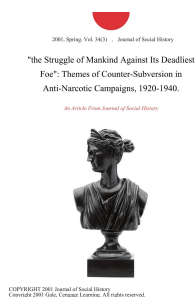


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PDF FORMAT ONYXBOOK THE STRUGGLE OF MANKIND AGAINST ITS DEADLIEST FOE THEMES OF COUNTER SUBVERSION IN ANTI NARCOTIC CAMPAIGNS 1920 1940 FREE FB2



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Relese Date: Lanzamiento previsto: @@expectedReleaseDate@@

On the evening of March 1, 1928, Captain Richmond P. Hobson, president of the International Narcotic Education Association and the World Narcotic Defense Association, gave a lengthy address on NBC's radio network, warning listeners that "narcotic drug addiction has now risen up to menace all the continents, the welfare of the peoples of today and the survival of generations unborn." He described America's exploitation by those who would profit from the drug traffic and the devastating effects of addiction ("so hopeless is the victim and so pitiless the master that heroin addicts are known as The Living Dead"). He also noted its contribution to the "crime wave." The problem, he said, was "spreading like infection," because addicts had "a mania for bringing others into addiction." He concluded the address by reminding listeners that "narcotic drug addiction has become one of the major factors endangering the public health," and that the situation might soon be worse: modern chemical science was developing even more potent addicting drugs. Though humanity was largely ignorant of the danger, he said, it was actually "in the midst of a life and death struggle with the deadliest foe that has ever menaced its future," and "the perpetuation of civilization, the destiny of the world, and the future of the human race" were hanging upon the narcotics issue. (1) Hobson's apocalyptic descriptions of the "menace" were perhaps more florid than those of his fellow anti-narcotic crusaders; he was a very experienced and popular orator, with several terms as a Congressman and over a decade on the Anti-Saloon League's lecture circuit to his credit. His themes, however, were quite standard. During the 1920s and 1930s, newspaper and magazine accounts of the "narcotics problem" and the propaganda of organizations like Hobson's consistently used the same stock of images and ideas to construct an intensely fearful rhetoric about drugs. Authors routinely described drugs, users, and sellers as "evil" and often asserted or implied that there was a large sinister conspiracy at work to undermine American society and values through drug addiction. There might be millions of addicts living undetected among us, they said. Even worse, new victims would be seduced into trying heroin or other drugs by addicts or peddlers posing as "friends." The drugs themselves would seem "friendly" at first, but all too soon the new user would be trapped. Writers credited drugs with immense powers to corrupt users: at the very least victims would become morally debased; at worst, they became thieves, rapists, or homicidal maniacs, capable of any imaginable atrocity. According to most of these accounts, addiction was spreading rapidly and would soon engulf the country, because the drugs were so seductive, so irresistible. Such was the danger to civilization that there could be no compromise measures: drug use and drug trafficking would have to be completely eradicated, no matter what it cost or how long it took. Police commissioners, prison wardens, judges, attorneys, and politicians joined other reformers in using this rhetoric, lending it added credibility. By the late 1930s, Federal Bureau of Narcotics chief Harry J. Anslinger had adopted similar images and ideas to alert Americans to the perils of marijuana. The rhetorical framework developed by this first generation of anti-narcotic crusaders proved durable and long-lived; it is still the template for American public discourse about drugs. Some critics of our current drug policy have argued--though I will not pursue this here--that defining drug problems in such terms has helped perpetuate these problems by removing any possible middle ground from the debates about them. (2)

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