

Stephen Russell

1702930

Research in Context ADAD5003

BA Graphic Design

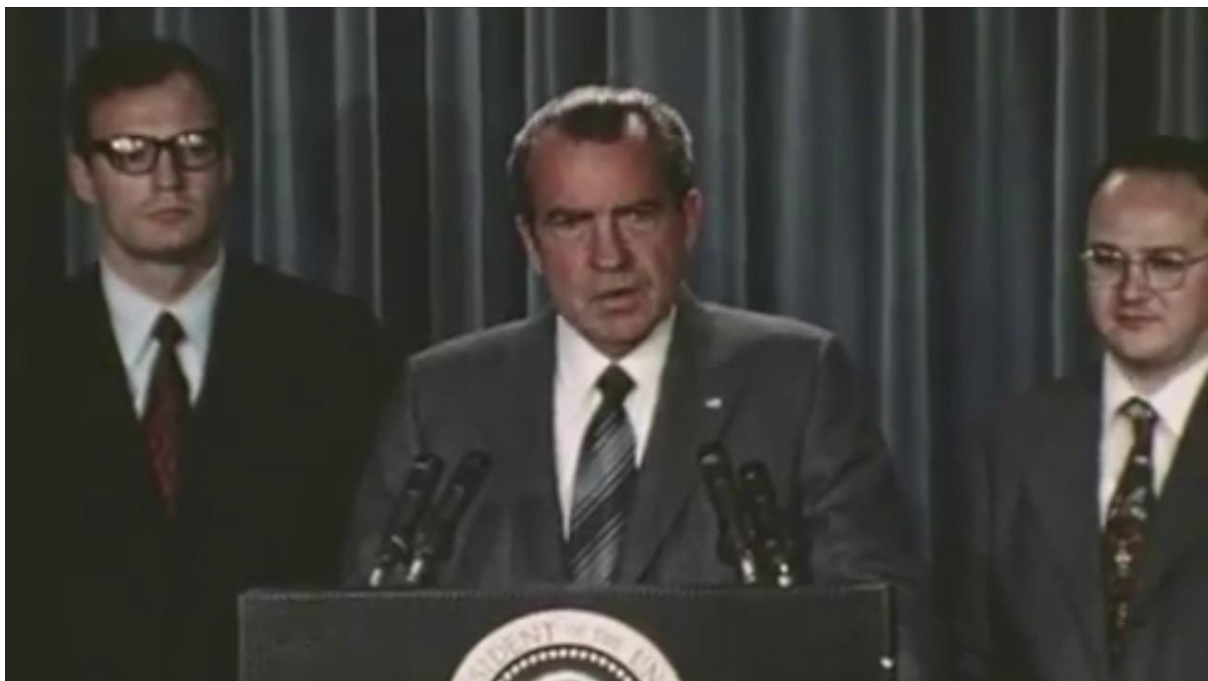
Timi O'Neill

Explore the mediated form of narrative and critically show how it is used to promote political, ideological, religious or socially constructed perspectives within your discipline area.

Word count: 2259

To answer this question, I have decided to write this essay about the consequences of a political movement which had the intention to eradicate drug abuse. When I say movement I specifically mean the laws that had been put into place in American Government including the Drug Abuse Prevention & Control Act and the Controlled Substance Act (CSA). These laws to prevent drug abuse will later we known as The War On Drugs.

“American’s Public Enemy Number One in the United States is Drug Abuse.” – Former President Richard Nixon.



Nixon declares Drug Abuse public enemy number 1.

When the American Government pushed the law to ban all drug abuse, we would like to think that the reason behind this was for the benefit of public health. Its true, there was an

addiction problem in the US. So in the public's eye the intention of the law was to stop the manufacturing and distribution of drugs which would solve the problem of addiction and abuse; a world without drugs. The strategy was No drugs = No problems. This was done by categorizing each substance from Schedule 1 – 5. 1 being the most dangerous (potential for abuse & no acceptable medical use) to 5 which has the lowest potential for abuse. Quoting an example of the schedule 1 description from the official Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) website who first developed the schedules:

“Schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. Some examples of Schedule I drugs are:

heroin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), marijuana (cannabis), 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (ecstasy), methaqualone, and peyote.”

These are how the substances stand today including cannabis which we have been seeing medical use for in recent years. It starts to make you think that it's a little outdated? Or the substances aren't as dangerous or abusable as the Drug Enforcement believe it to be? So perhaps there was another underlining reason that these drugs became illegal.

It's now becoming common knowledge that one of the reasons that began the War On Drugs stems back to racism and how society thought of minorities throughout the beginning and late 1900's. I had come across a person called Ethan Nadelmann who has made a couple videos on The War On Drugs, he has been featured on Ted talks and a popular YouTube channel: 'Big Think'. He talks about how White Americans have historically hated and feared the minority groups such as Black and Chinese Americans. Simply the way the Americans had thought of dealing with these minorities was by making the drugs these minorities were taking illegal or demonizing them. This is exactly the same thing that happened in the 70's with Nixon who was among the racist population in America. We now know that his intention when making these drugs illegal would be to incarcerate and put pressure on Black Americans as well as those who were protesting the Vietnam War. Both of these groups were associated with drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and LSD. I quote from Ethan Nadelmann: “The history is it has nothing to do with the relative risks of these drugs and almost everything to do with the use and who was perceived to use these drugs.” – This was taken from “Ethan Nadelmann: The War On Drugs is Racist” on Big Think, YouTube. Published 5th February 2014.

So how were these ideologies promoted and popularized? It became obvious that the best way to get the public to stop using drugs was through fear. Fear is an effective way of reaching audience because it easily grabs attention, it's in our best interest to stay safe and out of danger. So you can imagine that if something suddenly became advertised alongside negative words, people would most likely shy away. Here is an example of an anti-drug poster for marijuana:

Beware! Young and Old—People in
All Walks of Life!

This



may be handed you



by the friendly stranger. It contains the Killer Drug
"Marihuana"—a powerful narcotic in which lurks
Murder! Insanity! Death!



WARNING!

Dope peddlers are shrewd! They may
put some of this drug in the  or
in the  or in the tobacco cigarette.

WRITE FOR DETAILED INFORMATION, ENCLOSE 12 CENTS IN POSTAGE—MAILING COST

Address: THE INTER-STATE NARCOTIC ASSOCIATION

(Incorporated not for profit)

53 W. Jackson Blvd.

Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A.

AMERICAN PEOPLE are urged to be alert and to report to the proper authorities any person who is seen to be distributing or using any of the above mentioned drugs. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is the central agency for the collection and dissemination of information regarding the traffic in narcotic drugs. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is the central agency for the collection and dissemination of information regarding the traffic in narcotic drugs. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is the central agency for the collection and dissemination of information regarding the traffic in narcotic drugs.



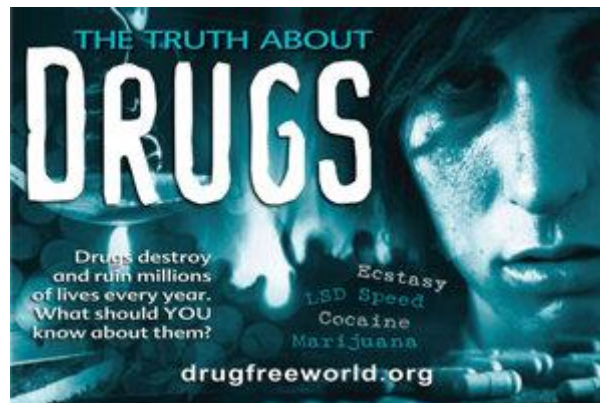
This is another example of demonizing drugs with the use of shame too; notice: “Hell” “Crime” “Despair” etc

These anti-drug posters came before television and was likely read in the newspapers or advertised on the street which was how people had always got their information from. At a time before there was less trust in the media and before the time of ‘Fake News’. There was a mass murder by the name of Victor Licata in the 30’s who axed his entire family. The media reported it as the work of a “axe-murdering marijuana addict” as it was quickly concluded that marijuana was to blame for his killing spree. This was then later proven wrong: “Modern researchers have found that marijuana was never mentioned in any of Licata's psychiatric reports or considered a factor in the killings. Instead it was established that the young man had been identified as mentally ill...”

This was the start of many false anecdotal stories that have been gaining momentum over time and still exists today. Since the 70’s there has been stories of what had gone wrong when students had taken the psychedelic drug LSD. This was also a drug that caused a massive moral panic. In Michael Pollen’s book ‘How To Change Your Mind’, he says that “With the media now in full panic mode, urban legends about the perils of LSD spread more rapidly than facts.” Page. 209. He then continues to debunk them after he says that several of these urban legends have been traced to their sources and discredited.

Some campaigns were a little less scary in the sense that they were warning people away from drugs for without using fear tactics. During the broadcasting age, a former First Lady

Nancy Reagan was discouraging the use of drugs with the phrase “Just Say No” which was aimed at children to encourage them to stay away from drugs for a more successful & ‘colourful’ future. Alongside this in the 80s, the DEA had made adverts “Say No To Drugs” which starred celebrities that would get the attention of the youth such as David Hasselhoff and Mr T. I had found that these anti-drug adverts have been making less of an appearance recently. The most modern advertisement I had found on YouTube was uploaded around 11 years ago by drugfreeworld.org – even their site seems a little outdated. So it’s becoming possibly evident that public opinion is starting to sway?



An image taken from drugfreeworld.org which promotes the eradication of all drugs for people’s safety using dramatized videos. They even include alcohol as one of the list of deadly drugs.

So has the law worked? Has it made a positive or negative change on public lives? No is the answer. The amount of negative consequences outweighs the number of positives by an absolute landslide. The main reason being that the DEA have been trying to completely stop the supply of drugs – but this does not affect the demand of them. People will take drugs no matter the cost. So the consequences include more drugs being manufactured and sold more than ever before by drug cartels which are huge criminal organizations who are in control of drug trafficking operations; the manufacturing and distribution of drugs. These organizations vary and are huge. This has then increased the number of gangs which then increases the amount of violence and death. This is ironically not caused by the ingestion of these substances made illegal. Drug cartels are an unregulated market. If you steal something from the shop, you will likely be caught and arrested. If you are caught stealing off of a dealer, the consequences will more than likely be violent or worse.

Drugs are now being made unregulated (no health system/guide) so this has resulted in being sold drugs of much higher purities, this can increase the danger of using them without a guide or any clear way of measuring how much you are taking. It goes the other way too, risk has been increased do to the fact that you might be buying a drug that’s been cut with another chemical or even worse you’re not even getting the drug you had thought you bought but an unpredictable substitute.

Another reason to add is that the drug prohibition movement has changed the way we all look at drug addicts. Sometimes its easy to blame drugs for those who are found on the street. Although some drugs do have addictive trait to them, some people are more vulnerable to abusing and becoming addicted to substances. In fact, most of these people

actually need help rather than treat them like a disease. There's a bit more to understand about a person rather than quickly come to conclude: "they shouldn't have started doing drugs in the first place."

So what's my opinion or view on this matter? It may actually be relevant in this essay as I had been brought up by my parents about 20 years ago at a time when the law had only been made in the past couple decades so I had been molded with this law in my background of upbringing. So right at the beginning I can obviously make a point that the word 'drug' has had such a negative, dangerous feel to it. It has no doubt to me been heavily stigmatized. When conversating about drugs and saying the word 'drug', you can still feel an awkwardness and almost a dismay about the subject by a majority of people I talk to. My parents and teachers and other adults of the same age and much older had all taught and warned me to stay away from said 'drugs'. They had been brought up in a time where the stigma on drugs was popularly publicized Even by those smoking and/or drinking telling me not to do drugs or telling me that they're dangerous. Again, how ironic.

It makes me think how a political movement which was built up on racism and for political gain has had a monumental effect on the world and even in the UK. Its crazy to think that we've all been affected by The War On Drugs in one way or another. What's more is that this isn't common knowledge – I believe that the stigma will be around to stay.

After learning about The War On Drugs and doing my own research I now have less faith in some of the laws made by the government knowing that some laws are perhaps outdated and its probably more important than ever to get our voices heard by those running the country. But I am optimistic for change. We are starting to see medical uses for Class A/Schedule 1 drugs that may be due to change Classes. The most obvious one at the moment is cannabis in the UK. We're seeing the benefits of both physical and mental health which is gaining a lot of momentum, even in other countries – especially the US that are now legalizing it completely in certain states. However for me I am most excited in the renaissance of psychedelic research on psilocybin. These drugs may hold a lot of potential for aiding mental health which is becoming apparent today that it's increasingly becoming a huge problem. There was in fact very promising research on psychedelics like LSD and mescaline but all research stopped after the prohibition alongside the research of MDMA. Yet another negative consequence on the prohibition. But again, the new modern research on psychedelics is happening right now without any sign of negative press or stigma slowing down. This was all in the Michael Pollen book I had quoted earlier who had become curious himself after 55 years. He mentions: "Stanislav Grof [Psychiatrist]wrote that psychedelics would be for the study of the mind what the telescope was for astronomy or the microscope for biology. Now that is an audacious claim—but I no longer think it's crazy."

Concluding this essay I believe that I have shown how examples of how ideas and beliefs such as racism has been used to create and fuel unwise political laws and enforcement that failed and responsible for many deaths and a stigma on 'drugs' in todays society. The word 'drug' has been constructed in the past 40-50 years now to unjustly bring a negative social stance on drugs worldwide. The word 'Drug' is associated with negativity, disease, illness, danger and fear. This is something I disagree with and hope to change the minds of people in the future. For personal recreational use I have actually benefited from these substances

and I have already mentioned we are seeing clinical trials with various illegal substances that have promising results for mental health. It would be interesting to know what kind of society we would have been in if The War On Drugs never happened. I think that there would be far less corruption with gangs and violence as there would be no reason for cartels and everyone would be baked. For my next essay I would like to ask the question: Do we truly live in a free society? We believe that we have the privilege of freedom of choice but is that just an illusion. With the unjust drug law in place I feel that we don't actually have that freedom. We should be able to make the choice to do what we want without bodies. People are also suffering right now even though we have potential & effective tools to help them. We should all live in a society of freedom and have a fair government that can help lower risk of harm with far more efficient, logical and fair practices.

Bibliography

<https://www.dea.gov/drug-scheduling>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Controlled_Substances_Act

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wONAgaxgloo> - "Ethan Nadelmann: The War On Drugs is Racist"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Licata

Michael Pollen How To Change Your Mind The New Science of Psychedelics. First Published in the United States of America by Penguin Press 2018

https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJUXLqNHCal> – "Why The War on Drugs Is A Huge Failure" - Kurzgesagt