

## AGAINST THE LEGALIZATION OF DRUGS

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[Assignment: Choose a controversial topic for your essay, one that has two clearly distinct sides. You must choose one side and argue for or against that position.]

(1) The use of mind-altering narcotics has enthralled humankind throughout history. The ancient Egyptians drank wine and other alcoholic beverages, as did the Romans and Jews during the time of Christ. There is documented evidence that many seventeenth century Far Eastern cultures were subject to a good deal of opium use, and during Medieval times, alcohol use was widespread. This history of drug use continues today, most notably in the United States. The two most widely used legal drugs in the U.S., alcohol and tobacco, are used every day all over the country. In addition, there are many illegal drugs that see daily use and abuse. Cocaine, heroin, and marijuana are collectively used by millions, and addictions to drugs such as LSD, PCP, opium, and others have become commonplace as well.

(2) Currently, the United States is involved in a "war" on drugs, in an effort to halt the flow of illegal narcotics into this country from Columbia, Panama, Bolivia, and other Third World nations. In addition, the war on drugs is geared toward educating the American public on the dangers of using drugs, in an effort to prevent initial use. However, this war on drugs is costly, and its funding consumes many of the citizens' tax dollars. It is also a slow process, a process marked with gradual gains and improvements. Because of this slow progress, some politicians and economists have become dissatisfied with the results of the war on drugs since President Bush repopularized the plan in September, 1989. They offer an alternative to the war on drugs, namely, legalization of all drugs currently illicit. They offer a number of ideas and explanations as to why the legalization of drugs is a good idea. The three most common ideas are: (a) We might as well legalize; nothing else is working. (b) Legalization will dramatically reduce crime. (c) Legalization will take the profit out of drugs and eliminate the black market. However, these ideas are flawed and, in some cases, incorrect. And, once we see the flawed nature of these arguments, we will concede that illegal narcotics should not be legalized.

(3) One very common argument for the legalization of drugs is that the war on drugs isn't working, so we might as well legalize. There are, however, statistics and results currently available that seem to show that the war on drugs is working. In 1978, a national survey of high school seniors showed that only thirty-five percent of those polled believed that smoking marijuana posed significant health-related risks. In a similar poll conducted in 1988, seventy-seven percent of high school seniors believed that same premise (Gold 42). Obviously, teenagers have become better educated about the dangers of smoking marijuana, and consequently, daily use of marijuana by those seniors over the same time span has dropped from 10.7 to 2.7 percent (Gold 42).

( 4 ) It also seems that the increased enforcement of prohibition laws has decreased the appeal of using drugs. From 1970 to 1976, a survey of young blacks in Harlem showed, the percentage of heroin users had fallen from eight to three percent. When asked why they discontinued heroin usage, over fifty percent of the young blacks said that they feared legal problems and that the high cost of heroin prevented use (Wilson 21). These reasons have dissuaded many more potential users today as well, for the average age of heroin users who appear in emergency rooms is well over thirty years, whereas that same statistic was twenty-seven years in 1976 (Wilson 21).

( 5 ) Many people who argue for the legalization of drugs contend that if illicit narcotics such as cocaine, marijuana, and heroin were legalized and made more accessible, then crime rates would fall significantly. The rationale behind this theory is that when drug users become addicted, they will turn to crime when their money runs out in order to fund their habit. Consequently, the drug legalization proponents feel that the easier accessibility and lower prices of legalized drugs would prevent addicts from turning to crime in order to pay for their drugs. The truth be told, however, research gathered since the 1970's in large cities such as New York and Miami has demonstrated that most drug addicts have had criminal records before their first exposure to drugs (Inciardi 269). Then, according to current drug czar William Bennett, "The drugs, so routinely available in criminal circles, make the criminals more violent and unpredictable" (Bennett 93). With lower prices and easier accessibility, then, these criminals would only have more opportunities to get high and commit their drug-related crimes. And who is to say that the "kill-for-a-fix" crimes would cease completely just because prices were lower? (Bennett 93) It wouldn't make any difference to a penniless drug addict whether a gram of cocaine cost forty dollars or twenty dollars. What other choice would he have but to turn to crime, whether to steal to get money for the drugs or to steal the drugs themselves?

( 6 ) One last very common argument for the legalization of drugs is based on the premise that if drugs were legalized, the drug lords in South America as well as the local dope pushers in U.S. cities would be out of business because government regulated drug outlets would be selling drugs at lower prices. The idea here is that the drugs would be sold at lower prices but would be heavily taxed, which supposedly would generate a great deal of revenue for the government to put into rehabilitation and awareness programs. However, as Bennett says:

Legalizers would have to tax drugs heavily in order to pay for drug education and treatment programs. Criminals could still undercut the official price and make huge profits. What alternative would the government have? Cut the price until it was within the lunch-money budget of the average sixth-grade student? (92)

The ability to undercut official prices would, of course, contribute substantially to the continuation of the black market, but it is not the only factor involved. There are some drugs, such as crack and PCP, which are too dangerous to allow to be legal (Bennett 92). What happens, then, when cocaine is legalized, and crack, a form of cocaine, is not? Almost assuredly, crack will still be offered by drug dealers, thus preserving the

existence of the black market. Yet another element that will contribute to the continuation of the black market is the demand for drugs by minors. More than likely, minors would be prohibited from buying legalized drugs, so their demand would be fulfilled by drug dealers (Bennett 92).

(7) It seems then that the legalization of drugs is not a solution to the United States' drug problem. Contrary to what most legalization advocates would have us believe, the war on drugs is actually beginning to work. As stated previously, the war on drugs will not provide instantaneous results, and neither will any other plan, for that matter. Now that some positive results are surfacing, it follows that clearly now is the time not to legalize, because the long-awaited positive effects of the war on drugs are finally arriving. Usage rates and frequencies are dropping, and public awareness has improved significantly. If drugs were legalized now, those gains for which we have waited so long would vanish. As demonstrated earlier, many of the arguments for legalization are flawed. In addition, it just doesn't seem that legalization is a practical idea. There are far too many questions associated with legalization to make it a viable option. For example, what drugs should be legalized? Should all of them be legalized, or just the ones that the government deems appropriate? Where should legalized drugs be sold? Should they be sold at local drugstores and grocery stores or at government operated "drug shacks"? If drugs are legalized, how should their use be restricted? Should public bus and taxi drivers and nuclear plant employees be prohibited from using drugs because of the nature of their jobs? Should certain restaurants be permitted to serve drugs in the same manner they serve alcohol? Should drugs be legalized only for those who are already dependent on them, and if so, what criteria should be used to determine dependency? (Inciardi 261-2). The legalization of drugs is an extremely broad topic, one that would be nearly impossible to outline, given the amount of bickering that goes on among today's legislators. Given all of the preceding information, then, the legalization of drugs is a nearly impossible and very impractical solution to the drug problem in the United States.

#### Works Cited

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