

THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT DRUGS

daniel e. williams

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for camel wellington and sweet melissa

Author's Preface

I was born in 1950. Growing up, when peer maturity passed me by as if I were standing still, Mom always said I was a late bloomer, imparting little comfort at the time. But being a late bloomer worked out surprisingly well in many aspects of my life, none more important than my association with drugs. I was fascinated by the counterculture in the 60s, especially the music, even though I didn't drink and wasn't in any hurry to try marijuana. When I finally did in 1970, it was on a fraternity house fire escape with a fellow ROTC cadet. Since that time I have done every drug on the menu. And I have learned two things: drugs are an adult pleasure and the government is deceiving us.

For nearly one hundred years our government has been wrong about drugs, about the people who use them and the risks they pose to society. Much of what they report is blatant misinformation, if not outright lies, despite a veneer of good intentions. It is also my contention millions of Americans agree with me. And it is not just the millions doing drugs responsibly, either. It is the millions more who've

come to see society's approach to the drug crisis generate much more harm than good. They cut across all age, income and race demographics. Over the last thirty-plus years I've made it a point to talk with a number of them. And listen.

What I've gathered reflects not so much a change of mind as it does a change of heart. We still consider drugs to be harmful, but have come to view our drug laws as worse – and many of us no longer consider legalization a four-letter word. But when Richard Nixon first convened his drug war council, escalating the conflict, hardly anyone outside of what was derisively labeled the “lunatic fringe” favored legalization. How dare we, they scolded, when marijuana turned innocents into murderers and LSD would sufficiently scramble our DNA to produce three-headed babies. None of that was true of course, but it is what our government wanted citizens to believe. And many did.

But that was then. This is now. And it seems sadly ironic those who continue to support drug prohibition now occupy the lunatic fringe. For with the benefit of nearly four decades perspective, we see truth trumpeting government fiction: a pan of warm brownies and a quart of cold milk are the only things I've killed stoned, and three-headed babies are themselves hallucinations, existing only in supermarket tabloids. We have come to see the responsible use theory, the one so close to the alcohol lobby heart, parallel itself in the illicit drug environment: as not every drinker is a drunkard, so too is not every drug user an abuser.

The Naked Truth About Drugs explores America's affinity for drugs, providing historical context, and my own, on virtually every drug we consume. And some of what you will read may surprise you. All drugs were legal and cheap and readily available in America prior to 1914, and we were

even encouraged to use them. Heroin was available from the Sears mail order catalog, as was morphine, opium and cocaine. But if you couldn't wait for the mailman, all those same drugs were sold at the corner grocery or drugstore. Our addiction rate then was very low, near identical to now. And we had no drug crime.

What changed it all, what disrupted our peaceful co-existence, was the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, a confluence of religious arrogance and racial bigotry, spread by a surprisingly small number of men and all tinged with political opportunism. All of which metastasized over the years and morphed into Richard Nixon's War on Drugs. Except now it was mostly white middle-class kids doing the drugs, questioning government authority by protesting our war with Vietnam. In turn, the government questioned their patriotism and gave raise to bumper-sticker politics, the most banal being "America: Love it or Leave it."

There are a variety of sound arguments for the repeal of drug prohibition. One is the Declaration of Independence, which guarantees our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, arguing the sovereignty of our bodies. Another is the Constitution, which defines treason against our United States as "levying war against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort." We are not fighting drugs per se; we are levying war against those who use them. Drug prohibition has enriched our enemies with hundreds of billions of dollars and will guarantee hundreds of billions more, giving more than enough aid to any comfort. At least that's how the arguments go.

The best argument, where I believe we share the greatest commonality and the least polarity, is the one for law and order. The hugely inflated prices addicts pay for ille-

gal drugs force many into a life of crime, committing nearly all our larceny-thefts, crimes the FBI report as non-violent. And though some addicts would just as soon shoot you as look at you, most drug violence occurs at the higher echelons of the black market, stemming from territorial and distribution conflicts. Repealing drug prohibition will bankrupt the black market and reduce the overall Crime Index by at least 50%, an argument central to the debate and hard to counter.

History is replete with drug stories and tales both good and bad, but all provide empirical data, unequivocal in its conclusion, that drugs are here to stay. So we are going to live with them one way or another. We lived in peace for over a century and have been at war nearly as long, ninety years. And rumor has it drug warriors, no longer intent on maintaining the status quo, have plans on paper just itching to be implemented that will end the drug war once and for all. It will not be pretty, making today's methods seem almost quaint. And we will all be doomed to failure, simply because we like drugs.

We drink, we smoke, we ingest and inject. It is part of who we are that no policy can change, no law. So we change our law and policy. But the biggest canard of the drug debate portrays those favoring repeal as being "soft on drugs." Not at all true. We're just being hard on stupidity. Which is why ending drug prohibition is society's smartest step toward jackhammering all those good intentions paving the way to hell.