

# Addiction Epidemic in Harlem: 'King Heroin Reigns Supreme'

By Charles B. Rangel

House of Representatives, N. Y.

"Heroin had just about taken over Harlem. Everytime I went uptown, somebody else was hooked, somebody else was dead. . . . It was a plague and it was getting to everybody." Claude Brown, 1964

"Even as we walk tall in a new and valid sense of our beauty, the Mighty Horse gallops through our Harlem neighborhoods; heroin is the genuine ruler of our lives." Clayton Riley, 1971.

For some years now, as these two passages illustrate, discrimination in housing and unemployment has no longer been Harlem's major problem. The tragic fact is that King Heroin reigns supreme over America's black capital.

At present there are 35,000 addicts in Harlem, including 12,000 children. City newspapers no longer consider it newsworthy to report the death of a fifteen-year-old Harlem addict and, according to *The New York Times*, eight-year-olds in Harlem are experimenting with heroin bought in the schoolyard.

The effect of this epidemic is truly horrifying. An atmosphere of fear and hate abounds as a derelict army of addicts prey upon neighbors and friends. Whole neighborhoods have declined; others have become abandoned. Addicts have taken up scarce space in the community's hospitals, destroyed the functioning of our school system and forced desperately needed stores and hospitals to relocate outside Harlem. Those who dare to drive or walk through Harlem streets must experience the agonizing sight of seeing our children, the hope of the black nation, staring vacantly from doorways and street corners, oblivious to reality around them.

For at least ten years, Harlem has helplessly endured this catastrophe knowing full well that this clumsy giant of a nation would continue to do nothing as long as the plague was way uptown or in tiny Harlems across the country.

But, suddenly, the drug culture phenomenon has exploded on the American scene. The "It Can't Happen Here" myth was exposed in many suburban and rural communities where hard drug abuse arrests doubled and tripled last year. In major cities throughout the country, hard drug arrests climbed 30 to 40 per cent on the average, but in such rural bastions as St. Paul, Minn., Des Moines, Iowa, and Anaheim, Calif., they soared to 200 per cent. In some communities, including white, suburban Fairfield, Conn., seven of every ten persons charged with armed robbery and two of every three charged with murder are addicts. The yearly cost of addict-committed crime in America is, in fact, \$8 billion, which is fourteen times as much as we spend to fight

air and water pollution and four times our annual investment in elementary and secondary education.

What happened to Harlem is now happening to America. The social fabric of the nation is menaced. Even American outposts are infected. U. S. Army officials in Saigon report that 20 per cent of the American troops in Vietnam have experimented with heroin.

## Legal Effectiveness

How have our law enforcement agencies fared in attempting to deal with this crisis? Despite the vigorous law enforcement activity of the Bureau of Dangerous Drugs and Narcotics, their agents last year seized only 427 pounds of the forty metric tons of heroin that entered the country. From January to March of this year, BDDN seized or purchased only slightly over fifty-three pounds of illicit heroin. Customs officials intercepted only 221 pounds during this same time period. Even the bureau admits that merely beefing-up its agents and increasing their number is not going to do the job. Neither will the problem be licked by expanding the Bureau of Customs or requiring more exhaustive searches of the airplanes, ships and persons entering this country.

It is equally hopeless to look for rehabilitation as the answer. Firstly, it is very hard for authorities to detect and locate most addicts. Secondly, only a few of the nation's addicts get the chance to be treated at a rehabilitation center. Finally, of those who have been treated, only a minority have been successfully rehabilitated.

In New York City, for example, there are some 200 public, private and voluntary agencies set up to cope with the addiction problem and there is no count available of the number of community prevention groups that are springing up all over the city. Yet, only 13,000 of the city's 100,000 addicts are today being treated and, of those, only a small number have been rehabilitated. Let's be honest and admit it. We have not yet been able to develop an effective cure that will rehabilitate a large number of addicts.

The brutal fact is that money, treatment, the arrest of pushers, the seizure of illicit shipments—all mean little so long as there is no effective control over the basic supply of narcotics grown and processed in foreign countries.

John P. MacCahey, commanding officer, Narcotics Division of the New York City Police Department, puts it bluntly: "Increasing narcotic arrests in this city cannot curb drug abuse as long as tons of heroin are smuggled across our nation's borders each year. Large numbers of pushers and dealers are being arrested after painstaking investigations, but these efforts are frustrated by the continued

illegal import of drugs which flow endlessly through the organized market and into the bloodstream of the growing addict population."

Once heroin reaches this nation's shores it is almost impossible to stop its distribution and use. Yet, the illegal shipments keep coming and the disturbing fact is that opium is grown and manufactured into heroin in countries that are supposed to be our traditional friends and allies.

For example, 80 per cent of the heroin entering the United States comes from opium grown in Turkey. Turkey gets so much American aid (\$5.6 billion since 1946) that it is practically an American satellite.

Most of the rest of the heroin coming to the United States comes from Laos, Thailand and Vietnam—countries which have cost us billions of dollars and thousands of lives to defend.

And France, an historic ally to whom we gave massive assistance after World War II, is responsible for processing most of the heroin that is exported from Turkey and Southeast Asia.

## Mitchell Setback

Attorney General John Mitchell informed Congress last July that the Nixon Administration would institute a tough policy of sanctions against countries engaged in heroin trafficking. Turkey protested and the State Department retracted Mr. Mitchell's words the very next day.

In 1970 the United States gave \$3 million to enable Turkish farmers to switch from growing opium to other crops. Yet Harvey R. Willman, special assistant for narcotics matters to the Secretary of State, now admits that actual acreage under opium cultivation in Turkey has increased by 2,300 acres since 1969. Other authorities report that opium production in Turkey has more than doubled.

Despite this state of affairs, the White House has quietly approved a \$40 million development loan to Turkey without trying to secure any new curtailment in Turkey's opium production. Even more revealing is what happened when I tried to testify before the Foreign Affairs Committee on the effect of Turkish heroin. A phone call from the Turkish Embassy in Washington to the State Department resulted in the prompt canceling of the hearing.

The inane reason why the Nixon Administration has not determinedly sought the total curtailment of Turkey's heroin production is because the Pentagon considers Turkey's location at the eastern end of the Mediterranean to be militarily strategic. It is concerned about the Soviet Union's expanding influence in the Mediterranean and, therefore, will not offend Turkish sensibilities by asking

them to stop selling poison to American youth.

This is absurd logic. What Turkey sends to America has the same effect as Russian missiles. Turkish heroin is killing thousands and maiming hundreds of thousands of others, and it is destroying the strength of our youth, our armies and our way of life.

Military defense arguments are also the rationale behind the State Department's inaction against France. Consequently, not a single French heroin factory has been put out of business in the past fourteen months, and actual seizures of heroin in France have substantially declined between 1969 and 1970. The increase in arrests in the Marseilles area comes mainly from picking up small pushers, possessors and users. The statistics of drug arrests in France are therefore much the same as those issued for Harlem—much ado about nothing.

## Iran Joins In

Because the heroin traffic flourishes so profitably in Turkey, France and Southeast Asia, Iran, another friend and beneficiary of United States aid, has now lifted its thirteen-year ban on opium production.

Once the poppy is cut and the opium gum is placed into illegal smuggling channels destined for the United States, the battle against narcotics abuse is all but lost.

I think, therefore, it is time that the flow of narcotics be stopped at its source. It is time that our State Department stop saying, "We are keenly aware of the problems associated with the illicit importation of narcotics, but the problem must

be placed in its proper perspective." It is time for our diplomats to stop making excuses for the lack of action of their host governments and time for them to start pressing the issue.

In order to make the message clear, Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) and I have introduced companion bills which empower the Comptroller-General to make a yearly survey of what foreign governments were doing to prevent heroin from being transported across their borders. Should the Comptroller determine the government has not taken appropriate steps, he would notify Congress, which would terminate foreign aid to that country after ninety days.

I have also joined with Senator Mondale of Minnesota in introducing the International Opium Control Act, a bill designed to increase international control over the opium traffic. It authorizes the President to negotiate with foreign countries in order to establish an

international treaty and organization which would coordinate the anti-narcotic law enforcement activities of member states and aid in the extradition of persons engaged in the illegal traffic in opium. The act also gives the President the authority to give financial assistance to opium-producing countries to develop alternative crops, improve employment opportunities for those no longer farming opium, and increase the country's law enforcement activities. If a country refuses to cooperate, all forms of American military and economic aid would be curtailed.

The Congress must take these steps. Further neglect will only make the price in people, crime and dollars much higher in the future. For the preservation of the fabric and health of the nation, we must act now to stop our friends from destroying us.