Points: the Blog of the Alcohol and Drugs History Society
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Points: The Blog of the Alcohol and Drugs History Society

Starting Points
Posted on January 23, 2011 by trind

Points (n.) 1. marks of punctuation. 2. something that has position but not extension, as the intersection of two lines. 3. salient features of a story, epigram, joke, etc.: he hit the high points. 4. (slang; U.S.) needles for intravenous drug use.

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Victorian Woman on Drugs, Part 3: Visual Representations
Posted on April 18, 2012 by kia

Points is pleased to present the third installment of guest blogger Kristina Aiken's four-part series on women's drug use in Victorian England. Today, Kristina looks at — among other things — visual representations of women's drug use and the male gaze.

In my last post, I looked at autobiographical writing by women that reveals some surprisingly humorous and positive attitudes toward drug experimentation. Last week's writings, however, were not nearly as pervasive as certain visual images — many of them used in
Our Stats Page on a Random Day
Herding Khat

On January 11th the BBC reported that the Netherlands government would ban the use of khat—the mild, leaf-based stimulant produced largely in East Africa. The ban came as something as a surprise, given the liberal Dutch approach to cannabis and the ubiquity of “Coffee Shops” selling joints in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. Why this apparent inconsistency? The answer becomes clear in the comments of the immigration minister, Gerd Leers, who oddly enough, announced the ban. According to Leers’s comments on Dutch radio, “I’m involved in the ban because it appears to cause serious problems, particularly in the Somali community.” He went on to claim that 10% of Somali men in the Netherlands were “badly affected” by khat consumption. According to the minister, “they are lethargic and refuse to co-operate with the government or take responsibility for themselves or their families.”

Khat (often called miraa in East Africa) is the only Africa-produced drug to develop any kind of international market. It is chewed on a large scale in Ethiopia, Somalia and elsewhere in East Africa, where truck drivers use it to remain alert. I first encountered it in the 1970s, when I was briefly stranded on the Kenya-Tanzania border and some friendly drivers tutored me in its use. I can’t say that it did much for me, except keep me awake enough to snap a ride to Nairobi. Although I didn’t get hooked, interest in khat has increased rapidly since then. As East Africans emigrated to Europe and North America, they carried the khat habit with them. Scholars soon followed that lead. The khat bible is...
Recurring Feature: The Points Interview
particular noteworthy. “A Female Junkie Speaks,” which appeared in the collection Notes from the Second Year, a volume that might well be subtitled “greatest hits of women’s liberation,” is also difficult to obtain. Edited by Shulamith Firestone, Notes collects various writings by the group New York Radical Women; it appeared in limited numbers in early 1970 and has never been reprinted. Key essays within it form the canon of the movement and are widely anthologized—Pat Moynard’s “The Politics of Housework,” Anne Koedt’s “The Myth of the Vaginal orgasm,” Carol Hanisch’s “The Personal is Political,” and Kathie Sarachild’s “A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising,” (a later version is available here) to name just a few.

“A Female Junkie Speaks,” however, is not a canonical text, despite its subject’s facility with key concepts in women’s liberation. In this short “interview” with feminist poet and NYRW member Lucille Iverson, she articulates white middle-class culture’s propensity for the symbolic annihilation of women, theorizes the normative female subject position as a form of prostitution, and endorses women’s consciousness-raising and female community as key antidotes to oppression—and addiction. But late in the piece, “Susan” notes her consciousness-raising group’s negative response to her admission that she is a drug addict; the text is frustratingly silent on what prompts the members’ “resent[ment].” It concludes with a hopeful call to radical feminists to actively engage with “female junkies.” Exactly why that call was not heeded will, I hope, be the subject of future posts.

A Female Junkie Speaks
Interview by Lucille Iverson

Susan, the girl speaking here, has been a drug-user and junkie off and on for almost ten years; she has recently joined Women’s Liberation.

No one can be liberated alone....

To come home and be all alone, man, I can’t stand that.

I was turned on by an article in the Village Voice by Vivian Gornick, and a few days after that I ran into a friend who told me about a consciousness-raising group forming.
Weekend Reads: Trayvon Martin Edition

Geraldo Rivera made a truly catastrophic appearance on Fox & Friends last week, when the man famous for finding bugkis in Al Capone’s vault felt the need to weigh in on the most tempestuous news story of the moment. When asked about the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, Rivera launched into a tirade denouncing the malevolent force that caused Martin’s death. He wasn’t referring to the actual shooter, George Zimmerman, who gunned down the unarmed black youth, but instead blamed hooded sweatshirts for Martin’s passing.

Rivera made the rather case that Trayvon was a “gangsta wannabe,” pointing out that “everyone that ever stuck up a convenience store” was wearing a hoodie. Even though Rivera subsequently apologized (if you want to call it that) for his call for young black men to accede to racial profiling, his stupifying comments became a key talking point for conservative pundits, Zimmerman’s staunchest defenders. You don’t wear a hoodie, the reasoning goes, unless you want to be considered a “gangsta.” Certainly there aren’t any troubling implications to that line of reasoning.

It seems that the central rationale of the now-infamous hoodie argument is the idea that, if the public understands Martin as having “asked for it,” rather than having been the victim of an attack from a prejudiced quasi-vigilante, the affair will not raise any troubling questions about gun ownership, concealed firearms, and the sort of “self-protection” so cherished by gun enthusiasts. Those who are primarily motivated by a desire for unhindered gun ownership must, in particular, find a way to show that the events of February 26 do not throw into question Florida’s stand-your-ground law, which