

By Salim Muwakkil

**T**HE SPREADING CRACK-COCAINE EPIDEMIC IS confounding drug experts, distressing law enforcement officials and fueling arguments of conspiracy theorists who insist that somebody wants to wipe out African-Americans. In less than five years this cheap, smokable form of cocaine has ousted heroin as the drug of choice in many American inner-cities. In the process, it has accelerated the decay of those communities.

Researchers are discovering that crack is among the most addictive substances they've ever studied; many contend that users become addicted after only one ingestion, although the process usually takes a few months. Drug abuse experts also report that crack addiction is more intractable than other substance addictions and that crack abusers are harder to help than any other substance abusers.

Not only is crack a new order of danger, but its peculiar properties seem to target those communities already reeling from an unending series of dislocations. Thus, the drug has found its greatest welcome among the African-American—and, to a smaller extent, the Hispanic—underclass in America's inner-cities.

Crime follows crack even closer than it did heroin, according to police officials. In Brooklyn, N.Y., for example, police say crack now is a factor in half of all felony drug arrests, compared with none in 1985, the year crack first appeared in New York City. Police officials in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Houston, Dallas, New Orleans and Miami blame crack for their cities' climbing murder rates.

**Rock and role models:** The development and successful marketing of crack has generated windfall profits for all of those along the supply pipeline. This infusion of capital helps fuel the alternative economy that inner-city youth find so attractive.

And why not? After all, their prospects for legitimate employment in anything but low-paying service jobs are slight to nil. For too many inner-city families, a son employed in

**Crack has found its greatest welcome among the African-American—and, to a smaller extent, the Hispanic—underclass. "Crack addiction is most frequent in the communities where people feel less good about themselves," says one expert.**

## 'The fast food of drugs' poisons the inner-city

the underground economy is the difference between making it and homelessness. These young drug operatives—typically black males—become community role models or recidivists in the criminal justice cycle. Sometimes they are both. Either way, the African-American community counts the loss of wasted potential.

Researchers are also discovering that women are more susceptible to crack than to other street drugs. In fact, officials at New York City's Human Resources Administration say that over the past two years crack use has led to a 225 percent increase in child neglect and abuse cases involving drugs. During the same two-year period, the number of New York City babies born with drugs in their urine rose 284 percent.

Recent studies have found that a wide spectrum of ill effects can result from fetal exposure to cocaine, and that retarded growth in the womb and subtle neurological abnormalities can result from even one exposure. The findings suggest that cocaine addiction is causing an epidemic of damaged infants, most of whom are born into families least able to provide the necessary remedial support.

**What is crack?** In its basic form crack is prepared by mixing cocaine, baking soda and water. However, additional ingredients—substances like procaine, vitamin B-12, etc.—often are added to the basic formula as crack dealers seek to distinguish their product from others. Methamphetamine (speed) has become a popular mixing agent in recent months, according to a counselor at a New York City drug abuse program.

Most experts agree that crack entered the U.S. through Miami and Southern California in early 1985, arriving in New York City by the middle of that year. By early 1989 it had made an appearance in all but a few states.

"Crack is so addicting because it delivers such a concentrated dose, such a rush of cocaine to the brain's pleasure center," explains Dr. Bruce Rounsaville of the Yale School of Medicine. He is a member of a research team studying aspects of the crack epidemic for the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

"The faster the cocaine level is absorbed into the bloodstream and delivered to the brain, the greater the euphoria," Rounsaville adds. "And the most efficient way to raise the cocaine level in the blood is to smoke it." Rounsaville lists several other reasons for crack's popularity: "It's potent, very cheap [as little as \$5 a vial], portable—and it's profitable."

The Yale researcher also attributes crack's popularity to cocaine traffickers' astute marketing techniques. Cocaine use was declining among the traditional middle-class buyers, so they had to create a new market. Crack fit the bill perfectly because "it's sort of like the fast food of drugs," he notes dryly.

**Freebasing:** Smokable cocaine preparations have been used for many years, he contends, noting Richard Pryor's widely publicized run-in with cocaine freebase. "Although

they are manufactured by slightly different chemical processes, there are few essential differences between crack and freebase," Rounsaville contends. "Freebasing cocaine is time-consuming and, as Pryor's experience demonstrated, dangerous."

Manufacturing crack doesn't take as long and is not as volatile as freebasing—freebasing cocaine requires a flammable substance like ether to purify the cocaine—but it requires a substantial financial investment for the purchase of enough cocaine to make the process profitable. However, the youthful age of most crack abusers has alienated many established cocaine dealers who prefer an older, more affluent clientele. Thus, urban street gangs have become the dominant crack distributors in most large cities.

Although he's fully aware of the drug's devastating consequences, Rounsaville still marvels at the cocaine producers' marketing savvy. "Cocaine is a commodity, like everything else, and there's a worldwide glut," he says. "They had to come up with something to rekindle the interest of its largest market—the U.S."

Others attribute far less benign motives to the drug's developers. "The crack epidemic seems to be more than just an accident," says Rev. Herbert Daughtry of Brooklyn, president of African Peoples Christian Organization and the founder of an anti-crack group in his home borough.

"Among other things, crack is being used by some people as a deterrent to our liberation efforts. Much like the British did in China during the Boxer Rebellion," Daughtry is one of many African-American leaders who discern a conspiratorial hand behind the spread of crack (see accompanying story). "However," he adds, "crack would find no ready market if we as a people had not been robbed of our sense of personhood."

And that's what we have to work on regaining."

There have been a few successful attempts to stem the tide of crack in some communities, but by and large it's been a losing proposition. Demand for the drug is too great, the supply too large and the profits too substantial. The virulent growth of the crack trade has overwhelmed traditional law enforcement tactics, and police in many cities can only mount holding actions with periodic sweeps of neighborhoods known to host crack dealers.

**Crack cures?** Scientists researching crack's biochemical nature are seeking therapeutic chemicals to help ease abusers away from their fierce addiction to the substance. According to Rounsaville, they've had some minor successes with certain antidepressant drugs. "Cocaine addiction manifests itself in psychiatric symptoms, like depression, rather than the physical symptoms of heroin addiction," he says.

"Our experience is that we can help people stay away from crack if we can help them develop a stronger sense of self-esteem," says John Pierce, media coordinator for Day Top Village in New York City and a former crack addict. "Once you get hooked, your entire life revolves around trying to recapture the feeling of euphoria you had when you first hit your first blast. Crack addicts say they're 'on a mission.'" Pierce says he was "on a mission" for more than two years before bottoming out. "I stopped because I told myself I had to."

Although Pierce acknowledges the drug's powerful physiological effects, he believes the true cause of addiction is a lack of self-worth. "To me it's a simple equation," Pierce says. "Crack addiction is most frequent in the communities where people feel less good about themselves."

Pierce's prescription makes sense and is concordant with the views of many others in the field of drug rehabilitation. But as yet another debilitating substance cuts a swatch through the African-American community, leaving battered lives and squandered potential in its wake, it's not clear if anyone is listening. □

### Controversial black leader battles against crack

Sonny Carson is president of a group called Black Men's Movement Against Crack, a Brooklyn-based group devoted to strong-arming the crack epidemic out of the African-American community. Carson is a veteran of the black movement whose transformation from gang leader to community organizer was depicted in the cult film *The Education of Sonny Carson*. He is outspoken, some say intentionally outrageous, and he often comes down on the side of unabashed violence.

"Crack is the most vicious weapon ever mounted against us," Carson explains. "It's part of a genocidal war and we must be warlike in fighting it. Our organization, Black Men's Movement Against Crack, has one motto: death to all crack dealers. And believe me, brother, we're dead serious."

Carson says he was pushed on the warpath by the murder of his mother-in-law by a crack dealer in 1985, and he's decided to put his life on the line to end what he sees as a blatant attempt to kill the spirit of the black community. "Who

do you think arranged for all of this crack to get into the black community?" he asks. "Who arranged for those Colombian planes to land in Miami via Panama? You know who I'm talking about. Bush and Oliver North and the rest of them. Why are we so afraid to speak the truth? They want us dead, and all we're doing is sitting around and watching our communities die while their agents peddle death right under our noses."

Carson says that when he first started the anti-crack group the response was large, but support has subsequently dwindled. Several observers attribute that to Carson's intemperate tendencies. He says it's because most black males have "forgotten how to act like men. We've been relegated to the bottom of the heap for so long we've forgotten what it means to take responsibility for our communities. We've ceded them to our enemies. I'm going to fight the crack plague until my last breath is gone."

—S.M.



By Joel Bleifuss

## They think it can, they think it can...

Assuming Congress gives the go-ahead, the Pentagon will deploy its first mobile MX missile train in 1991. Air Force Col. Michael R. Boldrick, writing in the October 1988 *Trains* magazine, describes how such a system will work. The following is a condensed version of his article. "During times of grave national crisis the Strategic Air Command's four-star commander-in-chief will grab the fabled red telephone and bark out an order dispatching 25 trainloads of MXs from fortified bunkers on Air Force bases onto the nation's railroads and out of harm's way. Military personnel who are qualified to operate the missile train are on board the locomotive, but railroad employees are carried as pilots. Randomly spaced gunports can be opened to direct small-arms fire at any hostile force threatening the train. The same tightly woven silvery flash curtains that hang in B-52 bomber cockpits can be drawn tight, shielding the crew from the eye-searing fireballs of nuclear conflict. The first car is the security car. A senior non-commissioned officer mans a console, scanning video displays of the outside world, periodically shifting his attention to radar scopes scanning for would-be intruders. Train noise is muted by lead panels shielding the crew from radiation. In the small kitchen, six members of the security strike team warm old-fashioned K rations (now called MRE, for Meals Ready to Eat). Underneath, a holding tank ensures environmental laws are obeyed, even on a war train. Next to the galley, a three-person maintenance team whiles away the hours playing cards in the compact dining area. Side arms, holstered cowboy-style on each crew member's hip, underscore the gravity of missile duty. In the second car, which masquerades as a [freight car] a 71-foot-long 190,000-pound MX missile, with its aluminum-tipped titanium shroud pointing toward the security car, lies prone, tightly packed in its launch canister. Only by secret message, authorized by the president, can this capability be unleashed. When ordered, retaliation is swift. With what sounds like a shotgun blast, followed by a loud whoosh, the missile is ejected from the canister. Above the train the MX emerges from the white vapor, slows, and—for a breathtaking moment—hangs like a spent round. Suddenly, an orange flame shoots downward from the nozzle, and with a thundering roar the missile accelerates, arcing downrange toward the target." He goes on to describe the remaining five cars.

**Democracy's price:** Boldrick explains that rust and peeling paint will be applied to these missile trains that could one day ply the nation's 150,000 miles of rail. He writes: "The trains are designed to look as much as possible like everyday freight trains for three reasons. First, protection from saboteurs. The Soviets have highly trained and effective teams to infiltrate enemy territory. Some probably are already present as 'deep' agents masquerading as Americans in various walks of life until activated for operation... Second, protection from anti-war activists... Third, protection from satellite detection... Finally, are railfans a problem? Knowledgeable consultants have apprised the Air Force of the depth and breadth of the hobby, but it appears that military planners don't consider it a major problem. There is a threat from what the Air Force calls HUMINT, or human intelligence, and in the case of MX it could prove troublesome if a nationwide band of railfans was willing to sell information to the Soviets. But that might be the price of a democracy. We must assume railfans are patriotic."

## Waste not, want not

People who live near the Amelia, La., plant of the waste-recycling firm Marine Shale Processors have long claimed that toxic emissions and leaks from the site are behind a rare form of childhood cancer that has afflicted several area children. So many residents were pleased when Louisiana's state government took action against Marine Shale late last month. Steven Watsky—who filed an extensive report on Marine Shale in the Oct. 5, 1988, edition of *In These Times*—reports that the state has fined the firm \$1.75 million. The far-ranging penalty assessment and compliance order, issued by the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), charges Marine Shale accepted hazardous waste that the firm knew had no recyclable value—a violation of its permit as a recycler of the toxic substances. The company also was ordered to remove all storage tanks and containers holding hazardous



A sign reading "Land, Justice, Liberty" marks the entrance to the land occupied in Tierra Amarilla.

## Mexican-American War still simmers in New Mexico

TIERRA AMARILLA, N.M.—A Mexican flag—a reminder of roots and reasons—flaps in the winter breeze. The roofs of barbed-wired bunkers peek out from under the snow. A poster of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, reading *Tierra O Muerte* (land or death), hangs on a tree near a newly constructed log cabin. "The struggle of liberation is based on land," says Pedro Arechuleta, a former construction worker who quit his job, picked up a gun and joined his armed *compañeros* in one of the most publicized land-grant disputes in New Mexico history.

Arechuleta and 14 other men have formed a council around the dispute and have been camping out in shifts for over nine months on a 500-acre tract of land they claim is theirs by virtue of a century-old land grant. The government says the land belongs to Vista del Brazos, an Arizona partnership that has yet to disclose what exactly it plans to do with the land.

The Tierra Amarilla land dispute has come to symbolize a community struggling to retain a few acres of land they and their families have lived on for over a century. Like so many small northern New Mexican communities, Tierra Amarilla (Yellow Land) has been targeted by developers envisioning dollars generated by vacationing yuppies and alternative-lifestyle-seeking New-Age families. Easy allusions to John Nichols' *Milagro Beanfield War* aside, in this community, blueprints for condos and ski lodges cast a shadow over small adobe homes and farms, wooden shacks, trailers, herds of sheep and roving geese.

The roots of the battle go back to 1832, when the Mexican government conveyed the 60,000-acre Tierra Amarilla Land Grant to settlers in the area. Sixteen years later, the historic treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

ended the Mexican-American War and ceded the land to the U.S. on the condition that existing land claims would be respected.

According to Malcom Ebright, author of *The Tierra Amarilla Land Grant: A History of Chicanery*, Congress in 1860 ruled that the land covered in the grant was not communal property, but was owned by one man, Manuel Martinez, the original petitioner for the grant. Ebright says the Martinez family began granting deeds to families settling the land in 1861. Many Tierra Amarilla residents still hold the original copies of those deeds. But in 1874, the Martinezes also began selling interests in the grant to the U.S. attorney for New Mexico, Thomas Catron. Catron later secured the U.S. government land



patent to the grant and in the 1880's succeeded in transferring to himself title to almost all of the land. Since then, state and federal judges, in a series of court actions, have ruled the older deeds invalid.

Amador Flores, a Tierra Amarilla rancher and the first to protest the ownership claims of Vista del Brazos, had written himself and another man a deed to the land in 1968 based on an old family deed and his Mexican descent. In the early '80s he asserted his claim following the purchase of 1,900 acres of the original land grant by Vista del Brazos.

In a hearing last summer, a Santa Fe judge ruled that Flores had no right to occupy the tract. Flores—who was not present at the hearing and claims he was never informed it would take place—was later arrested and jailed after he publicly burned the judge's injunction ordering him off the land on which he and his family have lived for 21 years.

Flores was released from jail on the condition that he and those under his control abide by a permanent injunction that ordered them off of the land. He agreed to the stipulation and has not set foot on the land since his release. But his father, Arechuleta and several others have remained, prepared to pick up their semiautomatic deer-hunting rifles in the event of a shootout with the police.

"The Constitution says we have the right to bear arms," says Arechuleta. "We have rights to protect our lives and our community. We're willing to go as far as we have to go." Adds Daniel Aguilar, another member of the council, "We took an armed position because history tells us the courts will never act in our favor. If we came in here peacefully, we would have been on the road in half an hour."

Family and community members bring food and supplies to the men, and financial and moral backing comes from people across the U.S. and throughout Central America. "We took this position as a struggle of our people for the survival of our community," says Arechuleta. Some community members consider the council's actions extreme. But council member Aguilar believes those opposed to the armed defense have financial interests in the development of the land. "The land struggle is the worst struggle there is," he says. "It divides brothers."

All of the members of the council say they are willing to negotiate with the developers. "We fly the Mexican flag because we are Mexicans—we are not Chicano or Hispano—we are not Spanish," says Arechuleta.

He would like to see the land re-