

Introduction

Some issues seem intractable until one realizes that they are intractable only because of the way we approach them. The War on Drugs is one of these issues. After 100 years of a failed prohibitionist regime, and despite 40 years of the worsening War on Drugs debacle, despite the ever-escalating financial, economic, geopolitical and human costs, the international community sticks to its worn-out official mantras, led by the US, its prohibitionist-in-chief.

It appears, though, that we are reaching a Galilean moment. In spite of all the censorship and propaganda, a wave of revolt against the failed policies of the War on Drugs is rising throughout the world, calling louder and louder for a paradigm shift. The wave of support for drug policy reform keeps growing as the concept of legalization moves rapidly from fringe lunacy to the mainstream. From church groups to retired law enforcement officers, to the NAACP, to Kofi Anan, George Shultz, Paul Volcker, and a string of former Latin American and European heads of state, a broad range of personalities and organizations from around the world keep adding their voices to the chorus. “World War-D” is adding its own voice, hoping to become a major contribution to the case for legalization.

This book is an invitation to step back and look at the big picture from a different perspective, freed from the ideological and moralist morass where the issue has been enmeshed from the onset, freed also from the often myopic US-centric point of view that tends to dominate the debate. “World War-D” looks at all the major issues raised by the War on Drugs from a global perspective with a pragmatic, evidence-based and science-based approach, with an innovative and enlightening outlook. It offers a reasoned critic of the prohibitionist model and its underlying ideology with its historical and cultural background. It repositions the issues of illicit drugs into the wider and more relevant context of mind alteration and psychoactive substances. It addresses the issue of legalization head-on.

“World War-D” revolves around the simple but fundamental question: “Can organized societies do a better job than organized

crime of managing and controlling psychoactive substances?” This, really, is placing the bar extremely low when you think about it. I obviously believe they can, and I explain why and how. After all, the vast majority of psychoactive substances, including the two deadliest, are already legal and more or less efficiently controlled.

Going beyond the simplistic characterizations of the War on Drugs rhetoric, “World War-D” clearly demonstrates that prohibition is the worst possible form of control. The so-called “controlled substances” are effectively out of control; or rather, they are controlled by the underworld at a staggering and ever-growing human, social, economic and geopolitical cost to the world.

“World War-D” lays out a concrete, pragmatic, and realistic roadmap to global re-legalization founded on a multi-tiered *“legalize, tax, control, prevent, treat, and educate”* approach with practical and efficient mechanisms to manage and minimize societal costs. Far from giving up and far from an endorsement, controlled legalization would be finally growing up; being realistic instead of being in denial; being in control instead of leaving control to the underworld. It would abolish the current regime of socialization of costs and privatization of profits to criminal enterprises, depriving them of their main source of income and making our world a safer place.

The War on Drugs has made illegal drugs a global problem and therefore it must be addressed globally, from production to distribution and consumption. Only global, internationally concerted re-legalization can efficiently remove organized crime from the psychoactive marketplace.

The world’s psychoactive landscape is going through profound transformations. With the advent of hydroponics and small-scale production, marijuana production is out of control, as acknowledged by the UNODC 2010 report. Far more worrisome, thanks to the Internet and “kitchen counter chemistry,” amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are also out of control worldwide. ATS use now surpasses cocaine and opiates combined and is growing alarmingly. Narco-violence, narco-terrorism, and narco-corruption are spreading like cancer, destabilizing one country after another in every corner of the world. Substance addiction is reaching epidemic proportions throughout the developing world, fueled by rapid urbanization and

the ensuing social dislocation. Children are especially at risk as War on Drugs foot soldiers and cannon fodder. Emerging countries do not have the resources to fight such a plight under the current War on Drugs policies and it would be folly for them to follow the failed US policies. The global economic crisis that is currently shaking the foundations of the world's economies runs the risk of further exacerbating and spreading narco-related violence and instability. A drastic change of course is sorely needed.

At a time when the current and two former US presidents have admittedly indulged, as have politicians of all stripes from Al Gore to Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin and over 50% of the adult US population, the credibility tipping point of the War on Drugs propaganda has long been passed. All that appears to be missing is the political courage to admit failure and move on to more realistic and efficient policies. What will it take for decision makers to display the wisdom and garner the courage to end the disastrous War on Drugs and responsibly take charge of drug production and trade instead of leaving it in the hands of extremely dangerous and powerful international criminal organizations?

I wrote this book with a sense of urgency as the 2012 presidential elections in Spain, France, Mexico, and finally the US (and even in India) represent an unusual alignment of political events with considerable geopolitical significance, offering an opportunity to bring the debate to the forefront. Drug policy debate is very likely to dominate the Mexican presidential elections, while marijuana legalization initiatives are likely to be placed on the ballots in several states in the US.

Methodology:

As much as possible, throughout the book I used data and statistics from official governmental or international sources: UN, UNODC, WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, European Union, NIDA, FDA, DEA, US Department of Justice, etc. I am fully aware that such data and statistics are often self-serving and that their accuracy and their interpretation have been contested. However, even these arguably self-serving statistics spell out loud and clear the dismal failure of the War on Drugs.

Section *1*

A contrasted history of the
War on Drugs

Foreword to Section 1

“The pretense that the workings of the mind, like the actions of the body, are subject to the control of laws, does not seem sufficiently demolished. ... The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others.”¹

Thomas Jefferson, Founding Father of the United States

“From now on it will be the function of the doctor to save humanity from vice, as it formerly has been that of priest... Mankind considered as creatures made for immorality, are worthy of all our cares. Let us view them as patients in a hospital; the more they resist our efforts to serve them, the more they have need of our services.”

Dr. Benjamin Rush, Founding Father of the United States,
founder of American psychiatry

Ever since its founding, the United States of America has been torn between radically different and dramatically competing visions of government, one minimalist libertarian, as embodied by Jefferson, the other paternalist totalitarian, as articulated by Benjamin Rush. The cards are often trumped and paternalist totalitarians regularly pose as minimalist libertarians. Such was the case with Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, and even more so with his son George W. Bush. Curiously, economic minimalists are often totalitarian moralists.

The War on Drugs sealed the victory of doctor Benjamin Rush over Thomas Jefferson, except that the hospitals in Rush’s vision were turned into prisons. Ronald Reagan, hailed as a champion of deregulation and free enterprise, self-proclaimed defender of freedom throughout the world, once declared: “Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits

1). “The correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp, 1773-1809.”

is in deciding to protect us from ourselves.” It would be ironic if it was not such a tragedy that the same Ronald Reagan presided over the staunchest attack on civil liberties at home, resulting in a 500% increase of the incarcerated population. In his attempt to protect drug users from themselves with his “tough-on-crime/drugs-are-evil” posturing loaded with ulterior motives, he turned the US into a de facto police state.

Up until the early 1900s, all known psychoactive substances, including those now classified as “controlled substances,” were legally and readily available all over the world and did not need a black market. Users were pretty much everybody; use was mostly medicinal, at least in the West; abusers were rare and mostly accidental. Fast forward 100 years. Thanks in large part to the US single-handed leadership, the so-called “controlled substances” bring in untold hundreds of billions of dollars in revenues to a flourishing, dangerous and destabilizing black market; they cost tax payers hundreds of billions of dollars worldwide every single year. They sustain a tentacular War on Drugs bureaucracy terminally addicted to its own policies and numbering hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats worldwide. They foster a prison-industrial complex that jails tens of millions of people worldwide. They kill hundreds of thousands of people every year, tens of thousands in gang warfare alone, most of the rest as a direct result of the perverse effects of the policies of the War on Drugs bureaucrats. They sustain endemic corruption in many parts of the world, starting in the US. From Lucky Luciano to Ahmad Wali Karzai, the US secret services have been embroiled since World War II, directly or through proxies, with drug trafficking and drug traffickers to finance covert operations, destabilize other countries, or secure the illusory support of enemies.

How did we get there?

Chapter 1:

The political, ideological and historical background of prohibition

Prohibitionism is based on the premise that citizens will refrain from behaviors that are deemed immoral or harmful if such behaviors are decreed unlawful and criminal, even though such behaviors do not harm or unreasonably endanger others without their informed consent. Prohibitionism stems from totalitarian paternalism, an ideology rather prevalent among governing elites around the world, based on the presumption that people are feeble, foolish and irresponsible, needing constant protection from themselves.

The origin of prohibitionism in the US can be traced to the rise of the temperance movement, inspired by the 1785 essay “The Effects of Ardent Spirits on the Human Body and Mind” authored by founding father Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, who advocated “a new species of federal government for the advancement of morals in the United States.”¹ Dr. Benjamin Rush is considered the founder of American psychiatry and his portrait is embossed on the official seal of the American Psychiatric Association. Dr. Rush is quoted as saying: “Terror acts powerfully upon the body, through the medium of the mind, and should be employed in the cure of madness.”² To his credit, Rush was also a fervent abolitionist.

- 1). Benjamin Rush, “Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical,” Philadelphia, Printed by Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798.
- 2). Benjamin Rush, “Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind,” 1813.

The temperance movement was one of the numerous so-called “reform movements” that flourished in the US at the beginning of the 19th century and united a broad coalition ranging from evangelists of the Second Grand Awakening to secular humanists and social liberals. The reform movements primarily aimed at correcting perceived social injustice and perfecting American society. They were instrumental in bringing about some fundamental (and much needed) transformations to the US political system, chief among them, of course, the abolition of slavery in the Northern states, which precipitated the secession war. Women’s rights, child labor, public education, and prison reform were some of the leading causes promoted by the reform movement. Unfortunately, reformists tended to be rather self-righteous and over-zealous sometimes and in their over-zealousness, wanted to deliver the sinners from the enslavement of their own vices, even, and I should say, especially against the sinners’ own wishes. To paraphrase Dr. Rush, the more the sinners resisted the reformists’ efforts to serve them, the more they had need of their services.

The problem was compounded by the advent of hard liquors that really took off with colonization. En route to the New World, boats were loaded with all the necessary supplies for a long journey, including large quantities of alcoholic beverages, mostly wine and beer initially. After a few boats loaded to the beams had sunk on their way, wine and beer were replaced by less bulky distilled spirits, which created a real epidemic of alcoholism, a “disease of nutritional excess” as we shall see in the chapter about alcohol. Once on terra firma, the settlers stuck to their hard liquors and by the turn of the 19th century, the alcoholic epidemic was near its peak, with women and children as the primary and most helpless victims. By 1818, production of whiskey, rums, and other hard liquors was the third most important industrial activity in the US. Understandably, women became the foot soldiers of the temperance movement. Alcohol prohibition ended up being the wrong solution to a very real problem. Likewise, the War on Drugs is still to this day the wrong solution to a real problem.

Prohibitionism, a 19th century totalitarian ideology

Let's step back and divert for a while to the philosophical roots of the reform movement and prohibitionism. With the advent of humanism and the age of enlightenment in the 18th century, human beings broke away from supreme religious authority and were placed in charge of their own destiny with a general belief in individual rights and freedom, coupled with an aspiration to the betterment of humanity through reason and virtue. Religious humanism was inspired by the Protestant Reformation movement that promoted religious individualism, self-sufficiency, and self-control, while secular humanism was inspired by the Philosophers. Humanism climaxed with independence in the US and the French Revolution in Europe. Following the heady days of independence, the US witnessed a rise in popular politics as the most enlightened citizens were eager to put to test their newly gained freedom in support of those who had been left out. They formed coalitions with the excluded, mostly women and slaves, leading to the reform movements. In the pursuit of their noble goals, secular humanists often allied themselves with austere Protestants.

Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution was being launched in the UK. Workers were transplanted en masse from their traditional rural settings to their new sordid urban settings. Massive drinking was their usual escape from their 14-hour workdays in filthy and often lethal working environment and their squalid living conditions. While socialism saw exploitation of the masses as the root of the evils that befell the working class, the temperance movement saw alcohol as the source of those evils.

As they gained political power, some reformists shifted from moral suasion with a goal of voluntary acceptance through persuasion, to forced compliance through legal or political coercion as a means to expedite the perfecting of humanity and eradicate its perceived misery. This perversion of humanism led to totalitarianism, the belief in coerced societal transformation, i.e. the belief that human nature can be forcibly transformed through coercive means. Communism wanted to put the common good above personal interests through

forced collectivism and elimination of classes. Nazism, national-socialism, and fascism wanted to create a hegemonic race of superior human beings who derived their strength and sense of destiny from subordination of the individual to collective identity through obedience, discipline, dedication, and pride. Prohibitionism viewed coerced morality as a means to improve society. Prohibitionists wanted to legislate ethics and eradicate vice, a broad term under which were dumped all kinds of perceived immoral and sinful behaviors, the cardinal vices being gambling, alcohol abuse, and sexual depravity – pornography, prostitution, and homosexuality. Substance abuse was added later on, almost as a footnote. The temperance movements arose from overzealousness in the US, and from social blindness in the UK.³

As for capitalism, the elephant in the closet, it is founded on a general belief in private property and laissez-faire economics. Based on the belief that free enterprise will naturally nurture a harmonious merit-based society of ever-increasing prosperity, capitalism doesn't overtly pursue the betterment of humanity as societal improvement should inevitably ensue, or at least, so the theory goes. Nonetheless, the Industrial Revolution needed reliable workers and the newly emerging and largely fictional homo economicus had to be sober. Needless to say, prohibitionism violates the basic principles of capitalism (as well as the US Constitution) and, as we will see, it took a swelling succession of moral panics and deceptive maneuvers to shove prohibition down the throats of unsuspecting and frightened Americans.

The three major totalitarianisms were to blossom and bear their poisonous fruits throughout the 20th century, leaving a trail of devastation that is unprecedented in history, as victims numbered in the hundreds of millions. I will be the first to admit that prohibitionism is by far the most benign form of the ideological evils that haunted the 20th century; it is nonetheless clearly a totalitarian ideology with its propaganda machine, its censorship, its massive incarceration

- 3). Peter Cohen "Re-thinking drug control policy – Historical perspectives and conceptual tools," Paper presented at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Geneva, 7-8 July 1993.

of deviants, and victims numbering in the millions over the last hundred years. And it is just as failed as the other two totalitarianisms. Alcohol prohibition failed; gambling is legal; homosexuals are out of the closet; the sexual revolution has brought overt sex splashing on every billboard and TV screen. Having lost most of its battles and severely weakened despite its pretense at world dominance, prohibitionism is also the last remnant, a fossil of an era that we would just as well leave behind. After its bruising defeat by alcohol thanks to alcohol's unassailable position as a dominant psychoactive of Western civilization, prohibitionism fell with a vengeance on substances that were then minor psychoactive substances without any real constituency to support them, barely an afterthought on the prohibitionist agenda, collateral damage.

The War on Drugs was in many ways a cultural war and controlled substances were essentially traditional psychoactives of non-Western cultures or their derivatives. Coca leaf has been used by the Andean natives for thousands of years while cannabis is the traditional psychoactive of India, the Middle East and North Africa; opium was probably discovered in Mesopotamia and has been the prevalent psychoactive in Iran, Turkey, and Central Asia ever since. The increased cultural cross-pollination that started with the 20th century led to the growing popularity of non-Western psychoactives in Western countries, chief among them cannabis. The so-called "controlled substances" gained a constituency as lifetime use among Western adults reached anywhere from 25 to 50% and regular use reached 5 to 15% depending on countries. Control systems became grossly inadequate; or rather, control was turned over to the underworld. This last battle of the prohibitionist agenda is increasingly being lost as drug culture pervades pop culture and overflowing jails cannot contain the flood of users. Ironically, substance prohibition probably nurtured the drug culture.

Like all totalitarianism, prohibitionism led to propaganda, censorship, massive incarceration of deviants, and the establishment of a de facto police state. The vampire-like drug addict was for most of the 20th century the perfect scapegoat, the source of all evils, the

boogeyman to dust off and pull out in time of crisis. The irony of course is that the War on Drugs, as drug prohibition came to be called, created the very monster it was calling for in Frankenstein-like poetic justice.

While secular totalitarian ideologies have now been largely discredited, religious totalitarianisms are taking over at the dawn of the 21st century, with yet unpredictable consequences, a development that can hardly be hailed as progress.

Settlement patterns and prohibitionism

We are still left with the riddle of why, of all places, prohibitionism took roots with such vigor in the US, why mind alteration through substances or otherwise is so threatening to US society? For an answer to that question, we must go back to the early settlers of the New World.

The extreme corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and the dissolute life of its leaders led to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, breaking Western Christianity apart and giving birth to numerous religious sects which often faced persecution by religious and political authorities. Protestant Reformation took hold mostly in binge-drinking Northern Europe⁴ and temperance became a cardinal virtue of Protestantism, probably as a reaction to the dominant drinking pattern and its associated excesses. Protestantism promoted self-sufficiency and self-control, based on religious individualism and religious humanism.⁵

The Church of England, the Anglican Church, was founded in 1534 by King Henry VIII as a scheme to get rid of his wife Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. It was mostly a ploy, a political tool and was just as corrupt as the Catholic Church. The Puritan movement wanted to purge the Anglican Church from its Catholic influence and align it with Protestantism. Needless to say Puritans

4). See Chapter 8 – Alcohol.

5). Harry G. Levine, "Temperance Cultures Concern about Alcohol Problems in Nordic and English-speaking Cultures," 1993.

were not particularly liked by British rulers and they started emigrating en masse to the New World, fleeing persecution. They were joined by scores of members of various religious sects and other religious dissenters facing persecution across Europe at that time. The religious dissenters settled mainly in the northeast, from Pennsylvania to New England.

The indentured servants, who agreed to work in exchange for their passage, formed another category of New World settlers. These were mostly impoverished English farmhands evicted from their lands as large landowners were switching from agriculture to less labor-intensive sheep-raising for wool production. Indentured labor was actually a form of temporary slavery; indentured servants were sold to their masters upon arrival in the colonies. The churn rate was horrendous. Up to 90% of newcomers perished before completing their tenure and regaining their freedom, but a few made it through. Indentured servants mostly settled in the Chesapeake area, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. These settlers were eager to start anew with a can-do attitude of self-made men and women. At the same time, they lacked the sense of moral rectitude and social justice of the Northern settlers and were more than willing to work with the infamy of slavery, even though some of them had originally been quasi-slaves themselves. Here, in the settlement pattern, lay the seed of the Civil War that was to engulf the country by the middle of the 19th century.

A third category of settlers were the convicted felons that, thanks to the 1718 Transportation Act, the Crown dumped unto the New World by the boatload, mostly in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. They were sold on arrival like the indentured servants. Indentured servants were typically required to work for four years, while convicts had to work seven or fourteen years, depending on the severity of their sentences.⁶ The fourth category of migrants, the slaves, was denied any opportunity to freedom well into the 19th century and the Civil War, and even then, their rights wouldn't be

6). Bruce Kercher, "Perish or Prosper: The Law and Convict Transportation in the British Empire, 1700-1850"

fully recognized until the 1960s and still fail to be fully implemented to this day. Over half a million migrants settled in the colonies from 1700 to 1775; almost half were slaves, 18% were indentured servants, and 9% were convicts. Thus, almost three quarters of the immigrants were deprived of their freedom upon landing. Those who paid for their passage and landed as free men and women were given a plot of land on arrival and typically bought a few indentured servants, convicted felons, or slaves to help them work their land.

The ascetic Protestants and the industrious former indentured servants were laboriously tilling their lands and setting up warehouses and businesses while the ex-convicts went on opening saloons, gambling dens, and whorehouses, to the dismay of the former. To the budding capitalist self-made men as well as to the ascetic puritans, self-control was a cardinal virtue and any type of mind alteration was highly suspect as a risk of losing control; they had the ex-convict boogeyman to reinforce this view. Protestantism flourished mostly in binge-drinking Northern Europe, where mind alteration is rarely mild and intoxication almost inevitably leads to total loss of control. So strong is the fear of loss of control among the religious dissenters that even celebrations must remain dignified, stodgy, sober, austere. The ascetic Protestant festivity contrasts with the often boisterous, rowdy, and heavily ethylic but chaotically controlled Southern European celebrations.⁷

The temperance movement

The United States, especially its northeastern region, was therefore a particularly fertile ground for the temperance movement. Not surprisingly, that is where it started. The first modern temperance society was founded in 1808 in New York by two of Dr. Rush's disciples, Dr. Lyman Beecher and Dr. B. J. Clark, as the "Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Good Morals." New England remained a hotbed of the temperance movement throughout its existence.

7). See Chapter 8 – Alcohol.

The temperance movement was not confined to the US; soon temperance movements followed in Ireland, Scotland, England, and other parts of Northern Europe, though it never had much appeal in Southern Europe. The first world temperance convention was held in London in 1846.

The “Whole World’s Temperance Convention” held at the Metropolitan Hall in the city of New York on Thursday and Friday, Sept. 1 and 2, 1853, had about 1,000 attendees from the United States, Canada, and England – a rather parochial whole world. The opening address by a certain Mr. Burleigh gives the tone of the high-spiritedness that animated the temperance movement at that time:

“We must show, from the observation and experience of the world, the evils which have arisen from the vice of intemperance, and contrast them with the blessings proceeding from Temperance. These blessings we must scatter broad-cast over the land, till there shall not be on the broad earth a single victim to the deadly vice, or a single wailing mourner over its sad consequences. [Applause.] We are to prosecute this enterprise, moreover, upon the most stringent principles of reform-no compromise with the adversary-we take our ground upon this stand-that the use and preparation of intoxicating beverages is a moral wrong, and therefore the whole business of the manufacture, the sale, and the use ought to be assaulted with exterminating warfare. “No quarter,” is our motto-we ask none. We ask none, because we stand upon truth as our stronghold. Our fortress is impregnable, our panoply is irresistible. The sword which we wield is like that which the archangel swayed; it is so tempered that nothing is so solid as to resist its edge. We have no occasion to ask for quarter; therefore we claim no credit for heroism. We desire to put an end to this traffic; we recognize that alcoholic drinks are not fit articles for commerce, and are not fit to be found anywhere in domestic use. Anything short of this full recognition opposes our operations. The moment we begin to compromise with Temperance, to go down to any lower ground, to adopt any

half-way measures, at that instant we give up any power which we possess of ensuring our ultimate success.”⁸

One of the most prominent temperance movements of the time, the Order of the Good Templars, was founded in 1851 and rapidly spread over the world. It was followed by the National Prohibition Party (1869), the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (1874), and the Anti-Saloon League (1895). The original Society for the Suppression of Vice was founded in London in 1802 and “laboured unremittingly to check the spread of open vice and immorality,”⁹ while its US namesake was founded in 1873.

Maine was the first state to adopt alcohol prohibition, in 1851. By 1855, 13 of the 31 states had adopted some type of alcohol prohibition. But even though the fight for alcohol prohibition was the mother of all battles for the temperance movements, temperance advocates sought prohibition of all intoxicants in general.¹⁰

The psychoactive landscape at the dawn of prohibition

According to colonial laws in the 1600s, farmers were required to grow hemp for the production of ropes and sails. By the 1700s, hemp was the primary crop grown by George Washington, and was also a valuable crop for Thomas Jefferson; both men exchanged smoking blends that may have contained cannabis. The Declaration of Independence was drafted on hemp paper.

Napoleon declared a total prohibition on hashish in 1798, which probably bolstered its popularity amongst the French intelligentsia. The early 19th century “club des Hashischins” counted among its

- 8). The Whole World’s Temperance Convention, held at Metropolitan Hall in the city of New York, Sept. 1st and 2nd, 1853, Fowlers And Wells, Publishers, Clinton Hall, 131 Nassau Street, 1853, Compiled from the Reports in Tribune, Times and Herald; principally from the Tribune.
- 9). The Leisure Hour, 13th January 1872.
- 10). See also for this section: Mark Lawrence Schrad, “The Political Power of Bad Ideas: Networks, Institutions, and the Global Prohibition Wave,” Mar 24, 2010.

members Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, and Eugène Delacroix.

In the 1800s, virtually every household in the US and Europe owned various types of opium preparations that were commonly used to cure all kinds of diseases, from diarrhea to tuberculosis, cough, neuralgia or menstrual pains, laudanum and paregoric being by far the most popular. Opium and its derivative, morphine, together with quinine, were often the only medicine available during the Civil War in the 1860s. Opium was handed out liberally to treat malaria, diarrhea, and all sorts of battlefield ailments, while morphine was used extensively as an anesthetic during surgeries to remove broken limbs and treat other war injuries, of which there were plenty. According to other sources, alcohol ingestion and chloroform inhalation were the anesthesia methods of choice.¹¹ War on Drugs lore has it that by the end of the Civil War, 400,000 addicted war veterans were roaming the country with their hypodermic needles and morphine, afflicted by the “soldier’s disease.” Despite its popularity among drug experts, this legend was a late fabrication of the War on Drugs propaganda to illustrate the perils of opiate use. There are no records in the National Archives and just a few mentions of post-war addiction issues in the literature until World War I, 50 years after the facts. One would think that 400,000 addicts out of a population of 31 million (including 4 million newly-freed slaves who most likely were not addicted) would have left some more noticeable imprint.¹²

When they were first discovered, morphine, heroin (the heroic drug), codeine, and cocaine were invariably hailed as miracle drugs and universal panacea. They were of course far more powerful than anything else used by medicine at that time. This led to another “disease of excess.” While opium had been safely ingested throughout the world for thousands of years and coca leaves had been safely chewed

11). http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Medicine_in_Virginia_During_the_Civil_War.

12). Jerry Mandel, “The Mythical Roots Of Us Drug Policy: Soldier’s Disease And Addicts In The Civil War,”
<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/soldis.htm>.

by South American Indians for about as long, the technological improvement that led to the isolation of the active principle of these two substances had dramatic consequences on the effects of their uses. It is noteworthy that a first technological improvement, smoking opium, marked the beginning of an epidemic of opium addiction, starting in China in the 18th century. This addiction epidemic largely spared India, where opium was traditionally chewed. Just like tobacco smoking, opium smoking significantly shortens delivery time to the brain, resulting in much quicker and more acute effects.

Up until the turn of the 20th century, the commerce of drugs was part of the legitimate economy. Psychoactive substances, mainly cannabis, cocaine and opiates (opium, morphine, heroin, codeine), were unregulated and available in any drugstore. The Sears & Roebuck catalogue, a fixture of millions of Americans homes at that time, offered a Bayer heroin kit, complete with a syringe, two needles, and a carrying case for around \$1.50 that was marketed as an opium and morphine addiction cure!

The pharmacopeia was dominated by psychoactive substances, as opiates and cocaine were among the major ingredients used in medicine, while alcohol was the basis of numerous medicinal tinctures, wines, elixirs and liquors. By 1905, there were 28,000 preparations, the so-called “patent medicines” sold anywhere from mail order catalogs, department stores and drugstores to the infamous snake oil doctors and their medicine wagons.

The German laboratory Bayer, the first of the world’s pharmaceutical giants, built its original fortune on heroin and aspirin, both discovered by Heinrich Dreser, head of Bayer laboratory. Merck, another German laboratory and pharmaceutical giant, built its fortune on morphine, codeine, and cocaine. The French cocaine-laced “Vin Mariani” that later inspired Coca Cola was endorsed by Thomas Edison, Emile Zola, Queen Victoria, US President McKinley, and no less than three different popes, among other celebrities. Pope Leo XIII even awarded Mariani a gold medal and was prominently displayed in the wine advertising. Up until 1916 in the UK, people could buy at Harrods “A Welcome Present for Friends at the Front” kit containing cocaine, morphine, syringes and spare needles. And

of course, the iconic Coca Cola contained cocaine until 1903 and was marketed as a temperance drink, an alternative to alcohol.

Addiction began to spread, prompting the US government to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, requiring labeling of contents on foods and drugs. It signaled the beginning of the end of the patent medicine era as medicines containing addictive substances were required to bear a warning label. The Pure Food and Drug Act also helped curb addiction by protecting patients from unsuspected psychoactive use.

With increased awareness of the potential dangers of opiates and cocaine, and more careful prescription by doctors, addiction started to decline at the turn of the 20th century while substance abuse moved down the social ladder to the urban poor and spread to the working class and the underworld, especially the prostitutes. While recreational use of psychoactives was acceptable and tolerated, even fashionable, as long as the stereotypical addict was a white, middle-aged upper to middle class white woman, it turned into dreadful evil when it moved to the working class or worse, to minorities and the underworld.¹³

The use of psychoactives was not restricted to their therapeutic applications. Their recreational use was actually quite fashionable among artists, writers and the intelligentsia, as well as the aristocracy and the upper class in general, especially in Europe. Sherlock Holmes is famous for his heroin and cocaine addiction. Freud was an enthusiastic cocaine user. Alice in Wonderland is most likely the product of multi-substance experiences. From Balzac, Théophile Gautier and Baudelaire to Gauguin, Van Gogh or Picasso, from Robert Louis Stevenson to Thomas de Quincey, Lord Byron or Edgar Allen Poe, the popularity of opium and hashish was widespread amongst the avant-garde.

A few facts are worth noticing here:

- The technological improvements that allowed the isolation of the active ingredients from opium and coca leaves into

13). Stephen R. Kandall, M.D., "Women and Addiction in the United States – 1850 to 1920."

morphine, heroin and cocaine caused an addiction epidemic, just like the invention of distillation led to an epidemic of alcoholism and the introduction of opium smoking led to an epidemic of opium addiction.

- The typical abusers of that time were health practitioners (nurses, doctors, pharmacists, etc.) and their wives as well as middle-aged rural housewives who had been over-prescribed by their physicians or had bought their potions at the local drugstores or from the back of traveling wagons, having no idea that the stuff they were using might be addictive.
- Abusers started abusing mostly by ignorance; addicts, in a way, were accidental, unsuspecting addicts. Over-prescription by careless physicians was one of the major causes of addiction.
- Addiction receded rapidly around 1900 as physicians and users became more educated about the potential dangers of addictive substances, which may indicate that some of these substances were not that addictive after all. Truthful labeling helped a lot of course.
- The vast majority of users, which was pretty much the entire population, never abused and the vast majority of abusers kept on living normal, productive lives.
- While alcohol use was mostly recreational, opiate, cannabis and cocaine use was mostly medicinal among the general population. Their recreational use was rare and mostly confined to some ethnic minorities and the avant-garde artists, the intelligentsia, and the European aristocracy.

Addiction estimates at that time vary wildly between 200,000 and 3 million addicts, 250,000 being the generally agreed number. Most of the addicts were victims of over-prescription.