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The War on Drugs is No Laughing Matter

It's time for Barack Obama to take legalization seriously

[Terry Michael](#) | March 27, 2009

Alcohol did not create Al Capone's gang violence in the hometown of our current president. Prohibition did.

Marijuana does not create murderous drug cartels in Mexico. America's War on Drugs does.

Surely President Barack Obama, one of the smartest men to inhabit the White House, must understand that truth—even if he chooses to laugh-off those of us who want to get serious about the need to end the social insanity of neo-Prohibition by legalizing marijuana and other psychoactive chemicals.

French essayist Georges Bernanos wrote, "The worst, the most corrupting of lies, are problems poorly stated." It is an outrageous lie, one that corrupts intelligent public policy discourse, when we talk of "drug violence." The official corruption and murderous mayhem in both Mexico and on our side of the border are not a result of dried leafy vegetation and white powder. They are the consequence of a lucrative black market, spawning profits for which bad people are willing to kill and die, directly resulting from federal and state laws that prohibit the sale, use, and possession of drugs.

As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged in Mexico City, this lucrative marketplace is fed by human demand for altered consciousness as insatiable as that which President Obama felt when he regularly sought a nicotine fix, or which George W. Bush experienced when he reached for another bottle of beer. But our leaders weren't thrown in jail for smoking and drinking, and neither were their dealers at the corner convenience store and neighborhood bar.

President Obama promised an end to [politics as usual](#), but he now stands in the way of a long-neglected debate about ending the harm creation of draconian policies which: infringe on individual liberty; rip apart neighbor nations; create government violence against our own people by militarized police forces; cause health harm to the young by forcing psycho-active drugs underground, with no regulation of their content, purity, and strength, or education about how to use them intelligently; promote disrespect for the rule of law, with unequal penalties applied to the rich and to the poor—all factors which have disgracefully transformed the United States of America into the world's number one jailer.

Our government's own research (a 2006 survey by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services) reveals that over half of the adult population of America has, at one time, used a controlled substance. Which means—if our drug laws were equally applied—that over 125 million of us would have spent time in jail, as Barack

Obama and George W. Bush themselves would have done for what we euphemistically and absurdly call "youthful indiscretions." Obama has admitted using marijuana and cocaine. Bush, who was less candid, simply refused to deny it.

It is understandable why politicians have convinced themselves that drugs are a third rail of public policy and that they therefore don't have to seriously address legalization. The media—the very institution charged by the First Amendment with facilitating intelligent discourse—colludes with the government's drug war rather than challenging politicians to engage a real debate. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* both require drug-tests from college students seeking summer internships. And both have given the federal government free advertising space to promote First Amendment-infringing drug policy, when the president's Office of Drug Control Policy acquires space for drug war propaganda. Would the *Times* and the *Post* ever alcohol-test an aging copy editor, or offer the Department of Defense free space to promote an elective war in the Middle East in return for a full-page ad touting "Mission Accomplished?"

In this time of national economic crisis, we keep looking in our collective rear view mirror for lessons from the 1930s for what we should do, and what we should avoid, in order to restore confidence in ourselves and create hope for our future.

While fiscal and monetary actions taken in that era offer mixed and muddled messages for today's policymakers, another action by a transformational leader in that far-off decade sends a clarion call to us at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Franklin Roosevelt supported the 21st Amendment to end the madness of the 18th, and in so doing halted the devastating social, economic, and cultural costs of Prohibition. That's a lesson Barack Obama needs to heed.

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