



## Introduction

It would appear that the United States is in the worst opiate crisis that it has ever faced, yet the prevailing view of what lead to this crisis and the degree of its severity does not match what historical and current literature would suggest.



## Methods

A review of the literature was done including historical works and current medical research examining the history of opiate use in the United States.

## Findings

- **18th to Mid-19th Century**  
Opium used primarily as a medical treatment. Harsh, racially-charged regulations on smoking opium confined its use to Chinese immigrants.
- **Late 19th Century**  
The medicinal use of opiates is the singular, pivotal reason for opiate addiction in the late 19th century. Primarily wealthy southern white women were afflicted by opiate addiction. As a result, opiates were minimally regulated.
- **20th Century**  
Opiate of choice for US addicts started as morphine followed by heroin, mostly due to changes in legal access to other opiates. Strict narcotic legislation was the result of societal inequalities and Caucasian conservatism.

## Discussion

Society's attitude towards addiction depends on who is addicted. The current opioid epidemic is considered a "crisis" because the people who are affected by it are disproportionately middle-class, Caucasian Americans. Opiate addiction is a symptom of a larger societal issue.

## Future Research

Future research should focus on how racial, ethnic, and gender inequalities in the United States may have contributed to historical and current trends in opiate use and misuse.

## Selected References