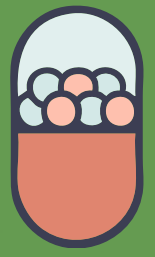


How White Canadians Created Drug Legislation Through Moral Panic and Racialization

By Linda M. H.

WHAT WAS THE MORAL PANIC?



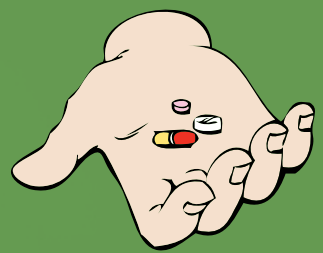
- "Drug Panic" in the 1920's was created from moral panic
- White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Canadians believed that they were a superior race with superior morality Growing unease that drugs and alcohol corrupted morality
- Sense of crisis that needed immediate attention
- Moral panics worsen social inequalities and stigmatize marginalized groups



WHERE DOES WHITE SUPREMACY FIT IN?

- Fear that drugs "corrupted morality" which led to mixed raced relationships
- Mixed-raced relationships and children were seen as a threat to the existence of the white race
- Desire to protect the "morality" or rather, men's exclusive access to white women and girls
- First drug legislation was to protect "white" interests
- In the 1920's white organizations such as newspapers, women's groups, labour unions, fraternal societies, and churches campaigned to criminalize drugs
- Newspapers victimized white youths as people who needed protecting from the drug trafficker
- Calls to abolish Chinatown because it degraded "white boys and girls"

WHY WAS VANCOUVER AT THE FOREFRONT OF DRUG LEGISLATION?



- Vancouver had the largest Chinese population in Canada & intense anti-Asian sentiments before the drug panic
 - 1907 Anti-Asian riots
- Used the drug panic as a means to exacerbate anti-Asian sentiment and to exclude Chinese people from Canadian society
- Gave Vancouverites a reason to call for banning Chinese immigration and deporting Chinese migrants



HOW DID THE CHINESE PERSON BECOME THE "DRUG DEALER"?

- Strong anti-Asian sentiments in Canada at the start of the 20th century
- Chinese Canadians' upward financial mobility threatened white Canadians' position in the economic market
- White supremacist had already banned Chinese immigrants from Canada before the drug panic
- Newspaper articles portrayed Chinese Canadians negatively as the peddlers of drugs and making a profit from exploiting "good" white people
- Racist rhetoric of "cunning" and "crafty" Chinese people was used to make them seem exploitative
- They also appeared as "moral corrupters" to "good" white people in the media
 - Chinese drug trafficker = evil
 - Chinese drug user = moral contagion
 - White drug user/trafficker = tragic victim

WHO WAS IMPACTED BY EARLY DRUG LEGISLATION?



- Opium was prohibited by 1920 drug legislation. Legislation impacted working class people who used drugs
- Working class drug users had to obtain their drugs through illicit markets
- Negative portrayals of the Chinese population resulted in increased control and regulation of Chinese Canadians
 - 761 Chinese Canadians were deported between 1923-1932
 - On average, deported Chinese Canadians had lived in Canada for 17 years
- What used to be fines in the 1910's became imprisonment in the 1920s
- Drugs became criminalized in the eyes of the law and public

Did not impact: Middle and Upper class drug users who could obtain opiates and cocaine legally from doctors

TIMELINE

1907 - Anti-Asian Riots in Vancouver

- No drugs were prohibited
- William Lyon McKenzie King, then Minister of Labour, returned a report that **opium was a concern because it was spreading to "white women and girls"**

1908 - *Opium Act*

- First drug legislation was passed without debate which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and importation of opium for any purposes other than medicinal use
- Smoking opium was not an offence

1911 - *Opium and Narcotic Act*

- Added other drugs: Cocaine and morphine
- Selling or possessing opium, morphine, and cocaine became an offence with **one year maximum penalty and a \$500 fine**
- Smoking opium was a separate offence which carried a maximum fine of \$50 and one month imprisonment

1920 - Drug Panic

- The *Vancouver Sun* in 1920 ran a campaign calling for the abolition of Chinatown to protect the degradation of "white boys and girls" from the use of drugs
- Emily Murphy in 1920 published five articles in *MacLean's* that were widely read referring to the Chinese immigrant "Ah Sin" in reflection to the perception that Chinese people were a menace to the morality of white people. Perpetuates racist ideas to a national level.
- March 1921 newspapers ran the story of Joseph Kehoe, a returned soldier who was a drug user. Guilty for 8 charges of robbery with violence. Kehoe was made into a victim. He was from a "good" family in Nova Scotia, medical student before entering the war, and most importantly a veteran. He advised that young people offered drugs to violently beat off anybody offering drugs.

- April 12, 1921 – Newspaper *Vancouver Sun* increased anti-Chinese sentiments by having the front-page story of Chinese businessman Wong Way of making over half a million dollars a year by selling drugs. The article was titled “Dope Peddler King is Taken.” It was a multi-day racist campaign creating white victims and evil Chinese drug traffickers/users.

1921- Amendments to the *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act*

- Increased the maximum prison time from one year to seven years

January 1922

- *Vancouver Daily world*, the city's oldest newspaper, launched a large racist anti-drug campaign
- Resulted in thousands of Vancouverites and organisations calling for compulsory imprisonment sentences and deporting "alien" drug traffickers

April 1922

- Ministers from British Columbia and the Yukon met with the Minister of Health asking for compulsory sentences, and deportation for "chinese" drug sellers

1922 - New Drug Legislation

- Judges were allowed to **deport aliens** convicted of possession or trafficking drugs, including naturalised immigrants
- Police had the right to search any location that was not a "dwelling-house" without a warrant if they suspected drugs were present
- People convicted of possession or trafficking should serve a **minimum six month jail term**

1923 - *Chinese Immigration Act*

- Prevented the immigration of Chinese people to Canada

Spring 1923 - Revisions to *Opium and Narcotic Act*

- Restricted rights to an appeal
- Increased the fine for smoking opium
- Increased the maximum penalty for being found in an opium den and for possessing opium equipment
- Codeine and marijuana were added as illegal drugs
- Drugs were criminalized by law and in public opinion

Lasting effects & impacts of these laws on society:

- Anti-Asian racism was critical for the passage of Canada's extraordinarily severe drug laws
 - The *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act* was used as a tool against the Chinese population of Canada
- Nonetheless, drug laws hurt all drug users
- The *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act* contained provisions for corporal punishment, limited rights to an appeal and allowed the police extensive power to search without a warrant
 - These provisions were dangerous precedents for human rights of all Canadians, whether or not they used drugs
 - This racialized drug panic had an important impact on Canadian civil rights and liberties

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