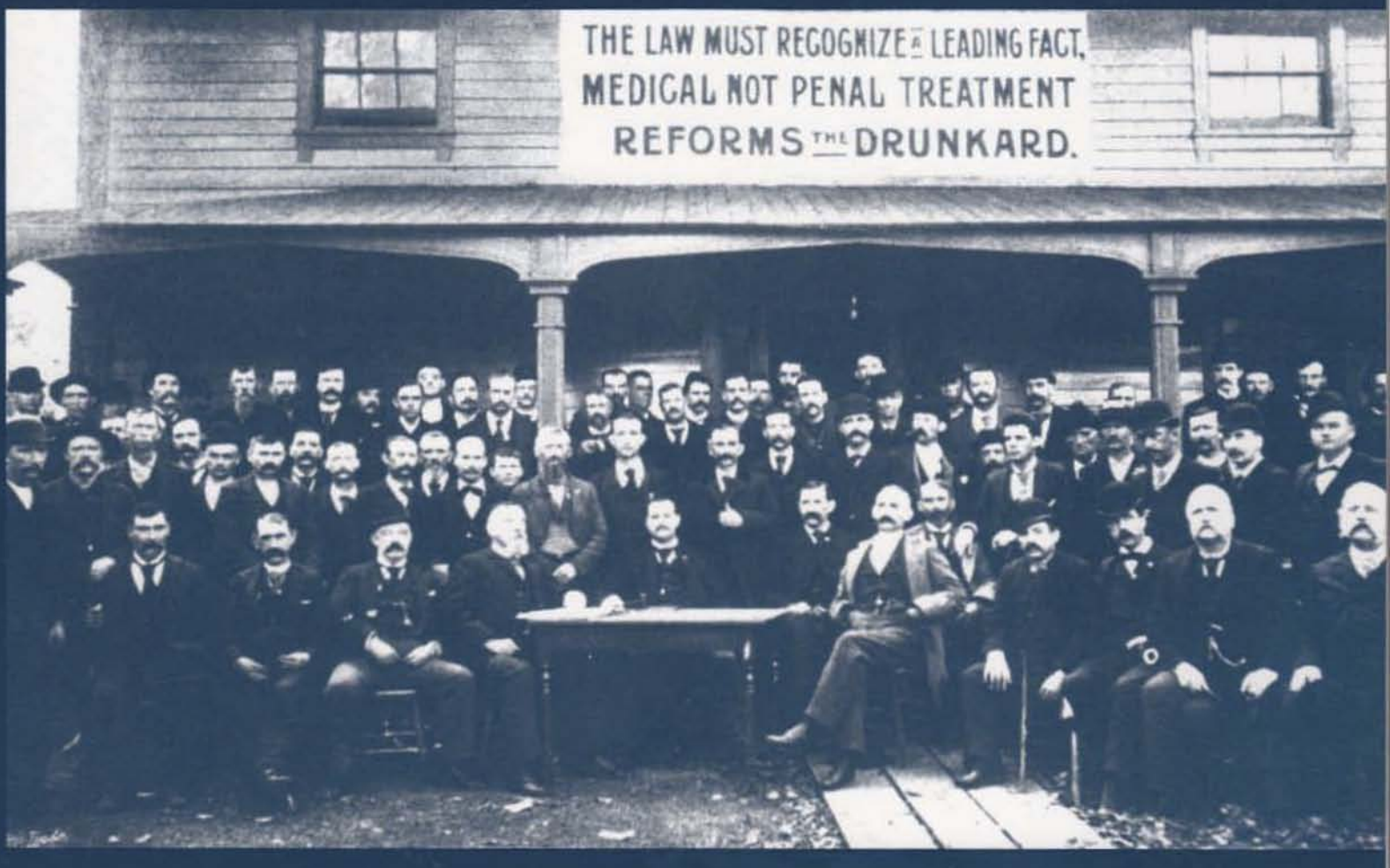
SLAYING THE DRAGON

The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America



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form oneself from a dope-peddling parasite to a person of honor and a servant of one's community and one's people. Many thousands of young African-American men have followed Malcolm's pathway in utilizing Islam—both the Afrocentric Nation of Islam and traditional Islam—as a religious pathway of addiction recovery.

The Nation of Islam experienced many tribulations and changes: charges of moral impropriety against Elijah Muhammed in 1963; Malcolm X's split from the movement in 1964; Malcolm X's assassination in 1965; continued violent clashes and ideological rifts within the Nation in the early 1970s; the death of Elija Muhammed in 1975; the collapse of the Nation of Islam and the creation of the World Community of al-Islam in the West by Elijah Muhammed's son, Wallace Muhammed, in 1976; and the revival of the Nation of Islam in 1978 under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan.[203]

What did not change through these many tribulations was the Nation's invitation to addicts to become part of its community. Some addicts continue to be drawn to the Nation and use its prohibition of drugs (including alcohol and tobacco), its moral code of conduct, and its demands for self-improvement as a framework for personal change. The Nation has been particularly influential in reaching addicts in prison. There are currently more than 140,000 Muslim inmates in state and federal prisons of the United States.[204]

Religious Pathways to Recovery: Religion-oriented programs of addiction recovery share many elements:

- the submission of individual will to a higher authority,
- isolation of the addict from the culture of addiction,
- an emphasis on conversion and rebirth,
- a clearly defined rationale for radical abstinence that generally involves two motifs: the sinfulness of intoxication/addiction and respect for the body as the temple of God,
- a reformulation of personal identity and a reconstruction of one's daily lifestyle and social world, and
- acts of service—carrying the message—to the unsaved.[205]

Religiously oriented therapeutic communities, like their secular counterparts, provide a closed world that buffers the newly recovering addict from re-exposure to the drug culture. These communities give the recovering neophyte a new identity, a new social world, food, shelter, clothing, employment, and a sense of participation in a meaningful cause. Critics of religious approaches to addiction recovery suggest that 1) religious ecstasy and all-encompassing religious affiliation can themselves have addictive qualities that prevent individual maturation and mainstream social functioning, that 2) the placement of people without histories of drug use in state-supported religious programs constitutes a misuse of public funds, and that 3) religious programs suffer from the lack of professionally trained staff and the lack of evaluation data to back up their claims of success.[206]

Narcotics Anonymous

The idea of the potential application of A.A.'s program of recovery to people addicted to drugs other than alcohol surfaced within A.A.'s first ten years. A physician interning at the federal narcotics hospital in Lexington wrote to the A.A. *Grapevine* in 1944, calling for a "Hopheads Corner" within A.A. While Bill Wilson warned A.A. members about the dangers of "goofballs" in a 1945 *Grapevine* article, in 1958 he cautioned A.A. membership about the need for A.A. to "*avoid distractions and multi-purpose activity.*" Regarding the question of whether or not people addicted to drugs other than alcohol could become A.A. members, Bill stated clearly that "no non-alcoholic, whatever his affiliation, can be converted into an alcoholic A.A. member."[207] Although A.A.'s position excluded narcotics addicts without alcohol problems from participation in A.A., it left open the possibility of an adaptation of the A.A. program for people addicted to drugs other than alcohol.

Beginnings: Modern addiction texts variably place the date of the founding of Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) between 1947 and 1953. The reason for this confusion is that there was more than one effort to organize A.A.-like support structures for addicts. The two most significant of these starts were in New York and California, but the origin story of N.A. begins, not on either coast, but in the South.

The story begins with Houston S., who got sober in A.A. in Montgomery, Alabama in 1944, then moved to the Lexington, Kentucky area three years later. Houston later sponsored a man who was addicted to alcohol and other drugs, and who eventually was sent to the federal narcotics hospital in Lexington. Houston called upon the medical director of the hospital, Dr. Victor Vogel, and suggested that initiating a group like A.A. specifically for addicts might prove a great benefit. With Vogel's approval, Houston volunteered to launch such a group inside the Lexington facility.

The first meeting of the new group was held on February 16, 1947. They called themselves Addicts Anonymous.[208] Many Addicts Anonymous members who left Lexington were successfully helped by local chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous in their various local communities.[209] Addicts Anonymous meetings continued at Lexington into the 1960s. Communication with members who had left Lexington came through an Addicts Anonymous newsletter, *The Key*. Addicts Anonymous groups also spread to the Ft. Worth public health hospital, as well as to other federal prisons. In 1949, the first organization called Narcotics Anonymous was officially begun in New York City by Danny C., following his eighth stay in Lexington. Danny C. had been exposed to Addicts Anonymous meetings while at Lexington, but chose to call his community-based group Narcotics Anonymous to avoid any confusion over the existence of two "A.A.s."

New York City's first N.A. meetings convened in the Salvation Army's Lowenstein's Cafeteria in Hell's Kitchen. Major Dorothy Berry of the Salvation Army was N.A.'s first patron, providing not only meeting space, but also N.A.'s first office. Jerome Ellison's 1954 *Saturday Evening Post* article reported that 90 members of N.A. had achieved stable, drug-free living since N.A.'s founding.[210] New York N.A. meetings continued under Danny's leadership until his death in 1956.[211] Following Danny's death, leadership within N.A. was provided by Rae L. and non-addicts like Father Dan Egan, who came to be known as the "Junkie Priest." The New York N.A. group remained very small, experienced little spread outside of New York City (with the exception of Cleveland), and dissipated in the early 1970s with the passage of harsh anti-drug laws and the death of Rae.

Meanwhile, on the west coast, another birth of N.A. had already taken place in what would mark the origin of N.A. as it exists today. Support groups for addicts in Los Angeles with names like Habit Forming Drugs (HFD) and Hypes and Alcoholics (HYAL) rose and fell in the early 1950s, until a group started in July, 1953 demonstrated its staying power. Among the participants in this group was Jimmy K.—widely considered to be the founder of N.A. as it exists today.[212]

There were significant differences between the modes of operation in New York and California N.A. groups. New York N.A. members, mostly heroin addicts, had little concern about alcohol and little contact with A.A. In contrast, three of the California founders of N.A. were dually addicted, brought in prior affiliations with A.A., and emphasized strict adherence to the steps and traditions adapted from the A.A. program. It took some 20 years for what would become the N.A. program to gel. Some groups were highly unstable during these early years, and group practices varied considerably. Some early meetings were called "Rabbit Meetings" because they jumped from site to site each week. While N.A. has always pledged its members to abstinence from all drugs including alcohol, that message was not consistently practiced in some early N.A. groups. There were even some reports of alcoholic beverages being consumed at N.A. meetings.[213]

After nearly dying in the late 1950s, N.A. slowly solidified its program of recovery and its operating structure. The details of this history have been recorded in excruciating detail by Bob Stone, former executive Director of the World Service Office of N.A., in his book, *My Years with Narcotics Anonymous*. N.A. was revived in 1960, beginning with four earlier N.A. members. It was often Jimmy K. and an assortment of sympathetic A.A. members who picked up the near-dying group and breathed life back into it again and again. Slowly, groups began to stabilize and grow from five meetings in 1964, to 38 meetings in 1971, to 225 meetings in 1976, to 2,966 meetings in 1984, to 7,638 meetings in 1987, to more than 15,000 by 1990. N.A. membership grew from 200 at the end of 1960 to more than 250,000 active members in 1990.[214]

A 1989 poll of more than 5,000 N.A. members provided a demographic profile of the organization's membership. The majority (48%) of N.A. members are between 30 and 45, 37% are between 20 and 30, 11% are under 20, and 4% are over 45. Of those surveyed, 64% were men and 36% were women. Fifty percent of surveyed members reported that they attend at least four N.A. meetings per week.[215]

N.A.'s structure and program mirror A.A.'s. The steps and traditions of N.A. are those of A.A., with only minor word changes. One subtlety in N.A.'s adaptation of the A.A. program is worthy of note. In N.A.'s first step, there is a declaration of powerlessness over addiction, rather than over a particular drug. This opened the door for the inclusion of all drugs, including alcohol, within N.A.'s definition of "clean and sober." Organizational structure, meeting formats, literature format, sponsorship rituals, and even slogans are similar between the two fellowships. Similarly, NarAnon and Families Anonymous are N.A.'s equivalent to Al-Anon.

N.A. faced many obstacles that were different from those faced by A.A., and these differences may account for the lack of parallel growth during N.A.'s early years. Duncan cites three early problems experi-

enced by N.A.: 1) the problem of members getting high together after spending time in the meeting recounting episodes of drug use, 2) the presence of pushers and undercover agents at the meetings, and 3) the lack of sufficient personal sobriety and maturity to sustain the functioning of the group.[216]

Although N.A. later emerged as a significant resource for recovering addicts, during the 1950s this resource was not available to most addicts in the U.S. In fact, few resources of any kind were available to addicts in the 1950s. In 1957, Charles Winick alleged that not one addiction treatment program in the country integrated hospitalization, psychiatric treatment, and rehabilitation services.[217] That lack spawned some radical experiments in the treatment of drug addiction. The most remarkable of these experiments was Synanon.

Synanon: The Birth of Ex-Addict-Directed Therapeutic Communities

The roots of the idea of a "therapeutic community" can be traced from the "moral treatment" philosophy that pervaded the 19th-century inebriate and insane asylums to the pioneering work of Maxwell Jones in the early 1950s. Jones wrote about how the total resources of a psychiatric institution had to be organized into a therapeutic community. The therapeutic community's organizational antecedents could also be said to include the Oxford Groups and Alcoholics Anonymous.[218] But the history of therapeutic communities for the treatment of drug addiction begins with a man, Charles Dederich; and an institution, Synanon. The story of the man and the institution are inseparable—a fact that in itself is an important part of the story of the rise and fall of Synanon as a pioneering force in addiction treatment. As this story unfolded, no one could have imagined that Synanon would later be depicted as a paramilitary cult and that Charles Dederich would be charged with conspiracy to commit murder. Such are the twists and turns in the story of Synanon—the beginning of ex-addict-directed therapeutic communities.[219]

Charles Edwin Dederich was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1913, into a family that had known alcoholism on both its paternal and maternal sides. In 1944, he contracted meningitis, which resulted in a sustained partial paralysis of his face and hearing loss in one ear. Fearing that he might be dying, Dederich divorced his first wife and escaped to California, where he remarried and worked as a salesman and machinist. His drinking, which had worsened during the late 1940s and 1950s, took him through his second marriage and out of a job at Douglas Aircraft.

Dederich's addiction to alcohol and Benzedrine led him to A.A. in 1956, where he became a self-described "frantic and fanatical Alcoholics Anonymous fellow."[220] The following year, Dederich took LSD as part of a University of California experiment on the use of LSD in the treatment of alcoholism. The LSD experience provoked an upheaval of emotions and a newfound confidence. A few months later, Chuck Dederich decided to make helping alcoholics his life mission.

Using the promise of a year's supply of unemployment checks, Dederich began to collect an assortment of down-and-out alcoholics, who stayed at or gathered at his home in Ocean Park, California for discussions. In addition to A.A. meetings, he began to experiment with a variety of group formats that ranged from discussions of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on self-reliance to confrontation tactics that used ridicule and profanity to batter away at the elaborate defense structures of just-sobered alcoholics. These meetings, held three times a week, were the beginnings of a new approach to treatment and recovery. Almost immediately, Chuck announced that something important was being discovered here—something that was going to make history. He became more convinced of this when the first addicts were drawn into the circle and actually stopped using drugs.

As the number of addicts increased, a power struggle ensued that resulted in his throwing out most of the "alkies" and severing ties with A.A. Synanon —a therapeutic commune—was born out of this struggle in 1958.

Synanon's first home was a storefront in Ocean Park, California. Chuck constantly told the fledgling membership that Synanon was going to become as famous as Coca-Cola. He was overweight, disfigured, and a failure at most everything he had tried. But he could hypnotize others through the sheer power of his personality and his voice. Later, asked how he had organized a thousand criminal addicts into a self-directed community, he replied simply, "It's all done with words."

Synanon: Early Days: This strange assortment of addicts led by an overweight, non-drinking alcoholic whose greatest desire was to be a "big man" and "make history" went through enormous ups and downs in its early struggle for existence.[221] The lack of any funding for this experiment made communal sharing of meager resources a necessity. As they grew, they faced great community resistance to their presence. Zoning wars raged and brought Synanon its first national publicity in *Time*, *The Nation*, and *Life*.