

Imagine that one day, a regular 18-year old girl was living her normal everyday life. This girl, Nicole Richardson, saw her life change in simply moments. Nicole had a boyfriend named Jeff who dealt drugs, however, Nicole never assisted Jeff in any of his drug deals. As Nicole received an afternoon phone call from an individual wanting to speak to Jeff, Nicole explained that Jeff was not home but offered the caller a phone number where Jeff could most likely be reached. That caller was actually an undercover federal agent. Jeff was contacted and then sold nine grams of LSD to an undercover federal agent. Jeff was arrested and subsequently, Nicole was arrested as well. One would think that informing someone of a phone number to contact another individual would be a gesture above suspicion. Nevertheless, federal prosecutors thought differently and sent her to federal prison for ten years without possibility of parole; all for giving someone a phone number. Interestingly, Jeff was able to make a deal with federal prosecutors to give inside information about his drug dealing and consequentially had his sentence cut in half to five years. However, Nicole, who had no knowledge or any real role in the drug deal or drug business in general was stuck in prison for ten years, when Jeff, who organized the whole "crime" served half the prison time as Nicole. This is simply one story that displays the effects of the "War on Drugs" in America today. This "war" was originally created to rid the United States of drugs and harmful impacts of drug trafficking; however, it has shifted towards targeting an "enemy" of innocent U.S. citizens such as people like Nicole (Cronkite).

As the U.S. fights the: "War in Iraq," "War in Afghanistan," "War on Terrorism," "War on Poverty" and others, it is evident that the "War on Drugs" is yet an additional "war" that is failing. In a "war" it is imperative to understand who or what is being fought. How does one fight poverty, or more importantly, how does one fight drugs? The common aspect in all of these "wars" is that the "enemy" cannot confidently be identified. Plainly not understanding what we

are actually fighting has caused the U.S. to not complete its goals. The "War on Drugs" has failed in the following areas: illicit drug use, drug availability and drug trafficking, drug-related crime, as well as treatment and prevention. The "War on Drugs" has not completed its goals and is an ineffective strategy to reduce the influences of illicit drug use in the United States.

In order to comprehend the failures of the "War on Drugs" in the United States, this essay will begin by defining: "illicit drugs," "drug trafficking," "drug trafficking organizations" and explain how they are used, as well as their purposes. Then I will briefly explain the history of the "War on Drugs" and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). An analysis of the main criteria and goals of the "War on Drugs" will then be presented. These four goals include the areas of: illicit drug use, drug availability and drug trafficking, drug-related crime, as well as treatment and prevention. Finally, this essay will conclude by summarizing my evidence of the failing "War on Drugs" in the United States.

To better understand the main idea of the argument, comprehension of "illicit drugs" is crucial. While some "drugs" are legal, "illicit drugs" are usually not legal. Rather, they are illegal substances that are "not authorized by law" ("illegal"). As explained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), illicit drugs include:

Marijuana or hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens (including phencyclidine [PCP], lysergic acid diethylamide [LSD], and Ecstasy [MDMA], heroin, or prescription-type psychotherapeutics used non-medically, which include stimulants, sedatives, tranquilizers, and pain relievers ("Results from").

Illicit drugs are usually taken orally, or by: smoking, inhaling, snorting, or otherwise injecting. Furthermore, one of the goals of the "War on Drugs" includes action related to "drug trafficking," which is an essential concept to grasp. Drug trafficking is the "intent to distribute

controlled substances" (Pandova). Under the United States Code, the term "controlled substance" means: "a drug or other substance, or immediate precursor, included in Schedule I, II, III, IV or V of part B of Subchapter I, Chapter 13, Title 21" (Pandova). Controlled substances do not include distilled spirits, wine, malt beverages, or tobacco (Pandova). In relation to "drug trafficking," the final term needed for definition is "drug trafficking organizations." According to the U.S. Department of Justice, these groups are complex organizations "with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs" ("National Drug Threat"). After defining key terms surrounding the topic of the "War on Drugs," it is vital to explain the history and purpose of the "War on Drugs," as well as the DEA before the goals are examined.

The "War on Drugs" was created in 1971 by President Nixon (Eddy, 5). It was created as "a new, all-out offensive" against drug abuse, "America's public enemy number one" (Eddy, 5). Currently, the (modern) "War on Drugs" is overseen by the federal Office of the National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The ONDCP describes the purpose of the "War on Drugs" as: "reducing drug-related crime and drug-caused health problems by reducing drug use" (Eddy, 3). Three approaches used are: prevention, treatment, and enforcement (Dobkin and Nicosia).

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was established in 1973 by President Nixon to fight the "War on Drugs" ("DEA History"). The purpose and "mission" of the DEA is to:

Enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States and bring the criminal and civil justice system of the United States, or any other component jurisdiction, those organizations and principal members of organizations, involved in the

growing, manufacture, or distribution of controlled substances appearing in or destined for illicit drug traffic in the United States ("DEA Mission Statement").

Now, as key terms have been defined and the background of the "War on Drugs" and DEA have been explained, the main criteria and goals of the "War on Drugs" will now be analyzed by starting with the area of illicit drug use in the United States.

One of the main goals of the "War on Drugs" is to decrease the usage of illicit drug use among U.S. citizens. More precisely, the United States Government would like to totally rid the United States of illicit drug use. According to a document by The Library of Congress, the 1988 law stated: "It is the declared policy of the United States Government to create a Drug-Free America by 1995" (Eddy, 7). More recently, the *2010 National Drug Control Strategy* states that the first goal to be attained by 2015 is to "Curtail illicit drug consumption in America" and this would include reducing "the number of chronic drug users by 15%" (6). It is evident that the U.S. has created past goals to free the U.S. of illicit drug use but have already been unsuccessful.

Although, the "War on Drugs" did contribute to a decrease in illicit drug use from 2002 to 2008, the U.S. has also seen an increase in illicit drug use since 2009, which displays how the "War on Drugs" is failing in terms of long-term effectiveness ("2009 National Survey"). Conversely, in 2002, drug users aged 50 to 59 actually doubled from 2.7 to 6.2 percent ("Drug Abuse"). Furthermore, there was a nine percent increase in the amount of illicit drug users from 2008 to 2009 ("2009 National Survey"). Despite all the efforts in the "War on Drugs," the amount of illicit drug users has been rising for years with 19.9 million American illicit drug users today (Suddath). All of this evidence clearly displays how the goal of diminishing illicit drug use in the U.S. has failed through the "War on Drugs." Likewise, the goals surrounding drug availability and drug trafficking have also failed.

Just as illicit drug use has increased, the availability of illicit drugs and drug trafficking have both increased as well. An additional goal of the "War on Drugs" is to decrease the availability of illicit drugs and decrease drug trafficking in the U.S. The *2010 National Drug Control Strategy* noted that there is a need to "Break the Cycle of Drug Use, Crime, Delinquency, and Incarceration" (2). The document states that this can be completed by: "supporting law enforcement's efforts to reduce drug availability and to educate the public about the dangers and legal consequences of drug trafficking and drug abuse" ("*2010 National Drug Control Strategy*," 2).

However, drug availability and drug trafficking are doing everything but decreasing. The U.S. Department of Justice and the National Drug Intelligence Center completed the *National Drug Threat Assessment (NDTA) 2010* dated February 2010, which included a study of the availability of illicit drugs in the United States. The assessment found that: "Overall, the availability of illicit drugs in the United States is increasing. In fact, in 2009 the prevalence of four of the five major drugs – heroin, methamphetamine, marijuana, and MDMA (Ecstasy) – was widespread and increasing in some areas ("*National Drug Threat Assessment*"). The *National Drug Threat Assessment 2010* also stated that the rising availability of illicit drugs in the U.S. is the "result of Mexican DTO [drug trafficking organizations] efforts to increase drug production and distribution." Again, the "War on Drugs" has failed in its goal to decrease the availability of illicit drugs and decrease the amount of drug-trafficking. Additionally, illicit drug-related crime is yet another goal of the "War on Drugs" which will be analyzed next.

As noted before, the federal Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) who manages the "War on Drugs" described the illicit drug issue to include: "reducing drug-related crime," which is a third goal of the "War on Drugs" (Eddy, 3). The *2010 National Drug Control*

Strategy states that one of the principles is to: "Provide communities with the capacity to prevent drug-related crimes" (50). The document continues to explain that with "sufficient resources and the right strategies, communities can be empowered to stop drug-related crime before it starts" (50). Nevertheless, illicit drug-related crime has increased in the U.S.

As a result of the "War on Drugs," the creation of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has contributed to many illicit drug-related arrests (Dobkin and Nicosia). However, since 1972, incarceration rates have increased five-fold without a comparable decrease in crime or drug use (Moore and Elkavich). Furthermore, Drug offenders in prisons have increased 1100 percent since 1980 (Mauer and King, 2). Actually, arresting individuals for non-violent illicit drug-related activity is harming families more than the drug activity itself (Madden). The *2010 National Drug Control Strategy* stated that the illicit drug-related crimes "tear families apart" and "divide communities" (50). Not only has the goal of decreasing drug-related crime failed through the "War on Drugs," but it is possible that it is actually hurting more than helping people in the U.S. Finally, it is time to identify and analyze the last main goal of the "War on Drugs," which surrounds the areas of treatment and prevention.

The final goal analysis of the "War on Drugs" is related to treatment and prevention. The "War on Drugs" was created to increase treatment and prevention of illicit drug-related health problems. The ONDCP noted that the "War on Drugs" included reducing "drug-caused health problems" (Eddy, 3). Also, the *2010 National Drug Control Strategy* "Policy Statement" stated: "The Administration is committed to supporting prevention, treatment, and the better use of our criminal justice resources to sharply reduce American drug consumption" (63). However, treatment and prevention of illicit drug-related health problems is an ineffective aspect of the "War on Drugs" for a number of reasons.

The goal of increasing treatment and prevention has failed in the "War on Drugs." Admissions for treatment have increased from 1998 to 2008 (Wetzstein, 1). These increases in treatment are evidence of a failing prevention system. Possibly, one of the most staggering statistics was presented in the *2010 National Drug Control Strategy*, which stated: "Each day in this country, almost 8,000 Americans illegally consume a drug for the first time" (5). Clearly, successful "prevention" would include no new first-time users of illicit drugs, but 8,000 new U.S. illicit-drug users everyday is evidence that this goal of prevention and treatment is failing through the "War on Drugs." This failure in the goal of treatment and prevention is symbolic towards the overarching argument that the "War on Drugs" as a whole has failed.

President Clinton's drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey perfectly described the "War on Drugs" by saying: "It's a war without a clear enemy. Anything waged against a shapeless, intangible noun can never truly be won" (Suddath). This was said in 1996, however, is still a profoundly accurate description of the "War on Drugs" today. In the past 40 years, the "War on Drugs" has cost the U.S. government 2.5 trillion dollars to fight (Suddath). As this "war" has continued to fail, the only action it has completed is putting more than 30 million U.S. citizens in jails and ruined the lives of people, families, and communities all over the country ("Obama's Drug War, 25).

In conclusion, the U.S. "War on Drugs" was created to: diminish illicit drug use, decrease drug availability and drug trafficking, decrease illicit drug-related crime, and increase treatment and prevention. However, all of the goals of the "War on Drugs" have failed. The U.S. is actually seeing an increase in illicit drug use, as well as increases in drug availability and drug trafficking. Similarly, illicit drug-related crime has increased in the U.S., while treatment and prevention of illicit drug-related health problems have been ineffective. The U.S. is fighting a "war" on drugs

that cannot be won, while paying trillions of dollars. Why the U.S. continues to fight this failing "War on Drugs" in this way is a mystery, however, it is clear that the "War on Drugs" has only created problems and ruined the lives of millions of citizens just like Nicole Richardson, a truly innocent teen whose life has changed for the worst because of the "War on Drugs."

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