of choice." Despite the fact that there existed only anecdotal information about the dangers of this new dangerous form of cocaine use, there were no prevalent statistics at all on crack, and no evidence of any sort showing that smoking crack had come to be even the preferred mode of cocaine use - much less the nation's "drug of choice!" To determine whether such statements from these claim-makers rose to the level of a moral panic, however, it is necessary to examine the official statistics to determine of the prevalence of use and abuse of crack actually comported with the claims of that time.

Data collection efforts to measure the prevalence of drug use across the nation can be found in four primary data sources: The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), The Drug Use Forecasting Program (DUF), the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Hospital Data, and The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Medical Examiner Data. Since the NHSDA is the only source that differentiates, with any degree of
accuracy, crack cocaine from powder cocaine, however, this study uses only the NHSDA data as a measure of the actual harm caused by crack cocaine.

General Use


As previously mentioned, drug use has generally declined in this country since the 1970's. Specifically, according to national trend data provided by NHSDA, (main findings, 1991) the percentage of Americans who had used any illegal drug in the previous month began to decline in 1979 and plunged 37 percent between 1985 and 1989.

The NHSDA also provides individual statistics on recent and lifetime usage for a variety of drugs. Among these are cocaine (both in its powder form as well as its derivative, crack), heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine. According to the NHSDA's Main Findings (1991), lifetime prevalence of cocaine use among young adults (the percentage of those 18-25 years old who have "ever" tried it) peaked around 1982 and has been declining ever since. Similarly, NIDA's measures for those who reported recent cocaine use (i.e. use at least once during the survey year) is consistently and significantly highest for individuals aged 18 to 25 years, also peaking in 1982. In illustration, the figure below reflects that since 1985, one year before the crack cocaine scare, the data indicate a steady decline in use across all age groups (See Figure 1 below.)
Since 1988, NIDA has distinguished crack from general cocaine use. According to the data, despite a general decline in cocaine use, crack use has remained relatively stable. The data indicated that .05 percent of the population reported using crack at least once a year during 1988, compared with .4 percent in 1992 (NHSDA 1991:58.) According to the NHSDA report, crack cocaine use was most common among young, and middle-aged adults, who were primarily black males, residents of metropolitan areas, those with less than a high school education, and unemployed (NHSDA 1991:60.)

Age and Trends in Cocaine Use

Examination of NHSDA lifetime prevalence trend usage data from 1976 through 1991, reflects that lifetime cocaine use has been consistently and significantly highest for
individuals aged 18 to 25 years, across all categories, and peaked in 1979. Since 1985, the data indicate a steady decline in use across all age groups (NHSDA 1991:61.)

With respect to crack cocaine in particular, these same findings reflect recent crack cocaine use (at least once in the reporting year) is most popular among a higher proportion of 12 - 17 year-olds (26.7 percent) than all other age groups including: 18- to 25-year olds (13.0 percent), 26- to 34-year-olds (15.7 percent), or 35 and older (21.4 percent) (Sentencing Commission 1995:38.)

NIDA also conducts an annual survey of drug use among high schoolers. Results from this survey similarly demonstrated a decline in both powder and crack cocaine use since 1986. In 1986, 12.7 percent of twelfth graders reported recent cocaine use (at least once in the reporting year) of any kind, compared to 3.6 percent in 1994. Similarly, in 1986, 4.1 percent of twelfth graders reported recent crack cocaine use compared to 1.9 percent in 1994 (National Institute on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future Study 1996: Table 3.)

**Race and Trends in Cocaine Use**

The NHSDA found that cocaine in any form was used by 2.8 percent of Whites, 3.9 percent of Blacks, and 3.8 percent of Hispanics in the survey population during the 1991 reporting year. Of those reporting recent use of powder cocaine, 75 percent were White, 15 percent were Black, and 10 percent were Hispanic. Of those reporting recent crack use, 52 percent were White, 38 percent were Black, and 10 percent were Hispanic (NHSDA 1991:61.)
Similar trends were found in lifetime usage (use of cocaine at least once in a lifetime) of both any form and crack cocaine. The survey found that, of those reporting lifetime usage, 82 percent were White, 10 percent were Black, and 8 percent were Hispanic (within racial categories, 11.8 percent of Whites, 11.3 percent of Blacks, and 11.1 percent of Hispanics.) Of those reporting crack cocaine use at least once in their lifetime, 65 percent were White, 26 percent Black, and 9 percent Hispanic (within racial categories, .3 percent Whites, 1.5 percent of Blacks, and .6 percent of Hispanics)(NHSDA 1991:61.)

A parallel study conducted in the Miami, Florida, metropolitan area by noted researchers Lockwood, Pottieger and Inciardi, however, found few differences in levels of crack use among participants aged 13-29 years based on the race of the individual. In this study, Lockwood et al, recruited a street-based sample of 350 cocaine users. They found that, with the exception of one sub-group (Hispanics aged 20-29 users), more than 90 percent of participants reported that crack was the primary form of cocaine used, regardless of race. The authors also report that among older cocaine users (aged 30-49 years), Whites are more likely to report crack as the primary form of cocaine used and Blacks are least likely to use crack as their primary form of ingestion (Lockwood, et al. 73-75.)

Although any conclusions to be drawn from the above data must be made cautiously given the limitations of the data collection, it is clear that in general, consistently more Whites than Blacks or Hispanics are using, or have used, cocaine in any form including crack cocaine. These findings clearly dispute the public perception that crack cocaine is a solely a "Black" problem. Indeed, contemporary research suggests that crack cocaine use is not a function of race, but rather, is strongly associated with the social conditions within
which the user resides. Holding factors such as drug availability and social conditions constant, crack cocaine use does not differ significantly by race/ethnicity (Belenko 1993; Sentencing Commission 1995: 39.)

Other Sources of Data Collection

Despite all the media and political attention to the “crack plague,” as well as the wealth of statistical information that is bandied about as it applies to both crack and crime and crack’s impact on public health, both the DUF and DAWN data (both for Hospital Emergency Room Episodes and Medical Examiner Report) do not distinguish powder cocaine from crack cocaine and therefore provide limited or no information as it pertains specifically to conclusions regarding crack cocaine.

“The New American ‘Apartheid’*: Impact Of The 100-1 Crack/Powder Cocaine Sentencing Differential

Introduction and Background

As previously mentioned, the emergence of crack occurred in an era when crime control ideologies shifted toward punishment, incapacitation, and retribution (Blumstein et al, 1983.) Moreover, In comparison to previous drug eras, a unique aspect of the crack phenomenon was the intensive criminal justice response that constituted the core of public

policy toward controlling crack (Belenko:1993:115.) The confluence of these trends, further escalated by intense media scrutiny and legislative initiatives increasing penalties for crack use and sale throughout the mid to late 1980s, resulted in our courts and prisons being filled to overload capacity with crack offenders.

According to Belenko (1993), one of the most dramatic and costly effects of America's “war on drugs" has been an enormous rise in jail and prison populations (Belenko 1993:122.) Indeed, according to Camp and Camp, at a time when the crack scare was at its climax (1989,) the number of inmates per 100,00 population increased dramatically from 154 in 1981 to 426 in 1989 (Camp and Camp 1990, as cited by Belenko 1993:122.)

Moreover, according to Sheldon and Brown, the latest figures show that as of June 30, 1996, there were more than one and a half million people behind bars. Specifically, there were 1,682,848 under the jurisdiction of state and federal prisons, and in local jails. The overall incarceration rate at this time was an astounding 615 per 100,000 population, ranking the United States as number one in the world! This tremendous increase, in the federal system particularly, is most certainly attributable to the impact of the 100-to-1 crack/powder cocaine sentencing ratio. In fact, for the period between 1985 and 1996, the total number of inmates increased by 121 percent, with the largest increases noted in the federal and state prison system (up 132 percent.) Consistent with this supposition, Table 2 below demonstrates that, while these increases were noteworthy during the later 1980's, they were most pronounced during the first half of the 1990's (Shelden and Brown 1999:8.)
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Federal of State Prisons</th>
<th>Local Jails</th>
<th>Rate/100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>761,422</td>
<td>502,607</td>
<td>285,815</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,179,239</td>
<td>773,919</td>
<td>405,320</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 (6/30)</td>
<td>1,682,848</td>
<td>1,164,356</td>
<td>518,492</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Increase (1985-1996)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Impact of the “War on Drugs”

This phenomenal growth, Sheldon and Brown contend, can be explained in one phrase, the “war on drugs.” According to these noted social scientists, this war, which really took off during the mid-1980’s, began to have its effects on jail and prison populations by the early 1990’s (Shelden and Brown 1998:10 citing Miller 1996; Currie 1993 ; and Baum 1997.) Consistent with these authors’ contention, Belenko (1993) similarly found that both the number of drug arrests and the percentage of all arrestees that are charged with drug offenses have increased significantly since 1980. In illustration, Belenko cited a recent national study of the impact of drug cases on urban trial courts in twenty-six cities. In this study, researchers found an average increase in the felony drug caseload in these cities of 56 percent between 1983 and 1987, with drug cases comprising an average of 26 percent of felony dispositions in 1987 (Belenko 1993: 119 citing Goerdt and Martin 1989.) Mirroring

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these trends, data from the U.S. Department of Justice Statistics reflects that filings in the U.S. District Courts (federal system) similarly demonstrated an increasingly harsh response to incoming drug arrests. During the fiscal year 1987, for example, 20 percent of the criminal case filings in U.S. District Courts (19,646 cases) were for drug law violations. The 12,285 drug law convictions during that same year, represented a 134 percent increase from 1980. In contrast, the number of non-drug case convictions in these same courts increased by only 27 percent (Belenko 1993: 121 citing U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 1988.) Equally disturbing, figures from this same court reflected that, between 1982 and 1994, whereas the average federal sentence for incarceration increased from 55 months in 1982 to 80 months; the average sentence for murder during this time period actually decreased from 162 months to 117 months (Shelden and Brown 1998:10.)

Finally, according to Sheldon and Brown, overall data for prison inmates during the period between 1988 and 1994, reflected that the number of prison inmates who had been convicted of drug offenses went up by 155.5 percent. For the years of 1980 through 1992, this statistic increased by an incredible one thousand percent for drug charges alone (Shelden and Brown 1998:10.)

The Impact of the Anti-Crack Legislation

Of the 42,107 defendants sentenced in federal court in fiscal year 1993, more than 46 percent were convicted for drug offenses. Figure 2 below represents the distribution of drug cases by type of drug during that year. Powder cocaine was the most frequently reported primary drug, representing 34.5 percent of federally sentenced drug cases. The
remaining 65 percent, in order of prevalence include marijuana (26.7 percent), crack cocaine (19.4 percent), heroin (10.0 percent), methamphetamine (4.9 percent), and other drugs (4.5 percent). Combining crack and powder cases, we see that cocaine was the primary drug for 53.9 percent of all federal drug cases sentenced under the guidelines, or a total of 9/925 sentenced offenders (U.S. Sentencing Commission, Annual Report, 1993.)

Figure 2

Despite the fact that powder cocaine convictions account for a significantly higher percentage of cocaine cases than crack cocaine, crack defendants are more likely to be sentenced to prison and, on average, receive much longer sentences than powder cocaine defendants. Further, crack defendants are more likely to receive a sentence of imprisonment (97.6 percent prison), as well as the longest average period of incarceration (median 97.
months, mean 126.6 months) of any drug, including powder cocaine (median 63 months, mean 96.0 months) (U.S. Sentencing Commission 1995, 150) (See Table 3 below.)

Table 3: Sentence Type and Average Sentence Length For Drug Trafficking Defendants by Drug Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,427</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powder Cocaine</td>
<td>4,963</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack Cocaine</td>
<td>3,028</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>126.6</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>3,472</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methamphetamine</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given this tremendous disparity, even the U.S. Sentencing Commission has admitted that, the 100-to-1 quantity ratio is the primary factor contributing to the differences between powder and crack cocaine sentences. Comparing the average sentence of offenders involved with the same amount of powder and crack cocaine, the impact of the quantity ratio is even more flagrant. For defendants involved with 50 to 150 grams of cocaine, crack defendants have median sentences of 120 months, while powder defendants have median sentences of 18 months (U.S. Sentencing Commission 1995:154.)

Similar to data for drug trafficking offenses above, the sentences imposed for defendants convicted of simple possession in federal court in fiscal year 1993, was significantly higher for crack defendants than for powder defendants. According to the data
from the U.S. Department of Justice Statistics, Ninety-eight defendants were sentenced for possession of crack cocaine in 1993; 122 were sentenced for possession of powder. Whereas the mean sentence for crack was 30.6 months, the mean sentence for powder cocaine was only 3.2 months. Equally troublesome, whereas the median sentence for crack was 9.5 months, the median sentence for powder was zero. (The median of zero for powder indicates that most powder possession cases received probation with no prison term - 73.8 percent - compared to 32 percent of crack possession cases receiving probation)(U.S. Sentencing Commission 1995:154.) (See Table 4 Below.)

Table 4: Sentence Type and Average Sentence Length For Simple Possession by Drug Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powder Cocaine</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack Cocaine</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methamphetamine</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Effect of the 100-to-1 Quantity Ratio on Blacks*

Given the tremendous disparity reflected in the tables above, and given the fact that Blacks were disproportionately targeted for arrest and incarceration for the possession and distribution of this drug, the impact of the sentencing differentials on African Americans has been significant. Indeed, according to Miller, this country’s "drug war" was a disaster-in-
waiting for African-Americans from the day of its conception. He suggested that despite the fact that drug usage among various racial and ethnic groups in the 1970's and 1980's remained roughly equivalent to their representation in the society during those time eras, from the first shot fired in the drug war, African Americans were targeted, arrested, and imprisoned in wildly disproportionate numbers (Miller 1996:80.) Indeed, according to Maguire and Pastore (1996), on any given day, almost 60 percent (58.6 percent) of all federal prisoners are serving time for drug offenses; of these 40 percent are African-American (Shelden and Brown citing Maguire and Pastore, 1996:576.)

Miller further indicated that despite the total failure of this war in its own terms, at a minimum, it exposed the dept of racial bias in the justice system, making hitherto subtle discrimination boldly obvious (Miller 1996: 82). Indeed, according to the U.S. Public Health Service’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, while African-Americans and Hispanics make up the bulk of those being arrested, convicted, and sentenced to prison for drug offenses, in 1992, 76 percent of the illicit drug users in the United States were white, 15 percent were black, and 8 percent were Hispanic (Miller 1996: 81; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Preliminary Estimates from the 1992 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Advance Report No. 3, June 1993, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: p.8)

Examined at a state level, the extent of this discrimination became even more ubiquitous. According to Miller (1996), in Baltimore, Maryland, for example, 11,107 of the 12,965 persons arrested for drug abuse violation in 1991 were blacks. In Columbus, Ohio, where Blacks make up less than 11 percent of the population, they comprised over 90
percent of the drug arrests and were being arrested at 18 times the rate of whites. Finally, in Jacksonville, Florida, 87 percent of those arrested on drug charges were black males, even though they comprised only 12 percent of that country’s population (Miller 1996: 82.)

Penalties followed the same trends. Based upon findings from their research Shelden and Brown also concluded that the increase of blacks in the nation’s prison system was directly linked to the “war on drugs.” From 1986 until 1991, the years during which the crack scare was preeminent, the proportion of Blacks incarcerated for drug offenses increased an astounding 465.5 percent (Shelden and Brown 1998:12.)

Paralleling these conclusions, findings in a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics study, conducted by Douglas McDonald and Kenneth Carlson, suggested that between 1986 and 1990 both the rate and the average length of imprisonment for federal offenders increased for Blacks in comparison to Whites (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics 1993, 1.) The researches concluded that this increase, based on legally relevant offense characteristics, was caused largely by the mandatory minimum penalties for drug offenses and more specifically by the 100-to-1 quantity ratio of powder cocaine to crack cocaine. According to these authors,

The main reason that Blacks’ sentences were longer than Whites’ during the period form January 1989 to June 1990 was that 83% of all Federal Offenders convicted of trafficking in crack cocaine in guideline cases were Black, and the average sentence imposed for crack trafficking was twice as long as for trafficking in powdered cocaine (U.S. Department of Justice 1993: 1.)

McDonald and Carlson examined a number of offense- and offender-related characteristics and found that White, Black, and Hispanic crack cocaine traffickers differed
in drug amounts, prior record, weapon involvement, trial rates, and charge reductions resulting from pleas. They concluded that within the category of crack cocaine trafficking, "these differences accounted for all the observed variation in imprisonment sentences (U.S. Department of Justice 1993: 1.)

Interpreting these findings, McDonald and Carlson suggest that "modification of specific laws and/or guidelines would essentially eliminate the racial/ethnic differences..." More specifically, they single out the 100-to-1 quantity ratio and argue that

[i]f legislation and guidelines were changed so that crack and powdered cocaine traffickers were sentenced identically for the same weight of cocaine, this study's analysis suggests that the Black/White difference in sentences for cocaine trafficking would not only evaporate but would slightly reverse (U.S. Department of Justice 1993: 2.)

Accordingly, the data suggests that the 100-to-1 crack cocaine to powder cocaine quantity ratio is the primary cause of the growing disparity between sentences for Black and White federal defendants (U.S. Sentencing Commission 1995:162-1637.)

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7Information found in this section was drawn heavily from the U.S. Sentencing Commission (1995), pps 162-163.)
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & METHODS

Objectives of The Study

The objectives of this study are two-fold; the first being to determine if a replication study using the Los Angeles Times (hereinafter Times) as a measure, rather than the New York Times, supports the hypothesis previously proposed by several noted social scientists that a moral panic occurred in the mid to late 1980s due to the media’s coverage of crack cocaine. Specifically, by examining the patterns in the nature and extent of the Times’ coverage of the crack cocaine phenomenon for the years 1985 through 1990, this study sought to ascertain whether a national moral panic pertaining to crack cocaine did indeed occur during this time, or, whether the excessive media attention afforded this subject in the New York Times was simply an artifact of localized attention.

The second objective was to examine the nature of the Times’ coverage during those years to determine whether minorities, Blacks in particular, were disproportionately associated with crack cocaine, thereby supporting a hypothesis that the 100-to-1 crack/powder cocaine sentencing differential was and is racially discriminatory and bias in nature.
Research Design

To explore the pattern of the *Times*’ coverage of crack cocaine, it was determined that the focus should be limited to references to crack cocaine in Parts I and II (Parts A and B beginning in late 1989) only of the *Times* during the years 1985 through 1990. This limitation to Parts I and II was determined due to the relative “newsworthy” prominence of the issues found therein.

The data for this research project was provided through a content analysis of the *Times* from January 1, 1985, until December 31, 1990, searching for specific mentions of the words “crack” cocaine and/or “rock” cocaine (as it was formerly referred to.) The *Times* was selected for several reasons. The first of which was that the *Times* was the first source of print or other media to mention crack cocaine in this country - November 24, 1984. As such, it was reasonable to assume that the *Times*’ coverage of this issue would be representative of media coverage of this phenomenon throughout the national print news media. Secondly, since it was necessary to use a national newspaper to determine the print media’s impact on a piece of federal legislation, the *Times* was also selected because of its worldwide reputation and general recognition as one of the “Nation’s Newspapers,” almost always classified with other newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*, etc... (e.g. see UNLV Library Web Site, UNLV Law Library Web site.) Third, since various authors have previously made extensive studies of the *New York Times*, with respect to this issue (e.g. see Reinarman and Levine (1988), Reinarman and Levine (1989) and Belenko (1993)), it was thought to be duplicitous to study the *New York Times*, yet again. Finally, the *Times* was selected because of its circulation size. For the time
period of this content analysis, the Times had an average daily circulation of one million, a Saturday circulation of over nine hundred and sixty thousand, and a Sunday circulation of over one million three hundred thousand. The only other daily newspaper that compared in circulation size was that of the New York Times (daily: one million; Saturday: one million; Sunday: one million six hundred thousand) (Fischer 1997.)

Content Analysis

As defined by Baker (1988), a content analysis is a method of study in which a collection of available data is subjected to a quantitative analysis, the object of which is to find special qualities in the data, such as repetitive patterns (Baker 1988:261.) More broadly defined, however, a content analysis is "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1968: 608; Berg 1995:175.)

Content analysis methods, then, may be applied to virtually any form of communication. Among the possible artifacts for study are books, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, speeches, letters, laws, television, and constitutions, as well as any components or collections thereof (Babbie 1979:234.)

According to Berg (1995), to perform an objective content analysis, a researcher must employ explicit rules referred to as the criteria of selection that must be formally established before the actual analysis of data. Furthermore, the criteria of selection must be sufficiently exhaustive to account for each variation of message content and must be rigidly

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*The following section relied upon the following authors heavily for information pertaining to this subject matter (Berg 1995, Babbie 1979)
and consistently applied so that other researchers or readers, looking at the same messages, would obtain the same or comparable results. The categories that emerge in the course of developing these criteria should reflect all relevant aspects of the messages and retain, as much as possible, the exact wording used in the statements. They should not be merely arbitrary or superficial application of irrelevant categories (Berg 1995:175; Holsti 1968: 598.)

What to Count: Levels and Units of Analysis

When using a content analysis to assess written documents, researchers must first decide at what level they plan to sample as well as what units of analysis will be counted. Sampling may occur at any or all levels: words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, books, writers, ideological stance, subject topic, or similar elements relevant to the context. In the instant study, an exhaustive study was performed of all Times articles in which the terms “crack” or “rock” appeared in an article related to cocaine. After extensive review of the data, however, it was determined that a purposive sample of such articles found only in Sections I and II of the Times during the years in question would be coded. The majority of articles relegated to sections other than I and II were “less newsworthy,” primarily pertaining to book reviews, television show reviews, and announcements of cultural events.

According to Berg, after determining the level of analysis, it is also necessary to determine the units of analysis. Generally, in content analysis, seven major elements in written messages can be counted: words or terms, themes, characters, paragraphs, items,
concepts, and semantics (Berg 1995: 181 citing Barelson 1952; Berg 1983; Merton 1968; Selltiz et al., 1959.)

In many instances, research requires the use of a combination of several content analytic elements. In the instance of the research project at hand, a combination of words or terms (the smallest element or unit used in content analysis) and characters (the number of times a specific person or persons are mentioned rather than the number of words or themes) were examined. Since there were several key individuals who were paramount to the crack cocaine panic (Len Bias, Don Rogers, Todd Bridges, and Marion Barry), these characters were coded not only for their prominence and public adulation as “stars,” but also for their latent associations with minorities - Blacks in particular.

**Manifest versus Latent Content Analysis**

According to Holsti (1969) and Carny (1972), communications have three major components: the message, the sender, and the audience. The message should be analyzed in terms of explicit themes, relative emphasis on various topics, amount of space or time devoted to certain topics, and numerous other dimensions. Among these dimensions, is the analysis of messages for their manifest content (those elements that are physically present and countable) and for their more latent content (an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physically present data.) Strauss (1987) further differentiates between these two types of messages through what he refers to as *in vivo codes* (literal terms used by individuals under investigation) and *sociological constructs*. In the latter case, the analysis is formulated by the analyst. Terms and categories such as *professional attitude, family*
oriented, obsessive workaholic, and educationally minded might represent examples of sociological constructs (Strauss 1987:33.) The results of using both latent analysis and sociological constructs in addition to latent analysis and in vivo codes is the addition of certain social scientific meanings that may otherwise be missed in the analysis. Thus, according to Berg, both latent analysis and sociological constructs add breadth and depth to observations by reaching beyond local and blatant meanings to broader social scientific one (Berg 1995:177.)

In coding the instant research design, it was determined that a blending of manifest and latent content analysis as well as a blending of in vivo codes and sociological construct would be examined. For example, whereas words such as “crack” or “rock” cocaine were used as a unit of analysis to determine the number of articles relating to crack cocaine, more latent terms or sociological constructs such as “gang(s),” “urban,” “south-central” and “rock-house” were used as a measure of whether the article had a reference to minorities, or specifically, Blacks. Since these latter terms can be viewed as a metaphor for Blacks, in particular, it was appropriate to code these terms as having a reference to Blacks, even though the specific word or term could not be counted.

Occasionally, messages are additionally analyzed for information about the sender of the communication. According to Chadwick, et al (1984), the links between the message content and attributes of the sender are often slight, however, nonetheless may be discernible if numerous examples are available (including literal representations of pauses, mispronounced words, grammatical errors, slang, and other language styles.) For example, many of the articles examined with references to Blacks contained a great deal of street
slang. From the very first article, readers were enlightened by such terms as “rock houses” (a fortified establishment where the buyer goes to purchase the crack), “big cops,” (where a dealer “scores” the powder cocaine from a supplier to supply to the rock houses), and finally, what Dap, the dealer in the story referred to as “rocking up” (or the process by which powder cocaine is cooked down into its crystallized crack form) (Times November 25, 1985: B:1.)

Finally, researchers may additionally use content analysis to assess a message’s effects on the audience. The Pornography and Television Violence Commissions tried, for example, to assess the impact of sexual or violent material on television and in movies on those who watched this genre of entertainment (Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, 1970; Comstock & Rubinstein, 1972.) However, according to Berg, making accurate inferences about either the characteristics of the sender or the effects of the message on the audience is often tenuous at best (Berg 1995: 178.)

Positive Aspects of Research Design

Perhaps the most important advantage of content analysis is that it can be virtually unobtrusive (Babbie 1979: 252; Berg 1995:193 citing Webb et al, 1981.) That is, the content analyst seldom has any effect on that which is being studied. Moreover, content analysis, although useful when analyzing depth interview data, may also be used nonreactively: no one needs to be interviewed, fill out a lengthy questionnaire, or enter a laboratory. Rather, newspaper accounts, public addresses, library archives, and similar sources allow researchers to conduct analytical studies without having any subsequent effect.
on the original data. This advantage is not present in all research methods (Babbie 1979:252.)

An additional advantage of content analysis is *economy*. Generally, the materials necessary for conducting content analysis are easily and inexpensively accessible. One college student, working alone, can effectively undertake a content analysis, whereas undertaking a national survey, for instance, might require enormous staff, time, and expense.

*Safety* is another advantage of content analysis. For example, if a researcher discovers serious flaws in a survey or experimental design, it is probable that the researcher would be forced to repeat the entire project - as well as endure the great expense and additional time attendant thereto. Discovery of errors or flaws in field research could prove to be equally problematic. For this method of study, it may be impossible to repeat the analysis as the event under study may no longer exist. In performing a content analysis, however, although it may be necessary to repeat a particular sector of the analysis, it is far more feasible than repeating the entire exercise as in the case of the other research methods previously mentioned. For example, if an error is discovered in the coding of a particular word or term, the researcher may be required to recode only a portion of the data, rather than to begin the entire enterprise anew.

A further advantage to content analysis is that it provides a means by which to study processes that occur over long period of time or that may reflects trends in a society (Babbie, 1992.) *Historical Research*, as it is commonly referred to, is a nearly unique strength of content analysis. Indeed, as long as historical records exist, content analysis makes is
possible for a researcher to not only study past periods of history, but also to make comparisons over time (Berg 1995: 193-194.)

Possible Problems with Research Design

Content analysis has several disadvantages as well. The most serious weakness of content analysis may be in locating unobtrusive messages relevant to the particular research questions. In other words, content analysis is limited to examining already recorded messages. Although these messages may be oral, written, graphic or videotaped, they must be recorded in some manner in order to be analyzed (Babbie 1979: 253.)

An equally difficult limitation to address, highly correlative to the first, is the issue of the content of the articles themselves. More specifically, it is the decision of whether to include articles that, albeit are related to the topic at hand, are not supportive of the research question posed by the study. By illustration, in reviewing the articles coded in the instant research, the content of several articles authored in 1986, described in disparaging terms, the gluttony of media attention bestowed upon crack cocaine. One article in particular, "Confessions of a Drug-Hype Junkie," described in vivid detail, the author's disgust with the extent of media coverage afforded to crack cocaine surrounding the enactment of the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Legislation (The "New Republic", October 6, 1986, 14-17.) While this particular article certainly met the search criteria necessary to be coded as an article related to crack cocaine, it did not, on its face, appear to add to the irrational fears surrounding a "moral panic." To the contrary, it accomplished quite the opposite -
attempting to quell some of the myths propagated almost entirely by the media during that time pertaining to crack.

Whereas these articles are typically included in a content analysis (as they were in this particular study,) many would argue that such articles should be excluded from being coded as being supportive of the research question. Those countering such an assessment, however, would suggest that given that competing social issues are continually vying for inclusion in the public arena and the nature of the limited space inherent thereto, the decision to print any article, particularly in Sections I or II (A or B) of a National Newspaper, has significance in its own right. Thus, irrespective of whether the content of an article is supportive of the research question posed by the study (or in this instance, a moral panic), its very inclusion in these sections has designated that issue as "newsworthy," thereby providing justification for coding it, in this study at least, as supportive of the "moral panic"

Another possible disadvantage of content analysis is one of validity and reliability. In general, validity "is a descriptive term used of a measure that accurately reflects the concepts that it is intended to measure." In other words, does the data collected measure what the researcher intended to measure?" (see e.g. Babbie 1979:585.) To increase validity, a careful balance between the content being studied and the questions being asked needs to be considered. Answers to questions such as: Does the content address the problem being studied?; or Will the coding scheme devised for the content fairly extract the meaning from the content data?; must be determined prior to the undertaking The answers to these questions, however, may be complicated, and at times, such issues can only be addressed through complex coding and analysis.
The question of reliability may also be a further possible disadvantage to content analysis. Reliability is defined as “That quality of measurement method that suggests that the same data would have been collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon” (see e.g. Babbie 1979: 583.) In other words, if the content analysis was replicated by a different researcher at a different time, would it yield the same results?

Because of the complexity of the coding schemes inherent to this design, achieving a high rate of reliability between various researchers may be difficult. Even a single researcher may have trouble remaining consistent in coding data with a complex data plan, particularly if the coding is more qualitative than quantitative, requiring more subjective decisions on the part of the coder. Accordingly, it is paramount to devise a systematic and objective methodology for coding that is both reliable (would lead to similar results if carried out at various times and by various researchers), and to select and use content in a manner that is valid (produces analyses of content that correspondingly address the study’s subject) (Baker 1988: 266.)

A final limitation of content analysis is that it is ineffective for testing causal relationships between variables. According to Berg, researchers and their audiences must resist the temptation to infer such relationships. This is particularly true when researchers forthrightly present the proportion or frequency with which a theme or pattern is observed. This kind of information is appropriate to indicate the magnitude of certain responses; however, it is not appropriate to attach cause to these presentations.

In summary, as with any analytical method, the advantages of content analysis must be weighed against the disadvantages as well as against alternative research strategies.
Although content analysis may be appropriate for some research problems and designs, it is not appropriate in every research situation. It is a particularly beneficial procedure for assessing events or processes in social groups when public records exist, as in the instant research project. It is likewise helpful in many types of exploratory or descriptive studies. If the researcher is interested in observing individuals or conducting experimental research, however, content analysis is virtually useless (Berg 1995: 194.)

Methods and Procedures

Prior to conducting the content analysis, an extensive literature review was performed with regard to the news media's coverage of crack cocaine. Examining the question of, "What is the nature, pattern, and extent of the print media's coverage of the crack cocaine phenomena in the Times?" it was felt that one researcher would realistically be able to effectively conduct a content analysis, in the amount of time allotted. For the reasons previously set forth in this chapter, it was determined that a content analysis would utilize the Times as its measure of national media coverage.

The research design focused on the Times' coverage of the crack phenomena from its beginning (approximately 1985), and each year thereafter (1986-1990) until the media coverage began to wane in 1990. In an effort to increase reliability, the efforts of professional researchers from the offices of the Times were contracted with to perform an on-line computer search for the aforementioned years. The researchers were instructed to provide a list of all headlines from 1985 until 1990, in which either the term "crack" or
"rock" were located in either the headline or the body of the article, when such an article was related to cocaine.

Each article was then copied from microfiche archived in the UNLV library and cataloged for future reference. Upon the completion of this complication of articles, each article was examined for its latent and manifest content. For each year analyzed, the total number of articles containing a mention of "crack" or "rock" was counted and coded into one of two specific categories: 1= Reference to Blacks, or 0= No Reference to Blacks.

In verification of these efforts and in an attempt to increase reliability, professional researchers from the staff of the Times were again contracted with to provide a heading list for all articles from 1985 until 1990 that contained either a latent or manifest reference to minorities - Blacks in particular. The Times' list of headlines was then compared to the articles previously coded for accuracy and any necessary adjustments were made accordingly. Such latent references also included the four previously mentioned African American figures (Bias, Rogers, Bridges and Barry) who were prominently mentioned during the media's coverage of this event.

Operationalization of Key Concepts

As previously mentioned, during the OPERATIONALIZATION phase of this analysis, it was determined that crack and/or rock cocaine-related articles would be separated into two categories (1=References to Blacks, and 0=No References to Blacks) through a blend of latent and manifest content analysis strategies. Such strategies were employed to determine whether to code an article as a "1," true, or as false, "0." After a thorough review
of the articles with references to crack and/or rock cocaine, it was determined that the presence of any one of the following words or terms would be operationalized as a reference to Blacks, therefore constituting a coding of “1”: Black(s), gang(s), urban, ghetto, slum, African American, rock house, crack house, inner-city, and South-Central. For example, in addition to the previous references to “street slang”, there were numerous references and associations with young black men and crack cocaine beginning with the very first paragraph of the very first article pertaining to crack. This article began,

Dap is an 18-year-old South-Central Los Angeles high school student whose favorite subject is math. He spends his afternoons playing baseball or football, or video games with friends in arcades. He is clean-cut and articulate.

He also makes up to $70,000 a week selling cocaine, he says, and law enforcement officials have no reason to doubt him.

They say Dap is one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men -- most of them gang members -- getting rich off the cocaine trafficking that has swept through Los Angeles’ Black community in the last 18 months.

The drug is being sold openly on scores of South-Central street corners, and inside, as many as several hundred heavily fortified “rock houses” that each gross thousands of dollars a day for their operators though the sale of hardened cocaine called “rocks,” which are smoked in a pipe...being sold for as little as $25 a rock (Emphasis added) (Times November 25, 1984:B1.)

As is vividly demonstrated in the foregoing example, terms such as rock house, gangs, and South Central quickly became a metaphor for young Blacks engaging in the sale and distribution of crack cocaine. These metaphors would be utilized repeatedly throughout 1985 as a means of firmly establishing the associations between Blacks and crack cocaine.

The presence of pictures and other visual representations alluding to or actually depicting the terms mentioned above were also coded as a “1.” In this same 1984 article,
for example, two pictures were used to demonstrate the relationship between blacks and crack cocaine. The first picture on page one of the article was of a fortified "rock house," located in the middle of a primarily Black neighborhood in South-Central Los Angeles. The picture was captioned "Television crews film a Nov. 3 raid on a rock house by Los Angeles police. Barred windows and a slot cut in the door, used for drug transactions, are usually found at such houses." The second, was a picture of the inside such a "rock house" complete with a cache of weapons and a safe.

Finally, specific mentions of the names Len Bias, Don Rogers, Mayor Marion Barry, and Todd Bridges within articles relating to crack or rock cocaine were also operationalized as a reference to Blacks. Each of these prominent figures played a significant role in the coverage of the crack phenomena. The deaths of Bias and Rogers, in fact, were noted by numerous authors as the watershed event which ultimately culminated in the 100-to-1 sentencing differential between crack and powder cocaine in the 1986 Federal Anti-Drug Act (see e.g. Belenko 1993, Reinarman and Levine 1989, U.S. Sentencing Commission 1989.) For example, in a July 1, 1986 article entitled Death of Sports Stars Raise Awareness at Drug Centers, the deaths of both Bias and Rogers are initially referred to as "cocaine-related," however, are later implicated as crack cocaine related.

Todd Bridges, former star of the television sitcom "Different Strokes" also played a critical role in the coverage of crack cocaine phenomena in 1989 (See e.g. Actor Todd Bridges Pleads Innocent to Crack Cocaine Charges March 25, 1989; Actor Todd Bridges Denied Reduced Bail April 20, 1989; Charges Against Bridges Dropped, May 10, 1989.)
Finally, the Mayor of the Nation's Capitol, Marion Barry, filled the headlines of newspapers throughout the 1990. Coverage of Barry's arrest and ultimate conviction for smoking crack cocaine, not only keep crack at the forefront of the nation's consciousness throughout 1990, but also reinforced, yet again, that crack cocaine is primarily a “black” drug, irrespective of the socioeconomic strata its users occupy.

Length and Location

In addition to being coded as a reference to Blacks, articles relating to crack or rock cocaine were also categorized by their length and location. For each year examined from 1985 until 1990, a mean and median length in inches and in number of words for each article was observed. Articles were then categorized as short, medium or long. According to the Times index (1990), a short article is one that is up to 6 inches in length, a medium articles is one that is 7-18 inches in length, a long article is over 18 inches.

Location was additionally reviewed. During the majority of the years during which this content analysis was conducted, the Times was separated into numerical sections (I, II, III, IV, etc...). In mid 1989, these sections were recategorized alphabetically (such as A, B, C, etc...). As previously mentioned, for the purposes of this study, although as a total count for all sections was tallied, only those articles with references to crack or rock located in sections I or II (or as “A” and “B”) were actually coded.

As such, the relevant importance, or newsworthiness, of an article was a function of not only the section in which it appeared, but also of the length of the article as well as the page number of its particular section. Moreover, it should be noted that the Sections
themselves are indicative of the type of coverage provided for the particular article in question. For example, since Section I (or “A”) is primarily designated for “hot issues” both locally and nationally, as well as coverage of national issues in general, an article located in Section I would be deemed to have more national “newsworthiness” than one appearing in Section II (or B), which coverage was primarily limited to local issues of interest to Los Angeles residents. Section II (also called the “Metro” section) is also typified by coverage of issues generally relating to crime. Thus, stories pertaining to the crack cocaine phenomena found in Section II, in general, involved coverage of the commission of some type of crime.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will present data generated from the content analysis used to explore patterns in the media's coverage of crack cocaine as well as the associations with Blacks that are attendant thereto.

Extent of the Coverage

Figures 3 and 4 below, represent the number of articles pertaining to crack cocaine that appeared in the Times during the years 1985 through 1990, represented in terms of media coverage in six-month intervals (For example, whereas 1985(1) represents January through June 1985, 1985(2) represents July through December 1985. These representations are consistent for each year examined beginning in 1985 and ending in 1990.) These figures further reflect the number of associations these articles had with African Americans for the same duration and period of time as well as the percentage of the population reporting annual cocaine use throughout that era. The juxtaposition of the percentage of 18-25 year-olds reporting annual cocaine use and the total number of articles published during a particular six-month segment, is significant in that it demonstrates the disparity between
the trends and extent of the coverage of crack and the measure of the objective threat posed by crack.

**Figure 3**

*Extent of Media Coverage 1985-1990*

As is demonstrated in *Figure 3* above, the six-month period that contained the greatest number of total articles pertaining to crack cocaine (177 articles) was July through December 1989 (the same period of time during which the first National Drug Control Policy was issued by the Office of National Drug Control.) The six-month period that reflected the greatest percentage of articles with associations with Blacks was January 1985 - June 1985 (42 articles, or 93 percent of the total number of articles containing a mention of crack cocaine or rock cocaine during that time period.) The segments that contained the highest percentage of 18-25 year-olds reporting annual cocaine use was 1985 (1) and 1985 (2) (16 percent.)

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The six-month period representing the least number of total articles (24 articles) mentioning crack or rock cocaine was January through June 1986. Notably, however, immediately following the deaths of Bias and Rogers in June of that same year, coverage of crack and rock cocaine increased sharply (from 24 articles to 64 articles) in the latter half of 1986 (the time period during which the 1986 Anti-drug Act establishing the 100-to-1 crack to powder cocaine sentencing differential was also enacted). In fact, the number of articles published during that time period (July 1986 through December 1986) accounted for 73 percent of the entire year’s coverage in the Times.

The six month period of time comprising the lowest percentage of associations of blacks and crack cocaine was July through December 1987, and the time era reflecting the lowest percentage of annual cocaine use was 1990 (1) and (2).

In augmentation to Figure 3 above, Figure 4 below utilizes a different graphic representation to demonstrate the extent of the Times’ coverage of crack cocaine as well as
the number of articles containing associations with Blacks and the percentage of 18-25 year-olds reporting annual cocaine use in six month intervals during the years 1985 through 1990.

In examination of Figure 4 above, one can only speculate as to the reason the percentages of associations with Blacks vis-a-vis the total number of articles written for that period of time (13 articles, accounting for only 39 percent of the total number of articles written from July 1987 through December 1987) had its greatest divergence in the later part of 1987. One possible explanation would be to hypothesize that by January 1989, the association between Blacks and crack cocaine had already been firmly established in the country's conscience, thereby rendering a perpetually high percentage of associations with Blacks superfluous. Given the virtually perfect relationship of association between Blacks and crack cocaine established throughout its first year of coverage (1985), claims-makers may have believed that by simply invoking the term crack cocaine, in 1987, the sociological construct previously introduced would accomplish the necessary association.

Immediately following this time period, however, the percentage of articles either latently or manifestly associating Blacks with crack cocaine began to increase steadily, peaking again in the beginning and latter periods of 1990 (61 percent and 64 percent, respectively). It is suggested that this secondary increase can be accounted for through at least two possible explanations. The first is the prominence of the arrest, trial, and prosecution of the Nation's Mayor, Marion Barry, for possession of crack cocaine. Secondly, as a growing body of distilled scientific research and findings began disputing the validity of a "crack epidemic," claims-makers began to redefine and reconceptualized the objective threats posed by crack by focusing on the secondary manifestations of crack use threatening
public health and welfare - gang violence, “crack babies” and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV. Accordingly, as the sociological construct pertaining to crack cocaine was redefined, the number of articles containing associations to Blacks increased accordingly. Some of the headlines in 1990 typifying this phenomena were as follows:

*Seminar’s Lesson for Harbor Area; Gangs Kill; Crime: as a funeral, Murdered Youths; Frank Talks With Children About Crack Cocaine* (September 27, 1990);

*Perspective on the War on Drugs; Jail or Kill All the Young Black Men and You Still Won’t Win ‘Drug Cartels are Billion-dollar Enterprises* (September 22, 1990);

*Tougher Drug War, More Jails Urged as Gang Violence Soars* (January 13, 1990);

*Crack’s Children Growing Up* (August 24, 1990);

*Body of Newborn Found Discarded in as a Trash Bin* (April 17, 1990); and

*Diverse L.A. Drug Culture Threatens AID Outreach* (January 1, 1990.)

Nature of the Coverage

Given that the findings pertaining to the extent of coverage of crack cocaine was consistent with that which was proposed by numerous authors in the literature review, a more in-debt examination of the data was performed to determine the extent to which the nature of coverage in the *Times* comports with the literature regarding external trends pertaining to crack, such as the legislative responses in 1986 as well as in 1988. Assuming, that the *Times’* coverage of crack is consistent with the literature on moral panics, trends in the prevalence of the coverage of crack cocaine as measured by the location, and length
of the articles, as well as whether an association with blacks (either manifest or latent) exists, should be positively associated with external events such as the deaths of Bias and Rogers; the enactment of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and 1988; the legislative and Presidential elections of 1988; and the issuance of the first National Drug Control Policy in 1989. Accordingly, the data was examined in six month segments ranging from January 1, 1985 until December 31, 1990.

**Media Coverage Characteristics January 1985 Through December 1985**

Table 5 and Figure 5 below, reflect the nature and extent of the *Times*' coverage of crack cocaine for the time period of January 1985 through June 1985.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>
As is graphically demonstrated in the table and figure above, the extent of the media coverage of crack during its first six-month period of time (a total of 45 articles, or 63 percent of the year’s coverage) peaked in February 1985 (18 articles), and gradually declined during each month thereafter. Coverage was bifurcated somewhat consistently between sections “A” and “B” throughout the time period, decreasing slightly only in February (39 percent), March (38 percent), and April (43 percent), however returning to at least 50 percent by May and June.
Trends in the length of articles, using the mean number of inches as a measure of relative “newsworthiness,” reflect a weak relationship of association with the extent of the coverage during January and February, however, diverges in March. A weak relationship is also observed in the latter part of the time-period, reflecting upward trends in each of the measures: extent of the coverage, mean inches per article, percentage of articles in Sections “A” and “B”, and the percentage of articles involving Blacks.

Finally, as was previously discussed, the percentage of articles associating Blacks with rock or crack cocaine during this time period was significantly high, demonstrating a perfect (100 percent) relationship of association three out of the six months evaluated. Moreover, in those months in which a slight divergence from this trend was noted, the percentage never decreased below 75 percent or at least 3/4ths of the month’s total coverage.

Similar coverage characteristics of crack cocaine for the time period of July 1985 through December 1985 are represented in Table 6 and Figure 6 below.


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
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</table>
Similar to trends observed during the former time period (January 1985 through June 1985), the extent of coverage of crack during the July 1985 through December 1985 timeframe increased gradually, peaking near the beginning of the period (10 articles in September), and declining for the remainder of the period. Coverage in Section "B" was markedly higher than in Section "A" during the initial months of the time period, however, eventually became comparable during the later months, measuring 50 percent for September and November and 40 percent in December.
Relative newsworthiness, as measured by the mean number of inches in an article, was fairly consistent throughout the time period, peaking slightly, however, not significantly in November (31.0 inches.) A moderately strong positive relationship can also be observed in Figure 6 between the relative newsworthiness of an article and the percentage of articles located in section “B”.

Also consistent with the beginning segment in 1985, the association of Blacks with the total number of articles observed during this time period is generally high. Of the 26 articles observed during this time period, 19 (73 percent) contained an association with “Blacks” as previously operationalized. Furthermore, consistent with previous discussions regarding this matter, the associations were highest during the initial months of the time period, declining only toward the end of the year - after the sociological construct inherently associating Blacks with crack cocaine had already been formed. Finally, further examination of Figure 6 reflects a strong relationship of association between the percentage of articles in Section “B” (that section which is typified by its coverage of crimes) and the associations with Blacks. Such a relationship is notable, since it strengthens the sociological construct associating crack with not only Blacks, but more importantly, it associates Blacks who are using crack with crime (typically gang violence.)

Media Coverage Characteristics January 1986 Through December 1986

Consistent with the moral panic literature, observations regarding the extent of coverage during the first six months of July 1986 (a total of 24 articles, or 27 percent of total coverage in 1986), reflected trends which were comparable to trends in coverage for the
preceding six-month period (July 1985 through December 1985) - relatively low. As an illustration, Table 7 and Figure 7 below, reflect the media coverage characteristics for the time period of January 1986 through June 1986.


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<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7

As can be readily noted from the figure above, there are very few, if any, relationships that can be observed during this time period. As discussed above, the extent of the coverage remained consistently low throughout this six-month period, peaking in June 1986 with a total of 7 articles immediately following the deaths of Bias and Rogers. The relative newsworthiness, also, was erratic. It vacillated between months containing articles that had a mean length of 43 inches (January) and months containing articles that had a mean length as little as 14.4 inches (February) or 7.3 (May) inches.

Moreover, notwithstanding a weak upward trend in June, no discernable relationships are observed between the number of articles with associations to Blacks, nor does there appear to be any relationship between these variables and the relevance of either particular section of the newspaper.
During the second time period in 1986 (July 1986 through December 1986), however, as the popularity of the proposition that both Bias and Rogers died from overdosing on crack cocaine increased, trends in coverage of crack increased correspondingly. This watershed event, in fact, combined with the enactment of 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act and the 1986 legislative elections, significantly altered the nature and extent of the *Times* coverage of crack throughout the time period studied. Indeed, beginning with the second time period in 1986, the number of articles pertaining to crack escalated from 24 articles to 64 articles - accounting for 73 percent of the year’s total news coverage in just six months’ time. Table 8 and Figure 8 below, provide a graphic representation of the nature and extent of crack coverage during July 1986 through December 1986 as well as an indication of the watershed events already described.

Table 8: Media Coverage Characteristics, July 1986 - December 1986.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Further examination of the data revealed that during the three months leading up to the enactment of the first Anti-Drug Abuse Act in October 1986 and the 1986 legislative elections (August, September, October), the extent of the Times' coverage of the crack issue comprised 75 percent (or 48 articles) of the total six-month time period's coverage. In the months immediately following the enactment of this Bill as well as the elections in early November, however, the extent of coverage again declined sharply.

Additional relationships observed in the data during this time period included a positive relationship of association between the percentage of articles located in section “B” and the percentage of articles that contained an association with Blacks. Indeed, during the
first three months of this time period, there was a perfect (1-to-1) relationship between these two variables. Thereafter, these variables diverged quite sharply and media coverage beginning in late November and December, contained few or no references to Blacks.

Media Coverage Characteristics January 1987 Through December 1987

Following the October 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, and in the absence of any further major political or media events, the *Times*’ coverage of crack diminished considerably throughout 1987. Indeed, the extent of the coverage during both the first and second time periods during this year never exceeded 12 articles in one month. Review of Tables 9 and 10, as well as Figures 9 and 10 reflect the trends in the nature and extent of the limited coverage for these time periods.

Table 9: Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1987- June 1987

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles Involving Blacks</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9

Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1987 - June 1987


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles Involving Blacks</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notwithstanding the limited nature of the coverage during this period of time, examination of these tables and figures, even in their attenuated form, reflects several relationships between the variables. In Table 9, for example, review of the data reveals a relatively strong relationship of association between the percentage of articles in section “A,” the percentage of articles involving Blacks, and the mean inches per article.

During the latter part of 1987, however, this relationship was no longer apparent from the data. Indeed, review of Figure 10 reflects that the percentage of articles in section “A” as well as the relative newsworthiness of their coverage as measured by the mean inches, declined significantly. Articles in Section “B” increased and the percentage of
articles involving blacks, although relatively low during the first two months of this time period (July and August), increased steadily throughout the remainder of the period. There were no significant relationships of association apparent within this period of time.


Beginning in 1988, however, as legislators and the President alike returned their focus to the campaign trail, crack cocaine again became a prominent issue, suddenly becoming the "social problem of the decade." During the first six months of July 1988, in fact, coverage of crack cocaine soared from 40 articles published in the last six months of 1987 to an astounding 122 articles (See Table 11 and Figure 11, reflecting the media coverage characteristics during this period.)


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<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
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</table>
An in-depth examination of the extent of this increased coverage reveals that, consistent with the limited coverage during 1987, the first two months observed a diminished level of coverage. Beginning with March 1988, however, coverage became prolific, and by June, had nearly quadrupled.

Moreover, relationships of association between the variables, albeit still weak to moderate, began to increase in strength by April, May and June 1988. During April, for example, there was almost a perfect relationship of association between the percentage of articles in Section “B,” and the percentage of articles involving Blacks. This relationship continued to be moderate throughout the end of the time period examined. Equally notable,
the strength of the relationship between the relative newsworthiness of an article and the percentage of articles found in section A increased at the end of the period. By June 1988, in fact, this relationship could be considered strong.

Review of Table 12 and Figure 12 below reflects the nature and extent of the coverage during the later part of 1988. Although the data is generally supportive of a moral panic hypothesis (i.e. a sharp increase in coverage surrounding the elections in November 1988, and in the month immediately following), the findings are somewhat inconsistent during this period of time as it pertains to the total number of articles published during 1988 (See Table 12 and Figure 12 below)


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<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>31.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In analyzing the above data, each time period was first observed as its own data set, and not as a part of a larger body of information. Given this restriction, several characteristics were noted as significant during this period of time. First and foremost, consistent with the panic hypothesis set forth in this paper, in reviewing the extent of the coverage during the later period of time of 1988, the greatest quantity of articles predictably appeared in September, October, and November, 1988. Considering the prominence of the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act in October, as well as the Presidential elections in early November, such an increase was expected given that legislators utilized the crack panic as a method by which they could deflect attention away from the more pressing deeply rooted
sociological problems becoming increasingly marked in the late 1980s and shift the focus toward a simpler enemy - one for which they could devise a safe plan of attack, without losing a single vote in the process.

Also notable during the latter half of 1988 was the strong relationship between articles involving Blacks and the percentage of articles located in Section “B.” Such findings are relevant because the nature of the coverage in Section “B” focuses primarily on criminal activity, rather than stories of more national prominence.

Also, in September 1988, there were a number of relationships of association that were present. As is demonstrated in the Table above, as the coverage of articles in section “A,” increased, so too did the mean inches per article. This relationship continued, albeit weakly to moderately, throughout the remainder of the period.

Notwithstanding the support provided to a panic hypothesis when the data is examined within the confines of a six-month data set, inconsistencies within this time period were nevertheless noted when the data was examined for the entirety of 1988. The number of articles found at the peak of coverage during the latter part of 1988, for example, totaled only 26. Review of Table 11, however, reflects that in May and June of 1988, there were a total of 33 articles and 28 articles respectively published on the subject of crack. Such findings, therefore, are somewhat non-intuitive, given the panic hypothesis that coverage during any given time period should be greatest at such times that prominent external events, i.e. the 1988 elections occur. Accordingly, it should be noted here that when examined using years, rather than six-month segments as a unit of analysis, the findings for 1988 do not fully support a conclusion that the extent of coverage during that year, was primarily
associated with the 1988 elections. One possible explanation for such inconsistencies is that during the first six months of 1988, legislators and the President alike were heavily campaigning and attempting to garner support from their constituencies using crack as the political platform upon which they stood. As such, coverage during this time (May, June, July) may have exceeded coverage during the later months immediately prior to the elections when campaigning began to focus on various other issues of interest during that time.

**Media Coverage Characteristics January 1989 Through December 1989**

Unlike 1988, as the crack phenomena moved into 1989 (at a time when the fear of drugs as measured by the Gallup Poll was at its peak as America’s number one social problem), the highest number of articles regarding crack cocaine of any year were published (307 articles). Consistent with trends in the extent of coverage of crack cocaine surrounding the 1986 and 1988 legislative responses, media coverage leading up to and surrounding the introduction of the first Drug Control Policy in 1989, peaked predictably during the latter six-month segment of 1989 (177 articles appearing in July through December 1989 as compared to 130 articles during the first half of 1989.) Similarly, the percentage of articles that had associations with Blacks during that time, although slightly higher in the second half of the year, was generally consistent throughout the year (38 percent in the second half of the year compared to 36 percent for the first half of the year.)

Tables 13 and 14 as well as Figures 13 and 14 below, examine this data using months as an unit of analysis for each six month period.
Table 13: Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1989 - June 1989

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<tbody>
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<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
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</table>

Figure 13

Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1989 - July 1989

Figure 13

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<tbody>
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<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
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<td>19.7</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14

*Media Coverage Characteristics, July 1989 - December 1989*

- Number of articles
- Mean inches per article
- Percentage of articles in Section A
- Percentage of articles in Section B
- Percentage of articles involving Blacks
- 1989 Drug Control Policy Issues

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As is pointedly demonstrated in the two tables and figures above, the extent of coverage for the time periods of January through June 1989 as well as July through December 1989, is strongly supportive of the panic hypothesis proposed in this paper. Consistent with this hypothesis, the extent of coverage during July, August and September, the periods of time leading up to and surrounding the introduction of the 1989 Drug Control Policy, is greater than any other time period in 1989. Equally significant, the time period farthest removed from the presentation of this policy (January and February 1989), reflected the lowest number of articles published. Finally, a steady increase in coverage is observed from January 1989 until its peak in September 1989 (48 articles), followed by a gradual reduction of coverage in the months thereafter.

Notwithstanding the trends in coverage, there were no additional significant findings pertaining to relationships of association observed in the six month data sets.

**Media Coverage Characteristics January 1990 Through December 1990**

As legislators went home just in time to inform their constituents of their success, media coverage of crack began to diminish rapidly. In fact, in the first six months immediately following the introduction of this policy, only 145 articles appeared (as compared to the 177 articles published in the previous six-month segment.) The second half of 1990 also saw a similar decline - 121 articles (See Tables 15-16 and Figures 15-16.)
### Table 15: Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1990 - June 1990

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Mean inches per article</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
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</table>

**Figure 15**

*Media Coverage Characteristics, January 1990 - July 1990*
Table 16: Media Coverage Characteristics, July 1990 - December 1990.

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<td>Number of articles</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean inches per article</td>
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<td>21.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section A</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles in section B</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of articles involving Blacks</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16

Media Coverage Characteristics, July 1990 - December 1990

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Although an examination of the trends of the extent of the data is important, possibly the most notable characteristic of the nature of the coverage of crack cocaine throughout 1990, was the increase in articles associating Blacks with crack cocaine. Although examination of the data between the first and second halves of 1990 yields observations which were unremarkable (61 percent and 64 percent of that total years' articles, respectively), the number of associations to Blacks in 1990 as compared to the three six-months segments immediately preceding 1990 (1) (38 percent: 1989 (2), 36 percent: 1989 (1), 40 percent 1988 (2), etc...) was significant. As noted above, this phenomena was probably due to the reconceptualization of crack; including a redefined focus that concentrated more on its secondary dangers to public health, rather than the dangers inherent to its users.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter provides a summary discussion of the major findings of this research project, as well as a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggested directions for future research.

Findings

As was previously discussed, in order to determine whether the reaction to crack cocaine constituted a moral panic in the 1980's, five crucial elements must be present. First, a heightened level of concern regarding the threat posed by a clearly identifiable group must exist. That concern must be accompanied by an increased level of hostility toward the group in question, engendered by the creation and promotion of stereotypes which distort and exaggerate the dangers posed by the group. Though this antagonism need not be universally held throughout society, there must be substantial consensus that the threat posed by the group is, in fact, real. Moral panics are further characterized by a disproportional reaction to the menacing group in light of the objective threat posed. The criterion of disproportionality is evidenced by the exaggeration or fabrication of figures purporting to measure the scope of the problem, fluctuation in attention to the condition without
corresponding changes in its severity. Finally, moral panics are distinguished by their *volatility*. A panic erupts suddenly only to abruptly subside at some later time. Some moral panics fade quickly without a trace; in others, the moral concern is institutionalized and persists in the form of new laws, policies, and governmental agencies (McCorkle and Miethe: 41 citing Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994.)

Was the concern generated by crack in the United States in the late 1980's a moral panic? On the basis of the findings set forth in the previous section, the answer is a qualified yes. In the sense that an increase in this concern actually was accompanied by an increase in measurable harm (increased heavy frequent, chronic use of cocaine) during this period actually increased) - this concern cannot be referred to as a panic. The concern over crack in the late 1980's was a panic, however, in the sense that activists failed to make a systematic assessment of the facts, making use of arguments and facts that were, indeed, in excess of available facts.

Moreover, according to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, consistent with a constructionist paradigm, the crack panic was constructed for a variety of reasons; a number of which are subjective factors and have little, if anything, to do with the concrete damage or harm inflicted on the society by the use of illegal psychoactive substances (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 219.) As measured solely by the human toll, drug use was not the most serious condition facing the country in the late 1980's. And, recreational illegal drug use was actually declining at the precise period when public hysteria reached an all-time high. Therefore, the fact that overdoses from heavy cocaine use increased during this period, while relevant to the *drama* of the drug panic, was irrelevant to whether or not the concern
constituted a moral panic, since the data to demonstrate that fact were ignored by major claims-makers in this drama. Indeed, claim's makers were not reacting to simple matters of overdose but to the usual array of constructionist factors previously discussed - the novelty of crack, its seeming powers of enslavement, the overdoses of a few prominent athletes, the role of prominent moral entrepreneurs, and so on. Thus, the fact that some measures of concrete harm rose in concert does not deny the existence of a moral panic over drugs in the United States in the late 1980's. Indeed, a close inspection of its dynamics emphasizes its panic-like quality.

As a necessary condition of a moral panic, Figures 3 and 4 from the previous chapter pointedly illustrate the heightened level of concern pertaining to a threat posed by a clearly identifiable group. Consistent with the hypothesis set forth in this paper, trends in coverage of crack cocaine increased steadily throughout the "panic years" - 1986 through 1989. Similarly, from it's first mention in the Times (November 25, 1984), crack was immediately associated with a clearly identifiable group (young, black, inner-city men.) Thereafter, in the first year immediately following this first mention (January 1985 through December 1985), over 71 articles appeared related to crack cocaine - almost 100 percent of which associated crack cocaine with Blacks (the highest percentage of any year examined.)

In the year to follow, 1986, the media and politicians engendered increased hostility for that group, by diverting the country's attention away from more pressing social problems such as urban decay, high unemployment and a recessive economy, towards the individual weaknesses of young black men. Support for such a conclusion can be found in the extent and nature of coverage of this issue in the months leading up to and surrounding the
enactment of the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Indeed, beginning with the coverage of the
deaths of Rogers and Bias, in June 1986, coverage of crack cocaine during the second half
of 1986, dramatically increased (from 24 articles to 64 articles) accounting for an astounding
73 percent of the year’s total news coverage. With respect to location and story length,
stories during the second half of 1986 were also generally more newsworthy than those
during the first half of 1986. Although both segments of the year had more articles located
in Section “B” than Section “A” (14 and 10 for the first half of the year compared to 34 and
30 for the second half, respectively), the stories themselves were generally longer in the
second half of the year (means and medians of 727 and 523 words during the second half
of the year, compared to means and medians of 432 and 463 words for the first half,
respectively, and means and medians of 20.95 and 15.00 inches for the second half of the
year, compared to means and medians of 18.63 and 12.5 inches for the first half of 1986,
respectively.)

In the six-month segment immediately following the enactment of this piece of
legislation, however, coverage dropped from 64 articles to 45 articles (accounting for 53
percent of the year’s total coverage of this issue.) Similarly, news coverage during the last
six months of July 1987 (40 articles or 47 percent of the total year’s), was consistently low.
Although there was a slight decrease from the first six months to the last six months, (5
articles), this decrease was not of any great significance. Notable, however, was that with
respect to location of these articles and story lengths, whereas both segments of the year had
more articles located in Section “B” than Section “A” (25 and 20 for the 1st half compared
to 31 and 9 for the second half, respectively), a significant number of the articles during first
half of 1987 were in section “A” (generally pertaining to national news) compared to the second half of 1987. Equally significant, was that the stories themselves were substantially longer in the first half of the year (means and medians of 762 and 510 words compared to means and medians of 484 and 409 words, and means and medians of 21.00 and 15.00 inches as compared to means and medians of 14.08 and 12.00 inches respectively.)

Given these figures, one could speculate that during the segment of time immediately following the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, coverage of crack cocaine continued to be typified by issues pertaining to national significance such as the enactment of this piece of legislation. Claims-makers and activists during this time, in fact, continued to focus on the dangers inherent to crack use as well as the addictive qualities of crack. The percentage of articles that had associations with blacks was identical during the first and second halves of 1987 (32 percent.)

Beginning in 1988, as legislators and the President both returned to the campaign trail, crack again became a prominent issue, suddenly becoming the “social problem of the decade.” Illustrative of the heightened level of concern necessary for a moral panic, during the first six months of 1988, coverage of crack cocaine soared from 40 articles appearing during the last six months of 1987 to 122 articles. The second half of 1988, although reflecting a slight decline from the first half of 1988 (100 articles), continued to cover this issue exhaustively. Notably, also, during the last half of 1988, although there were total of 100 articles from July 1 until December 31, these articles were heavily concentrated during the months leading up to and surrounding the elections as well as the enactment of the 1988 Anti Drug Abuse Act (80 percent of that total six month’s segment articles, or 80 articles,
were published between August and November 1988.) The percentage of articles that had associations with Blacks was also higher during the first half of the year (58 percent compared to 40 percent respectively.)

With respect to location and story length, again, both segments of the year had more articles located in Section 2 than Section 1 (79 and 21 for the 1st half compared to 90 and 32 for the second half, respectively.) Stories were slightly longer in the first half of the year, than the second half of the year (means and medians of 622.35 and 527.50 words during the first half of the year compared to means and medians of 571 and 414.50 words in the second half of 1988, and means and medians of 17.91 and 15.00 inches during the first half as compared to means and medians of 16.55 and 12.0 inches during the second half, respectively.)

One could speculate that the increased coverage during this period of time was a function of heavy campaigning by politicians. Indeed, in the months surrounding the election, 80 percent of the articles from that segment relating to crack appeared in August through November of that year. Also indicative of a moral panic hypothesis, 1988 saw an increasing percentage of articles associating blacks. Such associations were typified by the scapegoating phenomenon previously discussed, thereby engendering increased levels of hostility towards Blacks, making their stereotype with crack even more ubiquitous.

As the crack panic moved into its peak in 1989, several other conditions of the moral panic hypothesis were met. According to the literature, in order for a moral panic to be present, there must be a disproportional reaction to the menacing group in light of the objective threat posed. The criterion of disproportionality is evidenced by the exaggeration
or fabrication of figures purporting to measure the scope of the problem, fluctuation in attention to the condition without corresponding changes in its severity. Consistent with a constructionist paradigm, despite the growing body of distilled scientific data demonstrating that illegal drug use was actually declining throughout the years of 1985 through 1989, results of the 1989 Gallup Poll listed drug use and abuse as the most important problem facing the nation during that period of time. Coincidentally, the highest number of articles regarding crack cocaine of any year were published during 1989 (307 articles.) Articles during this time period were further typified by heated rhetoric, and an exaggeration of the figures regarding the impact of crack cocaine on public health. In illustration, citing DAWN figures, claims-makers proposed that the increases in lethal overdoses due to cocaine were solely a function of the use of crack. Although crack cocaine almost certainly accounted for a large portion of that increase, the DAWN data used for this study did not differentiate crack cocaine from powder cocaine, thereby rendering such claims superfluous regarding the exact impact of crack cocaine.

As a final condition of a moral panic, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) suggest that moral panics erupt suddenly only to abruptly subside at some later time. Some fade quickly without a trace; in others, the moral concern is institutionalized and persists in the form of new laws, policies, and governmental agencies. Given the "limited amount of space in public areas", as was illustrated in the research findings from 1989 and 1990, following the introduction of the first Drug Control Policy in 1989, media coverage of crack declined significantly in 1990. Moral concerns, however, continued to be institutionalized through the Office of National Drug Control and the National Drug Control Policy of 1991. This
newly created governmental agency, ensured the continuation of this country's "war on drugs", albeit in an attenuated form, throughout the first half of the 1990's. This was further illustrated by Gallop poll findings, continuing to list drug use and abuse as one of the nation's most important problems throughout the first half of the 1990's.

In conclusion, the media had a strong and independent effect on the public and political responses to crack cocaine. A review of the legislative history of drug legislation reflects that the strong reaction to crack cocaine was probably grounded in the simultaneous occurrence of several social, economic, and political trends: concerns regarding its psychopharmacological and criminogenic effects, combined with the social problems of a growing underclass, a continuing trend away from rehabilitation and toward punishment of criminals, and a philosophy of zero tolerance for drug use by the Reagan administration.

Consequently, the findings of this study comport with the hypotheses proposed by previous social scientists, suggesting that the rise and fall of public attention toward crack and other drugs coincided with the level of media coverage of this issue. The power of the media to shape public opinion was pointedly illustrated as the public concern over crack as a social problem fell as media coverage waned following the enactment of the 1986 Anti Drug Abuse Act, then again rose to the top of the nation's concern after a new blitz of media coverage about crack surrounding the 1989 Presidential Address and Drug Control Policy regarding crack.

Finally, although there was an absence of any empirical evidence at that time, the 1986 and 1988 Drug Abuse Acts, and the National Drug Strategy of 1989, were characterized by heated rhetoric decrying evils of crack cocaine. Consequently, as with other
important social problem, political leaders used the crack phenomena to gain attention and to demonstrate their “toughness” on crime. In this manner, crack cocaine, and the “war on drugs” in general became functionalistic in nature, in that not only was attention deflected from the intractability of other more pressing social inequalities endemic to the urban underclass, moral boundaries were set, defining the drug user as deviant, the non drug-user as normal.

In summary, the crack cocaine problem, although serious, was far from the extent to which both the government response and the attendant media coverage portrayed its dangers. Indeed, the media’s portrayal of this drug was far overreaching and not in proportion with both the prevalence of crack use, its effects on non-drug users, or its criminogenic and psychopharmacological effects. The legacy with which we have been left, a prison system bursting at the seems with Black “criminals” typify this nation’s abysmal attempts at social control of drug use - or a “surplus population” through such legislation.

Limitations

As with any content analysis, the findings of this study should be viewed within the limitations and methodological problems previously address. Specifically, research projects utilizing content analysis, are limited to the examination of recorded communications. Moreover, such communications may raise issues respecting reliability since the interpretations for coding of the more latent associations may be extremely subjective.

A second limitation of content analysis, and perhaps the most difficult to address, is the issue of the content of the articles themselves. More specifically, it is the decision of
whether to include articles that, albeit are related to the topic at hand, are not supportive of the research question posed by the study. In the study at hand, all articles that contained verbiage that was consistent with the search criteria were included in the coding. Accordingly, this paper may be limited, as previously discussed, by whether an article that described disgust with the excessive amount of media coverage afforded this issue was coded as having added to the moral panic surrounding crack.

A final limitation that is inherent to this study, and content analysis generally, pertains to the validity of a “key word” search performed by searching computer databases for particular words or phrases which are consistent with the researcher’s OPERATIONALIZATION of his/her manifest and latent coding specifications. For example, in the study at hand, researchers at the Times searched their archived databases for mentions of the words “crack” or “rock” in articles pertaining to cocaine. Although a far superior method than using the Times Index, this method may result in articles which meet the search criteria, however, are unrelated to the subject under study. To circumvent this problem, an independent analysis of the articles proved a suitable method to determine whether the article was germane to the topic at hand. Although this method may have resulted in additional problems with reliability, the validity problems associated with such a search, far outweighed the potential problems with reliability that be addressed through other mechanisms.
Suggestions for Future Research

Although beyond the scope of this paper, a possible further area of study in this area would be to determine if similar trends in the extent and nature of media coverage are applicable to what was considered to be the "drug scare" of the 1990's - Crystal Methamphetamine, or "ice." Assuming arguendo, that the findings from such research were consistent with the findings found herein, such conclusions would lend support to the findings and conclusions found in this paper regarding the effect of media coverage on the political and criminal justice response to a particular drug.
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