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ENG 100

**The War on the War on Drugs**

Drug use has always been a prominent problem within the United States of America. This problem has caused many “wars” fought over the issue. These wars are typically just a police crackdown on drugs, as well as new legislation being passed to combat these issues. However, these have shown to not be very effective, and have had a hidden meaning to them. Not only are these “wars” used to boost either popularity in office, or to bolster popularity in elections. So not only have these been used to bolster popularity, they have also been known to change legislation in ways to discriminate against other races, as well as pushing mass incarceration. This issue, especially recently, has been a hotly debated one within the country, with sides arguing that we need even more legislation to fight against this drug scourge, and others arguing that no drugs should be illegal. This makes the core issue finding the sweet spot for the country to effectively combat drug use, while being fair to all citizens of the United States. In the end drug legislation must be changed, and hopefully in a way that lessens many of the penalties for both possession, and use of drugs.

A good presentation against the war on drugs was presented in the movie “Where to Invade Next,” this movie tackled many issues such as the prison system in the United States, and how the United States prosecutes bankers; by going to different counties and seeing how they handle the same exact issues. One place that was visited was Portugal, to see how they handled the issue of drug use in their country. They have a very interesting almost alien way of tackling the issue, in which they had eliminated all penalties on both possession, and use of all drugs. This is an interesting way to look at the issue, seeing as the United States had been so forceful on their approach, as opposed to how Portugal handles it. This solution has proven to be very effective for their country because the amount of drug use declined after the legislation was passed in the country. This seems like it would be a great idea to bring over to the United States because it really should help with drug use in the country, as well as making it so not as many resources must be allocated to this “war” they have going. However, some people may argue that Portugal is a much smaller country than the United States, and while this is a valid point; those who oppose must look at the fact the United States is a large country made of essentially smaller counties. This means that this legislation can be handed down, and handled by not only each state, but the counties, and towns within each state; making it possible to apply the legislation of smaller countries to the United States.

While it may seem like presidents always want to solve this issue, it never seems like a main priority of theirs. While on the campaign candidates always promise the issue will be tackled as soon as they get in office, this rarely happens. This issue is highlighted perfectly in the article “Emergency in Name Only” by “Jessica Hamzelou.” At first, she acknowledges that president trump has at least shown that he knows of the crisis in this statement:

“In October last year, President Donald Trump acknowledged the scale of the crisis by declaring a public health emergency. This temporary emergency period lasted only 90 days, and expired on 23 January. A renewal has already been announced, but during the first emergency period, the administration has achieved little, if anything.”

However, in a statement later in the article she also disputes how concerned he is about the crisis.

“In December, the Trump administration responded to the commission's November report with a list of planned and ongoing actions, including expanding access to naloxone and funding development of new pain treatments. But much of this is continuing Obama-era policy, and barely anything new has been done since the emergency was declared.”

This is a clear indication of how many presidential candidates always use this issue as an easy source for votes during their campaign, however when it finally gets to the point where they must act on it they always find a way to slip, and almost completely ignore their promises. However, if the issue itself was solved, the United States would no longer have the secondary issue of having to deal with presidential candidates lying about how they want to solve it, and we can base the opinions of candidates on more important issues, further stressing the need to fix the issue itself.

The war on drugs is a term that many presidents, and candidates have used to simplify many of their actions taken against drugs. However, as time passes the meaning of the phrase “The war on drugs” has begun to lose the meaning behind it; mostly because it is now a blanket term used to justify many actions that may even be loosely involved with drugs. The article “A Flexible War” written by “John Lindsay-Poland” has an excellent statement that sums up why the term is no longer what it used to be.

“These days, the “war on drugs” no longer represents the primary discourse used to rationalize U.S. military involvement in Latin America. It’s a phrase that has become increasingly discredited both at home and abroad as ineffective and harmful. Instead, U.S. politicians have turned their focus toward how best to suppress the arrival of refugees and other migrants at the U.S. border, while U.S. military commanders testify about the threat of “transnational organized crime,” a term that is used to encapsulate much more than drug trafficking alone.”

This gives an excellent view into how “The war on drugs” is no longer a war on drugs but instead on the ideals of a president or congress; and how the term is now used primarily to justify actions that almost have no place at all with this “War on Drugs.”

Ever since the introduction of this “War on Drugs” people have always hotly debated the success of it all. There are many viewpoints on this all the way from it being an incredible program, that has stopped a lot of drug use in the United States, to others saying that it has had next to no impact on the country. The article “Is the War on Drugs Succeeding?” by “Robb London” gives some excellent views on the ups and downs of the “War on Drugs.” He starts with a very powerful quote that makes the readers really think about how well the program is going.

### Drug use is down over the last 25 years, but a half million Americans are in prison for drug offenses. How should success be measured?

### This is really lending to the idea that even though statistically speaking the “War on Drugs” is working, it does not mean that in actual practice it is working. This is because the use may have decreased, but the amount of incarceration for very petty crimes, such as only having a small amount of marijuana on someone’s person has gone up. This presents the ethical dilemma of knowing where to draw the line, and what steps should be taken next to avoid putting even more people in prison. Luckily London also gave an interesting point on this topic in the same article.

### “But Nadelmann rejects the claim that decriminalization of marijuana is a Trojan horse for a broader legalization agenda. With regard to decriminalizing other drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines, he says, “A majority of my organization and my board and the drug-policy reform movement as a whole are basically very cautious. We basically don’t support that.” But, he adds, he and his group support an elimination of prison time or severe punishment for possession of small quantities for personal use.”

### This offers a solution to the mass incarceration of U.S. citizens, by decriminalizing use of marijuana, and allowing people to now carry small quantities for their personal use; which contrasts to how it would have worked in the past where these small quantities would have put people in prison. Seeing as Nadelmann is also part of a larger organization that is pushing for drug reform, he shows concern that this will allow for more drug legalization, but pushes away any doubts by showing that the organization is also concerned with this issue, and that they want to take a more cautious approach to the issue itself.

### A popular point of contention between people who believe in the “War on Drugs,” and the people who do not believe, is the mass incarceration of U.S. citizens created by the “War” While many may write this argument off as nonsense, it realty has a big impact on what should be done with drug legislation in the United States. Just because something is illegal now, does not mean it has to say that way, especially when it is used to push political agendas forward, or to put people in prison who do not belong there. There have been many cases which this has shown to be true, such as the prohibition where alcohol was made illegal before being revoked later. “Lauren Carroll” highlights this issue in her article “How the War on Drugs Affected Incarceration Rates.” In this article she shows some of how prison sentences are being used to push political agendas, instead of helping citizens. This is especially highlighted in some of her quotes such as:

### “Research also suggests that when black and white people engage in the same illegal activity and have the same criminal history, black people are more likely to be arrested, more likely to face tougher charges and more likely to receive longer sentences than whites.”

### She then proceeds to back this up with statistics in another quote.

### “In a 2014 article, Rothwell found that the war on drugs has significantly impacted black people. He found that white people are more likely than black people to sell drugs and about as likely to consume them. Even so, black people are 3.6 times more likely than white people to be arrested for selling drugs and 2.5 times more for drug possession.”

### This means that the “War on Drugs” being used to protect U.S. citizens is actually being used as a tool to strip minorities of their rights, like has happened many times in the past. This again shows the need for reform in the criminal justice system, and drug legislation within the country.

### While at the conception of the “War on Drugs” it may have been something necessary the true purpose is now shown to the public. It is now being used as a tool to push political agendas, and as a tool for discrimination, as well as being used to gain some sort of leverage in political campaigns. While a concrete solution may not be present quite yet there are many steps that can be taken to side step the devastating implications of this “War” such as the decriminalization of minor drugs such as marijuana. While the U.S. may not need to take as much of a laid-back approach to the issue, such as Portugal has, there is still an urgent need to change how the system works as a whole, and to possibly even re-evaluate the criminal justice system, because the United States is supposed to have “Liberty, and Justice for All.”

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