The wealthy racketeer and bootlegger was... the American dream come true. The recent immigrants had come to America in pursuit of a golden mirage, and those among them who made fortunes by violating antipathetic laws were their first heroes and helpers. —A. Sinclair, Era of Excess: A Social History of the Prohibition Movement, 1962

"Felix Mitchell is the biggest drug dealer ever here. He made history in Oakland, Calif.," Owen said. "He's a hero..." He is accused of masterminding the distribution of millions of dollars in heroin and ordering the deaths of five rivals during Oakland's 1980 drug war. But to Owen and scores of kids growing up, as Mitchell did, in East Oakland's bleak 69th Avenue housing projects, Felix Mitchell is the American dream. —C. Marinucci, L. Williams, "The Ghetto's Drug Hero Tempts Youth," third of four part series, A Small War in Oakland, San Francisco Examiner, Nov. 27, 1984

The heroic identity, in general, derives from the mythology and history of different cultures throughout the world, including the religions of antiquity. The outlaw may be perceived as a type of hero: noble, romantic, wild, rebellious, tragic, or martyred. Many countries have had bandit leaders or criminals regarded as heroes, in the past and in modern times. Robin Hood of England is the classic example.

However, the folklore and the reality of the outlaw hero has especially flourished in American society. Outlaws came to particular prominence in the society of the American West, along with the development of American individualism. The legends of Jesse James and Billy the Kid have not ceased to this day. Later, with the advent of the rebellious era of Prohibition (1920-1933), and the suppression of a popular drug (alcohol), the Prohibition gangster became a fascinating, fearful and glamorized figure. Subsequent to the repeal of Alcohol Prohibition, the nation has continued in a major struggle over drugs, involving marijuana, cocaine, heroin and other illegal drugs, with an increasingly intense drug war into the last part of the twentieth century. Rather than coming under better control, drug problems have continued, along with a proliferation of secondary problems of violence and lawlessness. Certain American traits, in conflict, of authoritarianism and rebelliousness, of hedonism and puritanism, have contributed to these problems. In this context, the outlaw hero role has been further cultivated, particularly given the great financial opportunity and risks in the market for drugs, when they are made illegal. This is especially so given the cultural value of the American Dream, the rise from poverty to wealth.

With the arrival and emergence, in the United States, of different ethnic and immigrant groups, each suffering from various degrees and durations of disadvantage and prejudice, there were
many different outlaws who were seen as heroes by these minorities. The combination of discrimination and the underground economy in drugs, first during Alcohol Prohibition and then in the prohibition of other drugs, has produced a fertile mix for the development of this outlaw hero mentality.

The criminal, the gang member, the drug addict or the rebellious adolescent are individuals whose experience involves the heroic motifs of risk-taking, ecstatic experience, tragedy or martyrdom. Stories of outlaws of the West, gangsters, rebels, and the various types of criminals and villains turned into heroes have all provided objects of excitement and identification for the general public and also for the drug subcultures. This outlaw hero self-concept is only one motivation, among a number of others, for engaging in drug addiction and delinquent behavior, but it is one that is particularly determined by the larger society (as opposed to other psychological causes and physiological factors). We need to consider this outlaw hero role, in the context of American culture, in attempting to help addicted and alienated individuals and in reevaluating the social policy which seeks to totally prohibit certain drugs.

The phenomenon of the American outlaw hero is clearly revealed through the popular media. In the 19th century, it was the print and spoken media, including newspapers, stories and songs. In the twentieth century, there have been the technological media of radio, recordings, motion pictures and television. Of all the media, probably none has better mirrored or spread the outlaw fascination of American society than the movie industry and the movie fans.

The Outlaw Identity: Mythology and The Media

Thicker each year in these ghettoes is the kind of teenager that I was — with the wrong kinds of heroes... I am not saying that all of them become the kind of parasite I was... But still, the small fraction who do add up to an annual total of more and more costly, dangerous youthful criminals. —Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, 1965

Heroes and role models help determine how we think about ourselves and others, whether these heroes are religious figures, athletes, political and social leaders, movie stars or popular music performers. However, it is not easy to control or predict how these heroic examples will be used. When the gangster movies were becoming immensely popular, in the early 1930s, in the last years of Prohibition, Hollywood, then, through the Hays production code, attempted to provided some self-censorship, so that the motion picture industry would not be accused of
glorifying the gangsters and yet could still capitalize on their box office appeal. For example, there had to be some retribution at the end of the movie, such as death or prison for the gangster hero, to give the message that "crime doesn't pay." But to the average moviegoer, or the budding gangster, this did not detract, then or later, from the style or the charisma of Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, or James Cagney in their classical gangster roles. In his essay "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," Robert Warshow (1948) relates that in the typical plot of the rise and, inevitable fall, of this hero, the audience, on a deeper level, does not see the gangster as being punished for being an outlaw, but for being a success. This serves to free us of the burden of success and makes us feel more comfortable in our failure.

Among the more ancient heroes, and certainly the ultimate role model in our society, is Jesus Christ. But Jesus was also a tragic hero and, in his day, an outlaw hero, who was executed with common criminals. While the dominant religion in the United States presents the life story of Christ as the paradigm for a caring and well-ordered world, he was also a rebel, an outcast, and a martyr; and these are roles which may be played, as well, by the wild and destructive outlaw hero.

Other elements of the Christ story include obsessive adherence to a cause which results in being persecuted, the ecstatic experience and the resurrection after death, which all have their counterparts in the story of the drug addict's experience with intoxication, with rejection by society and with the resolution of addiction through death or recovery. Joseph Campbell, in his study of the myths of ancient cultures (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1949), describes the "monomyth" of the universal story of the hero, as separation, initiation and return. Even though the outlaw hero's identity may involve a distorted version of the classic myth, it still relates to those classic heroic characters who existed long before the outlaw emerged as such a full-blown personality and problem in modern society.

Among contemporary heroes are the professional athletes, where there is also a paradoxical association of outlaw identity with conventional heroism. Sports stars have the aura of regular heroes, but, in recent times, also have some outlaw status through their association with the world of illegal drugs. This is an outgrowth of the contemporary phenomenon of heroic status derived from simply being a celebrity and, additionally, the mythology that "athletes should be role models." This, in turn, seems to have justified the testing of athletes for illegal intoxicants. Interestingly, the first celebrity sports hero, and perhaps the greatest American sports hero, Babe Ruth, was also famously associated with an illegal drug: alcohol, during Prohibition.

In the 1980s, dramatic media coverage revealed that in the major professional sports, of football, basketball, and baseball, there was a surprising involvement in illegal drugs,
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particularly cocaine. The professional athletes represent the epitome of the success story, of the rise from poverty to great wealth and public admiration. Many of these cases occurred among African-American or other ethnic minority athletes. Additionally, many of these revelations of illegal drug use occurred when these sports stars were at the height, or near the top, of their athletic prowess. Among the most dramatic stories was that of Len Bias, a college basketball star, a truly tragic young hero, dying suddenly from smoking intoxication, just after a victorious performance and as he was about to embark on his professional career.

Other cases, however, involved lesser or no ill effect from their drug use. Star baseball pitcher Dwight Gooden, referred to as a "hero" in the press before his drug problem, then suspended and forced into treatment as a cocaine "addict," returned to become the highest paid baseball player at the time. Batting star Dave Parker, at the peak of his baseball career, led the league in runs batted in the year he was penalized for involvement with cocaine. Willie Wilson, the All-Star outfielder, hitter and base runner, also at the peak of his career, and Vida Blue, the veteran star pitcher, both actually spent prison time, just for personal cocaine use. In sentencing Willie Wilson, the judge called him "a national hero" and gave him a severe three months in prison for attempting to purchase cocaine, because as a professional athlete he had "the responsibility of setting a good example for young people."

Similar incidents continued into the 1990s, of players pulled out of competition, sometimes during top performance seasons, for personal drug use, often cocaine. Evidently the public, the government and the sports authorities believe this sends a cautionary message against illegal drug use by athletes. Perhaps the public's anger and anxiety over the huge salaries, which they subsidize, for professional athletes is partially resolved by punishing some of these heroes for having too much success, like the gangster at the end of the standard movie plot.

But the drug scandals, since they are not kept private matters, end in publicizing the association between sports heroes and illicit drugs as much as providing any lesson for young people about the problems of drug use. For the young people who might be initiated into the underworld, where life is dangerous anyway, the risks of prohibited drugs, combined with the attempt to make sports stars into role models, would most likely contribute to the mystique of the celebrity and to the outlaw romance of illegal drugs.

One of the great stories related to this genre climaxed in 1991, when Magic Johnson, already a celebrity basketball star, became a great tragic hero in announcing he had contracted the AIDS virus, establishing his outlaw status by admitting he contracted this through extensive, unprotected sexual experience.
The outlaw hero figures come from a broad spectrum of American society. Malcolm X described his earlier identity as a "dope peddler" and "hoodlum," but in his conversion to orthodox religion, Islam, and to the black revolutionary cause, he maintained his outlaw identity. He remains a hero to many African-Americans and political left wingers. When he was no longer a criminal, but a reformer, his defiant rage against the "white devil" continued his rebel identity, in a different form, and his early death at the hands of assassins completed the legend of a tragic outlaw hero.

For another sector of Americans, the fundamentalist white Christians and the right wingers, Oliver North does the same thing. He was daring in his exploits against communists in Central America and a virtual desperado willing to deal with terrorists for his cause, a soldier-patriot willing to break the laws of an ineffectual Congress and, finally, able to give an audacious, stellar performance before the Congressional investigating committee. Oliver North is a true outlaw hero.

Even Ronald Reagan, the President of the United States who was the best spokesman for the drug war, also best articulated that defiant American individualism (deregulating businesses and preaching "to get the government off our backs") which is fundamental to the mentality that causes government prohibition, especially of drugs, to bring out rebels, martyrs and criminal heroes in our society.

However, to really appreciate how deeply the outlaw hero identity is ingrained in the American psyche, one has to consider the movies. For it is here that the myth of the heroic desperadoes, rebels, rogues and gangsters is played out over and over again. From the beginning, Hollywood stars played the outlaw heroes. The silent era produced the cowboy movie star, William S. Hart, who played the good bad man: the outlaw who adhered to a basic code of conduct to begin with and then was often reformed in the course of the picture, but still remained an outlaw. The great Douglas Fairbanks Sr. bridged the era from silent to talkingpictures playing other variations on this theme: the pirate, the swashbuckling Robin Hood type and the dashing rogue. Virtually every male movie star has played the outlaw hero. For some it was their best known role and others made a career out of it. Even John Wayne, known for his right wing politics and movie roles as the cowboy good guy or military hero, was first launched to celebrity status by his performance as a simpatico western outlaw, the Ringo Kid, in "Stagecoach" (1939).

While Bogart, Cagney, Edward G. Robinson and George Raft became famous (virtual symbols of American culture) playing the gangster roles, others also were propelled to stardom on this
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byproduct of Alcohol Prohibition. One candidate for the definitive gangster hero was James Cagney playing the Irish-American bootlegger in "The Public Enemy" (1931). The stories based on the most celebrated Prohibition gangster, the Italian-American Al Capone, provided many starring roles: Edward G. Robinson in "Little Caesar" (1930); Paul Muni in "Scarface" (1932); Rod Steiger in "Al Capone" (1959); Al Pacino as a contemporary Miami Cuban cocaine dealer in "Scarface" (1983); and Robert De Niro in "The Untouchables" (1987).

Twentieth century American gang leaders have appreciated the issue of public image, cultivating a style that will give them status and sometimes adopting movie gangster styles. Street gang members took to carrying baseball bats after Robert De Niro's Al Capone brutally executed an out-of-favor gangster with a baseball bat, in "The Untouchables." In real life, John Gotti, the alleged top Mafia boss, known as the "Dapper Don," has shown a strong sense of public image, reflected in the tabloids as well as the national media, and also maintained many local supporters in the New York area, despite the repeated government prosecutions for major crimes throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

Marlon Brando made a major contribution to the folklore of Italian-American gangsters, and of organized crime in general, as a Mafia don, in the title role of "The Godfather" (1972). Brando, early in his career, created another outlaw hero icon, as the charismatic leader of a fearsome motorcycle gang in "The Wild One" (1954).

Usually the most attractive, popular stars get cast in these roles, such as those based on the actual Western outlaws, like Paul Newman and Robert Redford as "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" (1969). American history (distant and recent) has provided the stories and American movie audiences have continued to be entertained and instructed by the recycling of the outlaw mythology. Billy the Kid's story is the romance of the vanishing American frontier, but also a romanticized version of juvenile delinquency. By the time he was shot to death, in 1881, he had killed 21 men in his 21 years, so history and his legend says. By the centennial of his death in 1981, at least 40 movies had been made involving the story of Billy the Kid, including one with Paul Newman, "The Left-Handed Gun" (1958), and more have been produced since. The myth-making treatment of criminal heroes in the movies often derives from the newspapers and ballads of their time, giving them a Robin Hood persona. Such was the case for Jesse James, John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd (when he robbed banks he would tear up mortgage papers to save poor farmers) and "Bonnie and Clyde" (their violent lives and bank robberies were glamorized by movie stars Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty in 1967).

The growing prominence of African-Americans on the organized crime scene, along with the opportunities of the illegal drug trade for poor people, has been reflected in the movies, giving
African-Americans a chance to identify with their own outlaw heroes, as well as the European-American outlaws. The so-called "blaxploitation" films were launched with the highly successful "Superfly" (1972), an action movie about a black crime boss in the cocaine trade.

The outlaw hero is so pervasive on the screen that it is rendered in several different subtypes. For example there is the rogue or comic outlaw. Burt Reynolds, a matinee idol and a longtime box office success, has made a career mainly of comedy roles, referred to as "the good old boy con man"; like the moonshiner outwitting the sheriff in "White Lightning" (1973) and "Smokey and the Bandit" (1977), as well as the comic criminals of "The Longest Yard" (1974) and "Breaking In" (1989).

Then there is the troubled, alienated rebel, as played by James Dean, who, with his good looks, outsider persona and early death, became a cult movie idol. The title of his famous film, "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955), though it did not refer to drug addiction, could well apply to the young drug addict, of the type that would become more popular in the latter 20th century.

Still another permutation of the outlaw hero myth is the vigilante killer and the renegade cop. This reflects the public anger over the breakdown of law and order. Charles Bronson has been seen widely in movie theaters, and on TV reruns, as he goes on a rampage of revenge, after he has had enough of criminals getting away with murder, in "Death Wish" (1974) and then in three sequel versions through 1987. Bernard Goetz, using his gun on marauders in real-life New York, became the subway vigilante folk hero. The persona of Eddie Murphy as a comic, with his aggressive style and shock-value language, has been referred to as "the deification of the outlaw." His hit movies reflect the progress of the African-American movie star from the simple "blaxploitation" criminal hero into the genre of the loose cannon cop.

For Gene Hackman's vigilante hero cop, corruption of the laws against heroin is the setting in "The French Connection" (1971) and "The French Connection II" (1975). Clint Eastwood was for many years the number one box office attraction and played the outlaw like other male movie stars "The Outlaw Josey Wales" (1976), but he became most famous for the classic version of the cop who takes the law into his own hands: "Dirty Harry" (1971), plus four Dirty Harry sequels through 1988. Sylvester Stallone, another major box office attraction, starred as the ex-Vietnam War hero turned outlaw killer hero, driven to surviving in the wilderness after the war, in "First Blood" (1982). In "Rambo: First Blood Part II" (1985), Stallone gave us a new name, Rambo, for a no-holdsbarred one man army, in effect, a military outlaw hero.
The year 1991 was one of many good years for outlaw hero movies, and if we consider the films of just this one year, we can see how enduring and evolving is this genre. There was a major new production of the Robin Hood legend, "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves." It received much promotion and wide distribution, featuring an actor, Kevin Costner, at the very peak of his popularity and acclaim. Actually there was a still another big production of Robin Hood in 1991, entitled just "Robin Hood," and released on American television. Then there was the film that received the most Academy Award nominations in 1992, "Bugsy," the story of the gangster Bugsy Siegel and another, more famous, Jewish-American gangster, Meyer Lansky, with Warren Beatty returning to play the outlaw, in the title role, again opposite a glamorous young actress, Annette Benning. However, "Silence of the Lambs" seemed to be a movie that really captured the general public imagination in 1991 and it went on to win the most Academy Awards in 1992 (only the third film ever to win in all four top categories). This involved the suspense story of a frightening ex-psychiatrist, imprisoned for multiple murder, including cannibalism, who was played by "Best Actor" Anthony Hopkins. The movie contrives so that much of the audience sides with him by the end, as he uses his diabolic brilliance to help stop an even worse mass murderer and to deal with an evil prison doctor. This phenomenon of an audience siding with an apparent villain or "anti-hero" is observed also with the fans of "Nightmare on Elm Street" (1984, plus four sequels), the popular cult horror story of Freddy, a demonic murderer.

Additionally in 1991, there was a major breakthrough in the outlaw hero genre, with "Thelma and Louise," the first hit film ever to feature a partnership of two female outlaws. This movie brought out a major public response, including coverage in other media. It reflected the feminist advances which have brought to the screen more women outlaws and killers, as well as more women police and more aggressive women generally.

Finally, 1991 included a major, successful movie that derived directly from the impact of the outlaw hero tradition on the world of illegal drugs, "New Jack City." This predominantly African-American production, modeled on the old gangster films, is the story of a good-looking, brutal gang leader who acquires wealth ("new jack") in the crack cocaine trade (he is even seen watching the Al Pacino "Scarface" in the movie). This has been an influential film for some young people and expressive of contemporary outlaw issues; these include contempt for and admiration of the drug dealer. Matters of style were important in the film, including the jewelry of the drug dealer, the apparel (which has been referred to as "dangerous dressing" or "the look") and especially the music. These things establish a connection between the illegal drug scene, gangs and young people in general, even for young people far removed from cocaine dealers and from black street gangs.

"New Jack City's" strong sound track included the contemporary African-American music called "rap." In the movie, the rap singer Ice-T (Tracy Marrow) plays the part of a hotheaded
undercover policeman, as well as performing some of the background songs.

However, in the music world Ice-T does "gangster rap," and rap music has given birth to a whole new outlaw hero medium. Ice-T's 1992 album, Body Count, quickly became a political issue for its lyrics suggesting violence against the police, as in the song "Cop Killer." The group Geto Boys revives the outlaw hero mythology with its album, "Mr. Scarface is Back" (1991). In coarse, violent rap ballads they dramatize the crack cocaine dealer ("Money and the Power"), sex, gangs, guns, violence, death, tragedy and disrespect for the law. The names of other popular rap groups, Public Enemy, The Terrorists, Above the Law, and Gangstarr, suggest how the criminal hero tradition which started during Alcohol Prohibition has been promoted during the contemporary drug war. Like the outcry against the glorification of the gangster, which lead to movie industry self-censorship in the 1930s, the glorification of criminals in the rap music is being condemned, although such condemnation may only enhance the rap songs' outlaw hero status.

Still another source of outlaw identity in popular music has derived from country and western and rock and roll, including major white American performers. Willie Nelson has cultivated this image with "outlaw" country music. Elvis Presley began with a stage persona of a defiant sexy young rebel, had his most important movie role as an outlaw hero, "Jail House Rock" (1957), and when he died from drug addiction, he became more of a legend, a tragic hero, a virtual American icon, even to be enshrined on a postage stamp for the larger society. There are many jazz and rock music stars, of different ethnic groups, whose deaths from drugs, such as Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix, often from overdose, has fostered the outlaw image of popular musicians and the tragic romance of illegal drugs.

While we have not discussed television or video cassettes as media for this mythology, it should be noted that they are playing a major role in enabling the outlaw hero tradition to be carried on through repeated and wide showing of the outlaw movies. It should also be noted that TV has produced its own outlaw folklore, including some specifically connected with the illegal drug culture. The long-running program "Miami Vice" has been particularly influential, doing, in a sense, what the gangster movies did, creating a major addition to the genre. This has involved a distinctive style in its music and images, with glamorous cops who do not need to play by the rules and the beautiful world of drug dealers, overridden by great violence and corruption.

There also remains the question of whether the movies, and the other media, are responsible for the outlaw hero mentality in our society or whether they are just reflecting the pre-existing values of the people.
This is really an unanswerable question, of the "which-came-first-the-chicken-or-the-egg" type. But there still remains the issue of where and how to change the outlaw mentality in our society. To begin with, however, our purpose here is just to establish how deeply entrenched and pervasive the heroic outlaw mythology is, in American society. In the face of this mentality, the policy of drug prohibition, more so than any other social issue, is presented with an overwhelming problem wherein more of this outlaw mentality is engendered by the prohibition itself. The mythology of the outlaw hero is so prevalent in the dominant society, in the media and in our different subcultures, that it provides a readily available motivation, an attraction and an attribute of personal identity, for those gravitating towards lawless behavior, drug use or business enterprise in the illegal drug trade.

The Outlaw Role and Illegal Drug Experience

The man who in consequence of his unyielding nature cannot comply with the required suppression of his instincts, becomes a criminal, an outlaw, unless his social position or striking abilities enable him to hold his own as a great man, a "hero." —S. Freud, Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness, 1908

Capone was cunning as a fox, but he didn't have the balls of the Irish gangsters like Deanie O'Banion, not the kind it takes to walk into a bank and make an unsecured loan at the end a .38 pistol. —Rafer Dooley remembering the gangs of St. Louis, Los Angeles and Chicago, from J. Kobler, Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition, 1973

What we have already discussed about the outlaw mythology in folklore and the media is, in some respects, mainly a dramatic and artistic concept, but it does have a real influence and is reflective of a real phenomenon in our society. The heroic outlaw identity has especially become a reality in the world of illegal drugs. This would be expected, given the extent to which Alcohol Prohibition, and the criminalization of other drugs, have contributed to the development of the outlaw hero mystique in American culture.

There are many motives for using psychoactive substances, including, of course, the pharmacological effects of the drugs, whether they are legal or illegal. However, there are other non-pharmacological determinants of drug use, such as motives which relate to rebellious and outlaw values. These are especially important when it comes to poorly controlled, dysfunctional
and antisocial drug use. The heroic outlaw status may also be a factor in the problems of legal drugs, such as in alcoholism, but this status is more likely to be an attraction of illegal drug use, as well as an appeal of drug dealing, a criminal career and criminal violence.

One of the most problematic aspects of the outlaw hero mythology is the appeal it has for the young, especially when it reinforces the romance of illegal drugs. While many traditional institutions have declined, there still remains a human need for the experience of rituals and initiation (Zoja, 1989). The banning of drugs reinforces their esoteric quality and intensifies the bonding of those who share the officially prohibited experience. For young people who are alienated from their families, or not on track for the institutions of a conventional career, the drug subcultures and street gangs particularly offer alternative initiations, rituals and institutions. This is in addition to the inherently adventurous and potentially ecstatic qualities of the drug experience itself. When drugs are outlawed, the heroic journey of youth, the separation from family and initiation into adulthood, is more likely to occur within a drug scene or a street gang. One byproduct of this phenomenon is that there is a vastly disproportional involvement of children and youth in the marketing of illegal drugs, for example, in the cocaine trade of the inner city or marijuana selling by middle high school students.

Once a young person is initiated into illegal drug activity, if it goes beyond experimentation, the appeal of the outlaw hero identity, a rebellious and daring self-image, can help sustain continued illegal drug experience and become incorporated into the individual's personal identity.

Another facet of the drug outlaw folklore is the demonology of drugs. When I started the study of the outlaw hero, in the 1960s, heroin was the drug that was seen as the real menace ("The Heroin Addict as a Hero," S. Fisher, presentation, Northern Calif. Psychiatric Soc., 1971). Though it has since been replaced by cocaine and then crack cocaine as the devil drug, heroin held that position for a long time. Heroin was introduced by the legal pharmaceutical company Bayer, in 1898, with a name, derived from the German word heroisch, suggesting an heroically potent narcotic. However, its mythic reputation was promoted more effectively later, after it was outlawed.

By the 1950s, heroin started to become popular among the leather-jacketed fighting gangs in New York City. The swaggering teenage gang members began to lose status and, instead, the "hip" guy on heroin became "the new hero model" (Preble and Casey, 1969). By the 1960s, the "street status" and the outlaw mythology of heroin became well established. This was due to its reputation as extremely dangerous, as well as very pleasurable, and that the young men associated with the heroin scene had to have the "balls" and to be "crazy" to confront the
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physical dangers of illegal activity (Feldman, 1968). But the heroin lifestyle also came to be seen as "cool," i.e., worldly, detached and clever (Hanson, Beschner, Walters and Bovelle, 1985). Furthermore, by the 1960s, the "dope fiend" identity of the addict-hustler was established (Waldorf, 1973).

The dope fiend mythology was a clear case of how the prohibitionist and repressive approach to drugs has fostered the outlaw hero identity. The dope fiend concept came out of the 19th century Christian missionary work in China and was used to preach against the evils of the Chinese opium addict. In the decades after the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, it was part of the campaign to make the narcotic user, and particularly the heroin addict, seen as a drug-enslaved depraved outcast. However, in the context of the American drug subculture, the "righteous dope fiends" began to use this expression themselves, incorporating it into their own identity, as a status symbol of real dedication to an elite, outlaw way of life.

By the 1980s, the heroin scene had produced outlaw heroes visible to those beyond their immediate subculture. When Felix Mitchell was arrested in 1983, he had allegedly dominated the heroin trafficking in Oakland for seven years by controlling the heroin trade in the East Oakland housing projects. He reportedly made five to 50 million dollars a year and took on a folk hero status. He was credited with bringing money into the community and giving children things, especially paid jobs as lookouts. After he died in federal prison, in 1986, stabbed to death by a fellow prisoner, a lavish funeral procession was held in Oakland, with a few thousand people along the route and at the church. The casket was drawn by two horses, followed by Rolls Royces and Cadillacs.

By the time Felix Mitchell died, heroin was already fading as the major drug menace, and the big money maker, in East Oakland and throughout the country, having been replaced by cocaine and then by smokable cocaine freebase (crack). In the second half of the 20th century, drug menace fads have changed fairly rapidly. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s there were several distinct ones, including the glue sniffing menace, the LSD scare and the amphetamine ("speed kills") panic (Brecher, 1972). Each one has brought its own outlaw heroes, from the juvenile trouble-maker daring his friends to sniff glue, to Timothy Leary as a folk hero in the hippie communities, to the degenerate speed freak surviving certain death from amphetamines.

The mythic devil drug is totally pleasurable, irresistibly addicting and completely destroys the individual. To even try it is heroic. There was once a terrible phencyclidine (PCP) scare. Although difficult to use without becoming disabled, this drug actually has had certain popularity. In the early 1980s, those of us who practice psychiatry were advised that every psychotic
patient should be tested for it. By the early 1990s, we rarely hear about. Evidently, if a drug is toxic enough, the dope fiend mythology, and the glamour produced by its prohibition, are not enough to sustain its popularity, although enough to cause a temporary craze.

Outlaw Hero Mythology: Implications and Policies

Being illegal makes the drug attractive in the eyes of many, and the cat-and-mouse game with the police makes drug seeking by the addict an exciting and dramatic activity. Like the Westerns and courtroom and medical dramas on TV, where every drama, every installment, is a cliffhanger, the addict-hustler is threatened by detection and jail every day. —D. Waldorf, Careers in Dope, 1973

The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street, lest I collapse and be run down by an early morning truck... —Bill W. (co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous), from Bill's Story, Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976.

We will not attempt here to discuss all the implications for changes in drug policy, for social reform and for different therapeutic approaches to drug addiction, that are called for due to the negative impact of the outlaw hero mythology. Rather our intent is to establish that the outlaw hero mentality is so pervasive in American culture, in individual and mass psychology, that it must be taken into account in every aspect of dealing with drug problems. This is especially the case in reconsidering the drug laws, which through prohibition have fostered the worst aspects of outlaw heroism, "the rebels without causes" and the social climate that glorifies violence.

In the past and in the present, there have been calls to blame the media or even institute censorship as a response to the outlaw hero phenomenon. Addressing the issue this way would require a fundamental change in our press, our entertainment industry, all of our media, our Bill of Rights and in the relatively free society we have had so far. Furthermore, repression of the outlaw hero mythology would deprive us of its positive aspects: the yearning for human advancement, the striving against oppression and this expression of American individualism in opposition to excessive authority. Additionally, in a capitalist and competitive society, there is limited potential in asking industry to give up selling more newspapers, movies, TV programs or recordings. It is also difficult to ask presidential politicians, like Ronald Reagan or H. Ross Perot, not to exploit the American admiration and enjoyment of the rebel outsider mentality, in
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their pursuit of public office.

In dealing with the outlaw hero identity, it is important to recognize both its constructive and destructive potential. Certainly one area has involved the progress of ethnic minority and immigrant groups in the United States. For example, the Chicano/Latino people, like the other ethnic groups we have mentioned, have a strong tradition of outlaw heroes. There was Joaquin Murieta, the Mexican bandit of the California gold rush days, a violent gang leader, but a legendary romantic folk hero, a Robin Hood, not only to the Mexican-Californians, but to the Anglos as well. There was the Pachuco phenomenon of the 1940s, the young Mexican-American men of the Los Angeles area who adopted stylish, unconventional appearance and a defiant attitude who became cultural rebel heroes. My first recognition of the outlaw hero identity of the heroin addict was in a Puerto Rican-New Yorker, in a city hospital for heroin detoxification in the early 1960s, who acted like Humphrey Bogart and had a sense of excitement about the amount of heroin he had seen. The Hispanic people have had a prominent association with marijuana and cocaine, plus a sense of honor among gang members, as contributions to the outlaw hero tradition. That involvement however, as with other ethnic minorities, has been paralleled by increasing legitimate accomplishments among Hispanic-Americans and greater conventional success in our society. The ethnic minorities that make up the United States all have had their own gangs and outlaw hero traditions, for example the English, Irish, Italian, Slavic, Jewish, the various Asian nationalities, Native-American and African-American people. The process of different ethnic groups integrating into the larger society, combined with the expansion of the Western frontier, the consequences of black slavery, and then followed by Alcohol Prohibition and the subsequent drug wars, have all resulted in the great American outlaw hero mythology.

One consequence of this outlaw tradition, is a great potential for disrespect for the law in our society. An example of this is the street status that is accorded those gang members who have spent time in prison (Jankowski, 1991). Another example is the great rise in the jail and prison population in the United States since the 1980s while crime has continued unabated. This has occurred in the context of the drug war, with the increase in incarcerations substantially accounted for by drug offenses. It would make for a much safer and more stable society to diminish negative consequences of the outlaw hero mentality, which include some particularly destructive forms of drug misuse and violent criminality.

The most obvious way to bring about these changes is to diffuse the most repressive aspects of the drug war which create excitement about drugs and turn criminals into heroes. Even the drug which is most alarming (at the time of this writing), crack cocaine, might be demystified. Studies are starting to show that despite its notorious association with violent crimes, including homicide, the violence appears more due to the systemic problem of organizing a high-pressure illegal business, than to crack cocaine intoxication or addiction (Goldstein, 1989).
individuals who are prone to commit violence anyway find an attractive opportunity as crack cocaine dealers (Fagan, 1990).

A recent study of crack sellers, mainly African-American, found only a small proportion used crack themselves, as opposed to the marijuana, heroin and cocaine dealers who generally used the drugs they sell (D. Waldorf, 1992, in press). Familiarity with a drug that is too unmanageable may eventually breed some self-limiting factor in its use, even by serious drug habitués, as probably happened with PCP. This would be despite the drug promotion, indirectly done, by immediately responding to new and dangerous drugs with demon mythology and by repressive anti-drug campaigns that do not distinguish between more and less dangerous drugs.

An alternative approach would be to emphasize public education that discriminates between higher risk and lesser risk drug use, without scare tactics and a public health approach that stresses harm reduction rather than an exclusively prohibitionist approach.

To perpetuate the outlaw hero as a role model there needs to be some injustice which is readily apparent to some significant group within the society. This may be economic injustice or discrimination against, an ethnic group. In the 20th century, however, the injustice, which is little recognized politically, is especially the criminal penalties against drug users, who see their drug use as a matter of their own personal choice.

Two final points about the outlaw hero mythology. One has to do with the addicts in recovery and the reformed criminals. It is apparent that some individuals have a great need for drama and thrills in their life. Addiction or an outlaw lifestyle can fill that need. Often a successful recovery involves fulfilling that need in more socially acceptable ways. In the process of recovery, such as in the meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, outlaw hero stories abound of the drama and degradation of the addict experience. These shared experiences are the basis of mutual support and continued excitement. Interestingly, the original AA members, in the 1930s, came out the Roaring '20s with alcoholic "war stories" of Prohibition.

The final point has to do with the outlaw hero mythology being particularly, though not exclusively, a product of the society of the United States of America. While other nations and other cultures also have prominent outlaw heroes, this mythology has especially flourished in American society. Furthermore, as we have discussed, the outlaw mythology is expressed through American movies, popular music and other entertainment media, which are probably the country's strongest export. In this last part of the 20th century, the United States has
emerged as the most powerful nation, in terms of world politics. One of the ways in which it has most exercised this power is through influence on the drug policies of other countries. The American way of dealing with drugs, the rebellious and glamorized drug use along with puritanical and violent repression, may be the next most important cultural influence of the United States, after music and movies. The outlaw hero mythology is also being exported to other countries, in conjunction with American drug practices and entertainment.

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