

The War on Drugs -- Background Research

Brief History

The war on drugs in the United States can be traced back to the 60's where recreational drug use, which included substances like cocaine, marijuana, and LSD, was finding its way into the youth demographics. This resulting in part due to a rising rebellious sentiment created from social unrest (Fontline). Legislation began in the 70s under the Nixon administration to focus on reducing drug abuse, declaring that drug abuse was "public enemy number one" (drugpolicy.org). It resulted in the incarceration of individuals from certain communities, as it targeted users of marijuana. In 1972, President Nixon's commission unanimously voted to decriminalize marijuana, but Nixon rejected the recommendations and continued to pursue those found possessing and distributing marijuana.

The next wave of legislation came under the Reagan era, in which a new smokable form of cocaine -- crack -- rose in popularity in areas like New York and Los Angeles. Ronald Reagan's wife Nancy began a nationwide drug program -- DARE -- aimed to reduce drug addiction, and it demonized drug abuse. This program was adopted across the nation, despite the program lacking enough credibility (drugpolicy.org). Consequently, levels of arrests and incarcerations continued to rise and prisons were continuing to fill with those who possessed and sold crack cocaine.

Impacts

Due to the association between the communities and these drugs, a disproportionate number of blacks and latinos were jailed and given times to serve for simply possessing small amounts. Marijuana was associated and smuggled into the US largely from Mexico. Cocaine in the 60s and 70s was brought in largely from drug cartels from South America. However, because of the

association of the drug with glamor and the rich, cocaine use was not deemed a huge problem.

That is, until a new form, crack, was discovered. Because this drug, even though it is identical to powder cocaine was associated with the poorer communities, legislation pursued those individuals who were involved in its market.

Today, drug policy is taking a more sensible approach. States have decriminalized marijuana and are looking to pursue lesser sentences on other drugs. The hope is for more sensible drug policies to be enacted to reduce harsh punishments behind what seems to be small charges.

"A Brief History of the Drug War." *A Brief History of the Drug War* | Drug Policy Alliance.
Drugpolicy.org, n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2017.

"Thirty Years of America's Drug War." *PBS*. PBS, n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2017.