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WAR ON DRUGS

Key elements of what became the war on drugs were created by alcohol prohibition in the early twentieth century: a demonized drug, a feared class of users, tough laws, and an enforcement bureaucracy. In subsequent drug scares, moral entrepreneurs and the media linked drugs to foreigners, racial minorities, Communists, and criminals, blaming them for America's problems.

In 1968, Richard M. Nixon campaigned for president on a law-and-order platform. Since the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, the United States had been rocked by protests. African Americans in dozens of cities protested discrimination, poverty, and police brutality. Students protested the Vietnam War. A growing youth counterculture embraced illicit drug use. Crime rates were rising. In speeches designed to resonate with what he called the "silent majority" of white suburban voters, Nixon promised to restore order.

Once in office, the Nixon administration found that it could not easily reduce crime and focused increasingly on drugs. In 1971, Nixon called drug abuse a "national emergency" and drug trafficking "public enemy number one," arguing for a "total offensive." His war on drugs increased arrests, pushed producer countries to reduce supply, and expanded treatment for addicts. He hoped that all this would curtail crime in time for the 1972 election.

Meanwhile, in 1970, President Nixon and Congress had appointed the National

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Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse. In 1972 the commission's report, *Marihuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding*, concluded that the "existing social and legal policy is out of proportion to the individual and social harm engendered by the use of the drug," and recommended that "possession of marihuana for personal use no longer be an offense." Nixon ignored the commission, increasing federal spending for drug-law enforcement from $3 million to more than $300 million and the number of narcotics agents from 330 to 1,500. Marijuana arrests rose during the Nixon years from less than 100,000 to more than 400,000. The number of arrests subsequently declined to less than 300,000 by 1991, but then rose steadily to 847,864 by 2008 (89 percent for possession).

Later presidential administrations expanded the war on drugs: the Office of National Drug Control Policy was created by the Anti–Drug Abuse Act of 1988, and over the years offices for drug control were established at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, the various branches of the armed forces, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and local police departments. Funding for the Office of National Drug Control Policy increased from $2 billion in 1981 to more than $23 billion in 2005.

In the 1980s, Presidents Reagan and Bush escalated the war on drugs, shifting funds away from Nixon's treatment initiatives and toward policing. Under harsh laws passed during the crack-cocaine scare, thousands of predominantly poor, minority males were sentenced to mandatory prison terms. Drug offenses became the largest category of crime and helped quadruple the U.S. incarceration rate, making it the highest in the world. The number of drug offenders incarcerated rose from about 50,000 in 1980 to 500,000 in 2006, the largest and most racially disproportionate imprisonment wave in U.S. history.

Illicit drug use rose sharply from 1965 to 1979, generally declined through the 1980s, rose again after 1991, and stabilized by the late 1990s. The majority of illicit drug use is of marijuana. By 2008, 102,404,000 Americans had used marijuana, 16,700,000 in the past month. The prevalence of the use of other drugs is far lower, varying by year, age, and drug, with spikes of use of cocaine, Ecstasy (MDMA), methamphetamine, and prescription drug abuse.

Following the 1980s, several organizations promoting reform of the nation's drug policies emerged to contest the war on drugs. They argued that costly mass imprisonment had not significantly reduced America's drug problems, that supplies remained plentiful, and that prices for drugs were generally lower and purity higher than when the war began.

Reform efforts expanded rapidly after scientists determined that syringe-exchange programs for injection-drug users reduced the spread of HIV and AIDS and other diseases without increasing drug use. By 2005, such programs operated in 160 U.S. cities. Syringe exchange and other policies rooted in the logic of harm reduction have been adopted in seventy other countries.

Between 1996 and 2011, sixteen states and the District of Columbia passed medical marijuana laws, allowing therapeutic use if recommended by a physician. In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act to reduce racial disparities in sentencing for crack-cocaine offenses.

By the early twenty-first century, various opinion polls found that most Americans no longer believed that the war on drugs could succeed and that support for alternatives was growing. The war continued to be waged, but reformers have pushed the emphasis of

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U.S. drug policy away from criminal punishment and toward public health.

The United States has pressed other governments to combat drug trafficking. In 2007 the Mexican president Felipe Calderón sent the military to fight the drug cartels that profit from the U.S. market. By 2011 more than thirty-five thousand people had been killed in this conflict, but the cartels remained powerful. This has prompted mass protests in Mexico against the American war on drugs and for alternatives to prohibition.

[*See also* **Conservative Movement; Crack Cocaine; Drugs, Illicit; Prisons and Penitentiaries; Prohibition;** ***and*** **Public Health.**]

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Craig Reinarman and Harry G. Levine

WAR RESISTERS

Since the mid-eighteenth century, war resisters in what became the United States have been united by little other than their shared opposition to war. Across time and space, they have been inspired by different impulses and reacted to different circumstances, though more often than not resistance to war stemmed first from religious, spiritual, or ethical concerns about the equal spiritual status of human beings, and then occasionally—especially in the twentieth century—resisters have adopted political criticisms of war. Labels such as “pacifists,” “conscientious objectors,” “anti-imperialists,” “isolationists,” and “disarmament proponents” have all been applied to Americans who have resisted war, and the labels reveal the diverse motivations that have driven their resistance. In part because of their diverse motivations, before the twentieth century war resisters were not centrally coordinated through an organization or leaders; however, the war in Vietnam changed the peace movement in a permanent way by pushing the ideas of war resistance into the public domain.

Religious War Resisters in the Colonial and Revolutionary Eras. In what became the United States, the first expression of war resistance came with the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) and brought the Quakers, who had settled in Pennsylvania, into the colonial spotlight. As absolute pacifists, Quakers opposed all kinds of war at all times: according to their spiritual worldview, people must