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The Evolution of Drug Dealing in the 1960s

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NOTE: The original 1,000+ page manuscript for *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* had to be cut by more than half before its first publication in 1998. This is an edited excerpt that was deleted from the original manuscript.

When states made the possession and sale of LSD illegal, laboratories within the then-burgeoning illicit drug culture began to quickly fill the void by producing LSD and a variety of other hallucinogens. Many of those who began to grow or import marijuana or manufacture and distribute LSD did so more as an act of cultural or political defiance than as an economic and criminal enterprise. There was in these early days a degree of separation between what was perceived as a cultural exchange of drugs and what would have been viewed as exploitive drug trafficking.

The most frequent drug transaction was between persons who bought small amounts of marijuana or LSD and passed parts of this purchase along to their friends without any motive for profit. Some early

dealers were glorified in this new polydrug culture, perhaps none more than the man known as "Owsley."

No one outside of Sandoz Laboratory was more famous for their skills in the manufacture of LSD than was Augustus

Owsley Stanley III. Beginning in 1965, he became the most famous "street chemist" ever, turning out an unending litany of products beginning with methamphetamine, then LSD and then other varieties of hallucinogens. Owsley's product was known by such exotic names as Blue Dots, Green Flats, White Lightning, Purple Haze--names taken from their color, form or effect--and for an "honest 250 micrograms in every tab" (Perry, p. 81). His product was so consistent in a drug culture becoming known for misrepresentation and adulteration that

dealers everywhere peddled their product as "genuine Owsley."

Owsley was also known for marketing his product through free samples, particularly to band members, and for controlling the retail price of LSD which he wanted to keep at \$2 per tab. Jay Stevens summarized Owsley's mission as follows: "He was going to save the world by making the purest and cheapest and most abundant LSD possible" (Stevens, 1987, p. 203). Owsley was arrested in 1967 and sentenced to prison. His name stands as a cultural artifact of the 1960s drug culture.

References

Perry, C. (1985). *The Haight-Ashbury: A history*. NY: Vintage Books.

Stevens, J. (1987). *Storming heaven: LSD and the American dream*. NY: Harper & Row, Publishers.