

1. Finding an Enemy and Declaring a War

“Imagine if the government chased sick people with diabetes, put a tax on insulin and drove it into the black market, told doctors they couldn’t treat them, then sent them to jail . . . we do practically the same thing every day in the week to sick people hooked on drugs. The jails are full and the problem is getting worse every day.”¹ Billie Holiday

America has been waging a war on drugs for more than a century, and the body-count continues to grow. More than 64,000 drug users died in the United States from overdose deaths in 2016.² More than 46% of newly incarcerated federal inmates are in prison for drug convictions.³ Thousands are killed or seriously injured every year in accidents related to clandestine drug production.⁴ Drug-related crimes continue to claim and maim countless lives every year. And drug users face a host of preventable diseases and injuries related to unclean needles, dangerous additives, fake drugs, and infected products.⁵ The casualties, victims, refugees and prisoners of war continue to pile up, while the benefits of this ongoing conflict are as difficult as ever to locate.

The war on drugs is oxymoronic; the paradigm espouses a goal of complete social abstinence, while Americans continue to spend \$100 *billion* every year on illegal (and untaxed*) narcotics.⁶ Despite accounting for less than five-percent of global population, America is the site of more than 25% of the world’s drug overdose deaths.⁷ It is, relatedly, also the home of 25% of the world’s prison population.⁸ America is a culture in denial, waging an illogical war against the unpreventable vice of intoxication, and doing so in a counterproductive manner that leaves bodies in its wake, either dead or in jail.

An Other America: There is an America that many do not know exists. In this America, drug users are not criminalized and stigmatized—the majority of those who use intoxicants never develop addiction or dependency.⁹ In this America, supply is not restricted, nor are users forced to seek out black market dealers; rather, edible opium and tinctures, cannabis oils, and cocaine

solutions can be purchased at convenience stores without a prescription.¹⁰ For those who do find themselves struggling with addiction, the treatment in this America is never criminal sanctions nor social exclusion. In this America, the Supreme Court has ruled that when a doctor “gives an addict moderate amounts of the drugs for self-administration in order to relieve conditions incident to addiction,” they are practicing legal and responsible medicine.¹¹ Revealingly, most addicts in this America do not end up unemployed, homeless, or unhealthy; rather, three-quarters of people actively addicted to opiates or cocaine maintain steady jobs, even when they are using.¹² In this America, 22% of self-described addicts are wealthy, while only six-percent are classified as poor.¹³ Here, addiction is neither a death sentence nor a debilitating condition, a state of affairs that may seem odd to those who occupy the contemporary United States. Unfortunately, this America no longer exists.

The country described above, where drug users and addicts could live fulfilling lives, has been replaced by a police state where we drug addicts are shamed by our families, pushed out of our social support groups by faulty notions of tough love, hunted down by police who have been coopted as soldiers in the war on drugs, and stigmatized by society at large.¹⁴ As this project will reveal, the chemicals are not responsible for the majority of problems drug users and addicts experience.¹⁵ It is the environment in which we use these substances that is responsible for the lion’s share of damage done. Heroin and cocaine do not typically cause skin infections or abscesses, but contaminated drugs purchased from unregulated street-level dealers often do.¹⁶ Getting high on methamphetamine or crack does not naturally land one in prison; rather, the society that builds the prisons and regulates the laws is responsible for who is thrown into the abyss.¹⁷ Hepatitis and HIV are seldom contracted from the drugs that users inject; rather, these diseases plague addicted communities because of a cultural refusal to ensure addicts have access

to legal and clean supplies and paraphernalia.¹⁸ We addicts are not killing ourselves. We are under attack.

Prior to the twentieth century, when America began to regulate and eventually outlaw narcotics like heroin, marijuana and cocaine, the drug-friendly America described above, where addicts could live happy and fulfilling lives, was a reality. As Rufus King describes the era, “If drug use was not really approved by society, addiction was nonetheless regarded merely as a personal weakness similar to overindulgence in alcohol, and no efforts were made—or dreamed of—to impose penal restrictions.”¹⁹ Heroin, morphine, and cocaine were legal for recreational use in the United States until 1914, and marijuana wasn’t effectively outlawed at the federal level until 1937 with the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act.²⁰ Before these instrumental pieces of legislation, there was no war on drugs, no criminalization of drug use, no burgeoning prison population serving time for drug possession—there was no cultural fear of intoxicants. Lloyd Manufacturing once sold cocaine pain relief drops, which they advertised with an image of two children playing alongside the caption, “Instantaneous Cure!”²¹ Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup was a morphine-based product marketed to parents as a treatment “for children teething.”²² And the contemporary favorite of fear-mongering, anti-drug campaigners, heroin, was sold over the counter by Bayer as a cough suppressant from 1898-1910.²³ While Sigmund Freud was studying the medicinal properties of cocaine via self-experimentation, Coca-Cola was using the same chemical as an ingredient in its soda.²⁴ In early twentieth century America, drug users could easily and affordably obtain their drugs, they were generally active and employed, and they seldom caused problems for society.²⁵ There was a cultural catalyst in the war on drugs, but the zeitgeist was not informed by a legitimate concern for the lives of addicts. This fire was started by a demagogue.

Striking the Match: The Western World, and particularly America, has always loved to get high. The legality and marketability of narcotics prior to the war on drugs put millions of dollars into the pockets of capitalistic entities, as James Inciardi explains:

by 1905 there were more than 28,000 pharmaceuticals containing psychoactive drugs readily available throughout the nation, sold in an unrestricted manner by physicians, over-the-counter from apothecaries, grocers, postmasters, and printers, from the tailgates of medicine show wagons as they traveled throughout rural and urban America, and through the mail by newspaper advertisements and catalog sales.²⁶

The roots of chemical intoxication in America run directly through *laissez-faire* capitalism, and as this project will show, the roots of prohibition draw life from the same dirt. According to David Courtwright, outright drug prohibition was nearly unheard of in America, until, “...nationalism, industrialization, medical science, public health, evangelism, missionary activism, economic progressivism, and total warfare prompted further attempts to restrict nonmedical consumption.”²⁷ Prior to the twentieth century, American culture saw a consistent normalization of the use of intoxicating substances. Easy availability and targeted marketing provided a sense of social acceptability that allowed for legal experimentation and self-medication fueled by free market capitalism: *caveat emptor*.

America’s anti-drug attitude did not materialize overnight; by the late 1880’s, a change was already in the air. That change was fueled, in large part, by one of America’s oldest national characteristics, white supremacy. According to King:

Opium smoking, associated with laziness and nonproductivity in the Far East, was inhibited by high duties laid on in the 1880’s, by a law prohibiting manufacture in the United States after 1887, and by a total ban on imports for the smoking use after 1909. Smoking also received a setback in the public view in the early 1900’s when it became associated to some extent with the so-called criminal classes.²⁸

This social fear was not founded on the danger of the substances themselves, but on the white cultural fear that criminals and racial others would use intoxicants and act in a manner

unacceptable to the white bourgeoisie. As Johann Hari explains, “The main reason given for banning drugs—the reason obsessing the men who launched this war—was that blacks, Mexicans, and Chinese were using these chemicals, forgetting their place, and menacing white people.”²⁹ The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act reveals America’s original emphasis on promoting consumer safety through adequate product labeling, not outright prohibition. The act required product labels to disclose the presence and quantity of eleven controlled substances, including cocaine, heroin and alcohol.³⁰ None of these substances were banned outright; they simply required proper labeling in an effort to encourage responsible consumption. But once race and criminality were attached to cultural scripts concerning drug use and intoxication, America’s liberal attitude about drugs began to change.

Michel de Certeau has described the process through which societies construct, endorse and update social norms through the use of mediated accounts of reality, such as news stories, narratives and advertisements: “These fragments of history are organized into articles of doctrine . . . these narratives have the twofold and strange power of transforming seeing into believing, and of fabricating realities out of appearances.”³¹ According to de Certeau, an individual’s subjective reality is *always* affected by mediated images and social norms. Our beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, speech patterns, habits, preferences and morals *never* come to exist without being constantly influenced and amended by the social milieu: “narrations about what’s-going-on constitute our orthodoxy.”³² Until the early twentieth century, American orthodoxy seemed indifferent to the norm of intoxicating chemicals. Enter the demagogue.

Harry’s War: The stage is set: early twentieth century America. There is no drug epidemic—no opium crisis resulting in tens-of-thousands of premature deaths every year. Drug users and addicts are more than tolerated; they often thrive in a culture that lacks contemporary

taken-for-granted American phobias surrounding drug use and intoxication.³³ Drugs are cheap and easily obtainable, those who use them are typically employed, and overdose resulting in death is uncommon, even among addicted populations.³⁴ America is moving *away* from an ideology of prohibition, a cultural progression punctuated by the passage of the 21st Amendment in December of 1933.³⁵ But even as intoxication is becoming more socially acceptable, a change is in the air. A man named Harry Anslinger is about to enter the ranks of the DC elite, and his ability to play off the deep seated racist ideology of the American public will lead to a century long war on drugs that is being waged to this day.

Shortly into the twentieth century, America began its first social experiment with prohibition, passing the 18th Amendment in 1919, which forbade the manufacturing, sale, or possession of “intoxicating liquors,” and the Volstead Act in 1920, which provided guidelines for the enforcement of prohibition.³⁶ In June of 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed a law establishing the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, and he placed a man named Harry Anslinger at the reins.³⁷ Anslinger’s reputation preceded him; he was so racist that even in the political and social atmosphere of the early twentieth century, his fellow Republican politicians called for his resignation based on his use of racial slurs.³⁸ This is the man who would shape America’s war on drugs, and his bigotry would become the axiom of both policy and enforcement.

Perhaps Harry’s biggest challenge upon accepting the newly created office was that, as Hari explains, “many drugs, including marijuana, were still legal, and the Supreme Court had recently ruled that people addicted to harder drugs should be dealt with by doctors, not bang-‘em-up men like Harry.”³⁹ In addition, the passage of the 21st Amendment in December of 1933 overturned the 18th Amendment and ended nearly 15 years of nation-wide alcohol prohibition, another indication that America was becoming *more* tolerant of intoxicating substances. As Hari

goes on to point out, “A war on narcotics alone—cocaine and heroin, outlawed in 1914—wasn’t enough. They were used only by a tiny minority, and you couldn’t keep an entire department alive on such small crumbs.”⁴⁰ Before the paint could dry on his parking spot, Anslinger was going to be out of a job, so he worked up a solution: he declared a “relentless warfare against the despicable dope-pedaling vulture who preys on the weakness of his fellow man.”⁴¹ The war on drugs began in the 1930s, and it began as a war against marijuana, a substance that, when smoked, was associated at that time with Mexican immigrants and black musicians.⁴² Harry wasn’t starting a drug war; Harry was starting a race war.

Perhaps the biggest irony lay in the fact that many white Americans had been consuming cannabis regularly for years; it was the main ingredient in numerous tinctures and patent medicines.⁴³ As Malik Bennett and Amanda Reiman have shown, the term marijuana was a large part of the misunderstanding:

“marihuana” was a foreign term. So, when the media began to play on the fears that the public had about these new citizens by falsely spreading claims about the “disruptive Mexicans” with their dangerous native behaviors including marihuana use, the rest of the nation did not know that the “marihuana” was a plant they already had in their medicine cabinets.⁴⁴

White America was petrified and enraged at the notion of a racial other who would dare to bring their own intoxicants to the party. The threat lay in the possibility that people of color would use these intoxicating substances and challenge their position in the social hierarchy of American white supremacy.⁴⁵ This was not a new theme: more than a decade earlier, on September 29, 1913, the *New York Times* reported that a white mob in Mississippi had lynched and shot two young black men (eighteen and twenty-one) who were suspected of starting “a reign of terror” under the influence of cocaine.⁴⁶ Stories such as this—colorful depictions of racial others “forgetting their place” in America’s white supremacist social hierarchy after consuming

narcotics—provided a way for white Americans to vent their racist views while avoiding more direct and socially-policed racist language.⁴⁷

History is replete with examples of America’s tendency to make this mental jump. King describes a similar process at work during World War I, when:

vague warnings of danger of national enslavement by drugs blended with fuzzy notions about spies, saboteurs, and an imminent German invasion of the New World—suddenly the harmless, pitied victim of the drug habit emerged as the menacing dope fiend, tool of German malevolence.⁴⁸

The war on drugs thrives off political discourses that work in this manner to legitimize racism.⁴⁹ Attaching intoxication to criminality, then duct-taping both to non-white, non-American, and/or non-Christian bodies is a trick that has always served the interests of what bell hooks calls white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, “the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics.”⁵⁰ By criminalizing drug users, the state created a category of social miscreants that America was allowed to hate, to fear, and to punish; by attaching race to intoxication, white supremacy managed to double-down on that stigmatization.⁵¹ White people were given a new reason to fear their neighbors of color—drugs.

White supremacy, along with its supporting systems of oppression (patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia) have always been a main staple of America’s political apparatus; inculcation begins with state-mandated education.⁵² As white author Peggy McIntosh explains, “my schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor.”⁵³ Every American schoolchild is indoctrinated with the tenants of white supremacy, along with the basics of science, history and math: the lessons are built into the curriculum. American History begins the day, a class where there are 44 white, male Presidents to discuss, and one man of color. Science is next, and children learn about heroes like Franklin, Einstein, Darwin, Freud, Sagan, Hawking, Dawkins, Hitchens, and Edison —white men who have become

the chapter-headings of American science and history textbooks. Meanwhile, botanist, artist, musician, academic and inventor George Washington Carver is reduced from renaissance to “peanut man,” while Henrietta Lacks manages to elude conversation about medical treatments that would not exist were it not for her racist and misogynistic objectification at the hands of white medical “professionals.”⁵⁴ On to English Literature: Twain, Frost, Poe, Hemmingway, and Lee—more stand-alone last names belonging to white faces offered along with, at best, a brief shout-out to Fredrick Douglas, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin as alternatives to dangerous, unmentionable black radicals like Malcom X, Angela Davis and Hughey Newton. The lack of representation is a well-honed tool of oppression, every bit as sharp and deadly as its cousin, misrepresentation. As Anslinger realized nearly a century ago, this American wellspring of never-ending racist resentment is a powerful tool of manipulation that can be tapped into and utilized for political gain.

Anslinger’s ability to play on white America’s underlying racial fears became his calling card. Without any legitimate evidence to back up his claims, Anslinger testified before Congress, claiming that marijuana was a gateway drug that would make users criminally insane.⁵⁵ He treated the House Committee on Appropriations to a racist diatribe, saying he had been told of “colored students at the University of Minn[esota] partying with [white] female students and getting their sympathy with stories of racial persecution. Result: pregnancy.”⁵⁶ Pressing further into the hallowed ground of racist ideology, he informed the country (falsely) that “the Negro population . . . accounts for 10 percent of the total population, but 60 percent of the addicts,” adding that the increase in addiction was “practically 100 percent among the Negro people.”⁵⁷ His 1937 article in *The American Magazine*, “Marijuana: Assassin of our Youth,” was an incredible performance of political Orwellian doublethink in which Anslinger begins by claiming

that the number of “murders, suicides, robberies, criminal assaults, holdups, burglaries, and deeds of maniacal insanity [marijuana] causes each year, especially among the young, can only be conjectured.”⁵⁸ In the very next sentence, however, he seems to suggest that despite the alleged crime waves caused by marijuana, communities have failed to notice its use (or the accompanying criminality): “The sweeping march of [marijuana] addiction has been so insidious that, in numerous communities, it thrives almost unmolested, largely because of official ignorance of its effects.”⁵⁹ A wave of murders and robberies that nobody notices, perpetrated by racial others—this is the government’s official explanation of the dangers of marijuana. Once it proved successful, Anslinger’s rhetoric entered the political playbooks of racist demagoguery, reappearing repeatedly in political discourse throughout the next half century.

As Robin DiAngelo has pointed out, “The ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which are suppressed is the foundation of cultural domination.”⁶⁰ In a country that has *always* defined itself through an ideology of imperialism, white-supremacist capitalism, and patriarchy, authorized cultural narratives will necessarily uphold these problematic cultural tenets.⁶¹ Any narrative that challenges these oppressive structures will be silenced or ignored—it will not be authorized. The proof is in the press. Finding success in his broad, racist appeals, Anslinger utilized the twentieth century’s burgeoning spectacle of mass media, encouraging press organizations to run macabre stories depicting marijuana as a dangerous psychoactive substance, nearly always associated with non-white use.⁶² He posed for official photographs behind his desk, surrounded by paperwork, or next to large piles of drugs seized by his agents; always competing for market space, newspapers had little choice but to publish the high-quality photos along with accompanying articles describing the “success” of the war on drugs.⁶³ He

brought other government officials onboard, including the Secretary of the Treasury, who reported (without evidence) on June 12, 1919, that Americans were:

consuming ten to sixty times as much opium per capita as any other nation; that the number of opium users was somewhere between 200,000 and 4 million, and “probably more than” a million; and that dope peddlers had set up their own elaborate national organization to procure and distribute their illicit wares.⁶⁴

Fear is a powerful motivator; the public was on board.

Anslinger’s utilization of visual and narrative media was a precursor to Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*: “the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.”⁶⁵ The trumped-up stories spread across the country like a media-fueled virus, providing citizens a new social script for understanding drugs as dangerous, infectious, and associated with people of color. While press organizations reaped the fiscal rewards of humanity’s macabre lust for the salacious, Anslinger rode a wave of mass-produced spectacle and speculation to a new level of political control—he declared war, a responsibility typically reserved for either the President or Congress. The spectacle of mass media provided Harry a conduit for distribution of his propaganda, and distribute he did.

Anslinger crafted and circulated poignant images that told a powerful story, and the newspapers added headlines and captions that provided readers with a discernable narrative. As Michelle Alexander explains:

...the conflation of blackness with crime did not happen organically; rather, it was constructed by political and media elites as part of the broad project known as the War on Drugs. This conflation served to provide a legitimate outlet to the expression of antiblack resentment and animus—a convenient release valve now that explicit forms of racial bias are strictly condemned. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer permissible to hate blacks, but we can hate criminals. Indeed, we are encouraged to do so.⁶⁶

Anslinger utilized the spectacle of mass media to influence public perception of marijuana use(rs) by affiliating acute marijuana intoxication with dangerous, violent outbursts, a trick that

brought support from many who had little personal experience with the plant. But more importantly, he catered to deep-seated racist contempt that many Americans were desperately seeking to express through an acceptable social script—he provided Alexander’s “release valve” for racist ideology. Anslinger’s crafted statements and exciting photographs found their way into newspapers across the nation, painting the war on drugs as a righteous endeavor designed to protect white Americans from dangerous racial others who might victimize them at any moment.⁶⁷

News stories provide a large audience with a subjective account of an event from an arbitrary perspective, and the portion of a story that is told, along with how it is told, affect the audience’s view of reality. As de Certeau narrates:

“Be quiet,” says the TV anchorman or the political representative, “These are the facts. Here are the data, the circumstances, etc. Therefore you must . . .” Narrated reality constantly tells us what must be believed and what must be done . . . the establishment of the real is the most contemporary form of our dogmas.⁶⁸

The news reports we read tell us all that we can know about events that are often far away and disconnected from our personal lives: the “facts” provided by a reporter are often the *only* information that a consumer will receive concerning the subject matter. As Anslinger realized early on, and as Debord colorfully explained:

the spectacle, grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration . . . In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life.⁶⁹

As the spectacle evolved, Harry kept pace, and the war on drugs expanded to become a targeted war against poor people and people of color.

Licata's Ghost: The story of Victor Licata reveals Anslinger's adeptness at manipulating the news media by choosing which stories (and which parts of stories) were emphasized in official government statements. When Licata murdered his family with an axe in 1933, *none* of the numerous psychiatrists who examined him mentioned marijuana use in the lengthy file they created to diagnose his behavior—they did not think it relevant.⁷⁰ They did, however, note a long and verifiable history of mental illness, including repeated failed attempts to institutionalize Licata based on a well-known dissociative disorder.⁷¹ But when Anslinger backed up media reports that Licata's grisly act was a direct result of marijuana intoxication, he created a capitalistic opportunity for news outlets competing for customers.⁷²

With the government's stamp of approval mitigating any risk of libel suits, newspapers raced to one-up each other by producing the most extreme and fear-inducing description of the murders. Many headlines appeared alongside a black-and-white photograph of Licata (also the name of a Sicilian city), dark skinned, curly haired, wide-eyed and exhausted—the new posterchild in Anslinger's war on drugs.⁷³ It is worth noting that through his manipulation of Licata's identity, Anslinger may be the first example of a politician who utilized racist ideology *without ever mentioning race*. He was not the last to perform this clever trick, which is now so well-established to have been given a name: “dog whistle politics.”⁷⁴ Political dog whistling involves the use of coded language, clever phrases, and loaded terms to communicate a message that is never overtly stated.⁷⁵ As Ian López explains:

The new racial politics presents itself as steadfastly opposed to racism and ever ready to condemn those who publicly use racial profanity. *We fiercely oppose racism and stand prepared to repudiate anyone who dares utter the n-word.* Meanwhile, though, the new racial discourse keeps up a steady drumbeat of subliminal racial grievances and appeals to color-coded solidarity . . . using a dog whistle simply means speaking in code to a target audience.⁷⁶

Dog whistling would quickly become a staple of contemporary political rhetoric. But in the era of Anslinger, this new concept of dog whistling was a trick for the kids to pick up and perfect; for Harry, old-school racism would suffice. Such raw bigotry, both personal and cultural, instigated and fueled the war on drugs.

Once the press got ahold of a salacious story, it often went “viral,” and Anslinger could sit back and watch his baby grow into a monster. Licata’s story is a perfect example. On October 17, 1933, the *Tampa Daily Times* headline read, “Crazy Youth Slays Family,” describing “the killer was Victor Licata, 21, said to be a marijuana addict.”⁷⁷ The next day the *Tampa Morning Tribune* raised the stakes with a quote from an investigator who reported that “...the slayer had been addicted to marijuana cigarettes for more than six months. This, he said, had unbalanced his mind, at least temporarily.”⁷⁸ An evening edition of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* went all-in, titillating readers with the headline, “Dream Slayer Talks in Cell,” and reporting that “Victor Licata had a dream, a horrible nightmare that snapped the last bit of sensibility out of his dope-tortured brain and made him a butcher.”⁷⁹ These stories utilized fear to sway public sentiment towards stricter enforcement of drug laws, as evidenced by additional stories in the same edition of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* which read, in part, “War on marijuana traffic here. Every agency of the police department, with assistance pledged by federal, state, and county law enforcement officials, will be put to work at once to stamp out the use of marijuana weeds as a narcotic.”⁸⁰ The same day the *Tampa Daily Times* ran a headline that read, “Stamp Out this Weed of Flaming Murder.” With one grizzly act that likely had nothing whatsoever to do with marijuana, Victor Licata became a cautionary tale to American families, and a racialized parable for advocates of the war on drugs.

Victor Licata was neither the first nor the last person whose behavior would be used to justify an unrelated racist war on drugs. With guttural fear driving public sentiment, the early twentieth century saw white America's long-standing racial anxieties begin to seep into other narratives of drug-induced violence, reinforcing pre-existing racial fears that could then be played on by politicians to pass new and stricter drug laws. In February of 1914 the *New York Times* published a full-page editorial titled, "Negro Cocaine 'Fiends' are a new Southern Menace," which falsely claimed that "Murder and insanity [are] increasing among lower class blacks because they have taken to 'sniffing' since deprived of whiskey by prohibition."⁸¹ Kind has analyzed the ways that, throughout the early twentieth century, "it was reported to the press that 'cocaine poisoning' produced insanity and that the drug was being widely sold to school children. Harlem was supposed to be so full of dangerous child addicts that good citizens were urged to stay out of it."⁸² Such stories served to simultaneously affiliate black citizens with cocaine use *and* to associate criminality with both, providing readers, once again, with Alexander's "legitimate outlet for the expression of antiblack resentment and animus," and allowing the war on drugs to progress under tacitly racist justifications.⁸³

As Khalil Muhammad has pointed out, the "statistical language of black criminality . . . is the glue that binds race to crime today as in the past."⁸⁴ Anslinger and his successors have consistently reapplied this rhetorical "glue" by associating people of color with bad behavior through the trope of intoxication as a social scourge. Travis Dixon has described how mass media, using this recipe of unspoken racism, is "teaching us to love fear:"

when inundated with such images, day in and day out, year after year, there can be little wonder that so many Americans support the prison-industrial complex, for the mass media are indeed teaching us to be racist, to clamor for more arrests of young black men, to surrender our hopes for justice and racial equality to the hysteria of a punishing democracy."⁸⁵

The war on drugs was constructed through the illusion of race-based criminality—through a sustained assault on the senses, from every direction and at all times, that painted white people as righteous citizens who must fear the threat of intoxicated black or brown men seeking to do them harm.

On February 21, 1925, the *New York Times* reported, “Mexican, Crazy by Marihuana, Runs Amuck with Butcher Knife,” describing how Escardo Valle, “crazed from smoking marijuana . . . ran amuck in a local hospital and killed six people before he could be subdued.”⁸⁶ In 1927, another *New York Times* headline read “Mexican Family Goes Insane,” previewing a story that alleged “a widow and her four children have been driven insane by eating the Marijuana plant, according to doctors who say there is no hope of saving the children’s lives and that the mother will be insane for the rest of her life.”⁸⁷ These stories—normalized racist ideologies thinly veiled with rationalizing claims of criminality and intoxication—were not unusual in the early twentieth century. Their prevalence shaped the worldviews of readers across the country, and in a rhetorical trick, Anslinger managed to attach chemical intoxication to criminality, and to then apply the alleged dangers to populations that white America had already decided to marginalize and oppress. Once this trick was complete, it was not difficult to feed off of the deep-seated racism that white Americans harbored toward people of color and use it to pass a host of anti-drug laws—the media did most of the work for him. As Muhammad points out, racist stereotypes are reinforced and validated through depictions of black criminality: “For white Americans of every ideological stripe . . . African American criminality became one of the most widely accepted bases for justifying prejudicial thinking, discriminatory treatment, and/or acceptance of racial violence as an instrument of public safety.”⁸⁸

Harry's People: In an ironic twist that epitomizes white supremacy's double-standard, Anslinger was himself both a drug dealer *and* a drug addict when he died.⁸⁹ In his late-life memoir, *The Murderers: The Story of the Narcotic Gangs*, Anslinger described his interactions with an important member of Congress who, "headed one of the powerful committees of Congress . . . his decisions and statements helped to shape and direct the destiny of the United States and the free world."⁹⁰ This member of Congress had become addicted to heroin, and when Anslinger demanded his friend quit using the drug immediately, he was told that this was not possible—that the desire for heroin had become a need—that this man would continue to use the drug regardless of any threat or danger, including jail.⁹¹ Years after Anslinger authored this semi-anonymous description, the book's coauthor, Will Oursler, confirmed an oft-repeated rumor: the unnamed addict was Senator Joe McCarthy.⁹²

Anslinger's racist double-standard concerning enforcement of the laws he pretended to support is the stuff of legend. When he heard that white actress Judy Garland was struggling with an opioid addiction, he encouraged her to take some time off to rest and recover; when Billie Holiday was suspected of using heroin, he had agents chain her to a hospital bed and withdraw her methadone medication, leaving her to die in agony.⁹³ When confronted with the cognitive dissonance of heroin addiction invading the sacred space of white legislation, Harry acquiesced. Billie Holiday was tortured and murdered, but Senator Joe McCarthy was provided a legal supply of heroin from a nearby drug store; the Federal Bureau of Narcotics even paid the bill until the day he died.⁹⁴ Years after setting up the illegal drug connection for his friend, Anslinger himself developed a painful condition known as angina, which he treated with daily doses of morphine until his death, a development biographer John McWilliams describes as "an incredible irony for the man who devoted his adult life to the enforcement and control of such

narcotics.”⁹⁵ But Anslinger’s legacy did not die with him; it was passed down through mentorship and strategic hiring prior to his retirement.

From the moment Anslinger hired Joe Arpaio as an agent for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1957, the man became his “principle disciple,” and Arpaio has taken Anslinger’s policies of punishment and stigmatization to a new level of cruelty.⁹⁶ After his career as a federal agent in the war on drugs, Arpaio was elected sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, six consecutive times, serving from 1993 until 2016. During that time he constructed what he proudly calls “concentration camps:” large, outdoor “tent cities” where inmates with drug convictions were housed and forced to work on chain gangs in 110 degree Arizona heat, burying bodies, cleaning up trash, or landscaping public property, all while wearing pink clothing that labels them with *The Scarlet Letter* of their criminality.⁹⁷ As Hari has reported, “Anslinger said addicts were ‘lepers’ who needed to be ‘quarantined,’ and so Arpaio has built a leper colony for them in the desert.”⁹⁸ Arpaio has bragged that he would feed the inmates just two meals per day of “rotten” lumps that cost, at most, 40 cents per meal.⁹⁹ Visits with family and friends are non-contact; temperatures inside the tents crest 140 degrees during summer months, and although there is an air conditioned prison facility nearby, Arpaio has refused to allow the inmates to use it.¹⁰⁰ This is how the war on drugs plays out in real time, with generation after generation of policy-makers advancing one-another’s inhumane agendas regardless of the cruelty imposed or the damage done.

Michelle Alexander has explained how, time and again, those who support the continuation of racial hierarchies have succeeded in reducing resistance to new and updated forms of oppression by “appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the

bottom of the American hierarchy.”¹⁰¹ Although recent trends have seen a Trumpesque return to overt racism and racist attacks, politicians had become quite adept at using López’s dog whistle politics:

. . . coded racial appeals that carefully manipulate hostility toward nonwhites. Examples of dog whistling include repeated blasts about criminals and welfare cheats, illegal aliens, and sharia law in the heartland. Superficially, these provocations have nothing to do with race, yet they nevertheless powerfully communicate messages about threatening nonwhites.¹⁰²

Dog whistling evolved when Anslinger’s methods proved incredibly effective at directing the racial animus of white Americans toward specific policy initiatives (criminal justice, welfare, anti-drug laws, etc.). The dog whistle of contemporary politics is Anslinger’s prototype, taken to the production phase.

George Wallace is an unavoidable staple of American history—a synecdoche for Southern politics throughout the 1950s and 1960s, where race was often the central aspect of political campaigns. He is perhaps best known for his 1963 speech in Montgomery, Alabama, where, after winning the Governor’s seat, he proclaimed, “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!”¹⁰³ But Wallace was not always a staunch segregationist; rather, as López shows, “by Southern standards, he had been a racial moderate.”¹⁰⁴ In 1954, Wallace ran for and lost the Alabama Governor’s race on a moderate platform. In 1958 he lost again. His successful 1962 campaign discarded moderation and embraced far-Right racist causes, namely segregation and Jim Crow; *this* strategy won him the election.¹⁰⁵ But in the atmosphere of the 1960’s Southern civil rights movement, Wallace had to walk a fine line if he wished to appeal to the racist sentiments of his white supporters while avoiding overt, disparaging racist rhetoric. He had to learn how to dog whistle. The trick is in the wink, the nod, the shout out: dog whistling requires a perfectly-tuned message, one that is imperceptible to part of a crowd yet clearly

understood by others. The code is delivered, the ignorant stand mute, while those in the secret club nod back.

Wallace perfected the *beta* phase dog whistle. His tactics of coded speech nearly took him to the White House in 1968, in a campaign where, as he explained to a group of his supporters, “I am going to make race the basis of politics in this state, and I’m gonna make it the basis of politics in this country.”¹⁰⁶ But the trick was that Wallace wasn’t outspokenly racist; rather, he was a “*Law and Order*” (arrest black people) candidate with a “*Southern*” (Confederate) viewpoint, standing for separate but equal “*segregation*” (whites only sections) and fighting for the rights of “*productive members of society against parasitic elites and subversive protestors*” (unchallenged white supremacy).¹⁰⁷ Revealingly, despite his clear and outspoken intent to make race the central theme of his campaign, Wallace seldom mentioned it directly, choosing instead to utilize clever coded racial appeals to (Southern) “*states’ rights*” and “*lawlessness*” (in black communities) —a coded shout out to the Klansmen in the back. This is the dog whistle; this is the coded racism of contemporary America. Wallace’s political success spawned a wave of followers who would utilize and expand the tried-and-true method of deliberate coded language used in the service of white supremacy. One of the favorite subjects of the dog whistle politician is the war on drugs, a political Pandora’s Box that provides a host of methods for talking about race without mentioning it directly.

Barry Goldwater: As López has summarized, “Running for president in 1964, the Arizonan [Goldwater] strode across the South, hawking small-government bromides and racially coded appeals.”¹⁰⁸ Goldwater’s platform of (Confederate) “*state’s rights*” and “*freedom of association*” (in whites-only spaces) was centered on a racist ideology that sought to use these tenets of political philosophy as a tool of white supremacist oppression, utilizing Wallace’s

already-proven method of dog whistling through coded rhetoric. In Goldwater's explanation, "*freedom of association*" referred to the right of individuals to decide who to allow on their property, a definition that seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with race. Yet, as López explains, "in the South this meant first and foremost the right of business owners to exclude blacks from hotels, restaurants, movie theaters and retail establishments. Like Wallace, Goldwater had learned to talk about blacks without ever mentioning race."¹⁰⁹ Communicating multiple messages to multiple crowds in the same coded breath, Goldwater brought the methods of Anslinger and Wallace to a new generation. "Goldwater's ability to transmit a set of codes that white voters readily understood as a promise to protect racial segregation" allowed him to win big in Southern states despite his overall loss; his ability to create "soft porn racism: as a set of codes that voters readily understood as defending white supremacy," despite the lack of any language referring directly to race, fed white America's appetite for animus.¹¹⁰ It was only a matter of time before these strategies would prove successful at securing the highest political office in the United States.

And the Beat Goes On: The dog whistle soloists of the past have evolved into contemporary dog whistle orchestras. John Ehrlichman, special counsel to Richard Nixon during his 1968 run for President, summed up his successful campaign by explaining their choreographed, focused attempt to secure the white, racist vote: "that subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always present in Nixon's statements and speeches."¹¹¹ He went on to explain how Nixon strategically used coded language to appeal to the racial animosity of Republican voters and gain their support while avoiding alienating Republicans who did not wish to support a racist candidate:

We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and the blacks with

heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities...we could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.¹¹²

Nixon's intentionally coded racism was confirmed by another of his advisors, H.R. Haldeman, who describes the campaign's appeals to the so-called Southern Strategy: "He [Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to."¹¹³ And the Klansmen nod back.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan won the Presidential election under his now-famous dog whistle slogan, "Let's Make America Great Again," by attacking affirmative action programs and promising to overturn "federal guidelines or quotas which require race, ethnicity, or sex . . . to be the principle factor in hiring or education."¹¹⁴ More importantly, his dog whistling took shape in a recommitment to the war on drugs, which he waged in the most violent and racist of fashions. From 1980-1984, the war on drugs was refocused to emphasize punishment rather than assistance: FBI anti-drug funding jumped from \$8 million to nearly \$100 million, while from 1981-1984 the budget for the National Institute on Drug Abuse was reduced from \$274 million to \$57 million and antidrug funds to the Department of Education were slashed from \$14 million to just \$3 million.¹¹⁵ Reagan also signed the now-infamous Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 into law and created a double-standard for powder-versus-crack cocaine—five grams of crack, a diluted form of cocaine, required a mandatory minimum prison sentence of five years, the same mandatory minimum for 500 grams of powder cocaine.¹¹⁶ The hundred-to-one ratio was then used to focus the full force of the war on drugs on poor, black communities. Even though studies reveal that 66% of crack users are white or Latinx, more than 80% of defendants sentenced under Reagan-era crack mandates were African American.¹¹⁷ The war was taking an insidious shape:

it would be waged on the streets, by law enforcement, in the poorest of communities, against the most vulnerable Americans who could not defend themselves from the heavy-hand of the state.

As it turns out, these communities are and have historically always been disproportionately comprised of people of color.¹¹⁸ Reagan's rhetoric surrounding the war on drugs was designed to redirect state funding, from harm reduction and prevention efforts to incarceration and law enforcement—to punish drug users and dealers in at-risk communities rather than treat and assist them. In so doing, Reagan deliberately rededicated the war on drugs to the effort of criminalizing black and brown bodies, renewing America's long-standing commitment to white supremacy through targeting poor people and people of color. Once incarcerated, citizens become casualties of war: unable to work, unable to contribute to family structures, unable to fulfill parental obligations, unable to provide support to those who rely on them, and unable to build a wealth-base to pass on to future generations. And the beat goes on.

Forget not the Democrats: The practice of political dog whistling is not exclusive to the Republican party, although it tends to find a welcome historical refuge within the GOP framework. Democrats have also been known to utilize the magic of dog whistle politics to advance political agendas through appeals to deep seated American racism. In February of 1996, then First-Lady Hillary Clinton spoke at Keene State University, describing the progress of “community policing” efforts in getting “more police officers on the street” to combat, “not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids who are called super-predators—no conscience, no empathy.”¹¹⁹ Clinton was appealing to white racial resentment through the same clever rhetorical tricks as her Republican counterparts: she spoke about race without ever mentioning race. Clinton's super-predators are not middle-class, white, suburban tweens. The super-predator is arbitrary; *he* is a reduction of an individual's personal biases and prejudices,

simmered and stewed through cultural tradition and social milieu to find its home in an opportune label offered by an aspiring leader. As the political landscape detailed thus far confirms, the stock characters that tend to pop into the minds of (both white and non-white) Americans who are asked to conjure up an image of an unspecified criminal, such as Clinton's super-predators, tend to be black and brown young men.¹²⁰ The dog whistle is bipartisan.

44 & The Flip Side of Dog Whistling: Coded racial appeals are both bipartisan and multi-directional. This was never more obvious than when President Barack Obama spoke publicly after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was gunned down by a man who claimed to suspect him of being a prowler. As Ta Nehisi Coates has pointed out:

The moment Obama spoke, the case of Trayvon Martin passed out of its national-mourning phase and lapsed into something darker and more familiar—racialized political fodder . . . Before President Obama spoke, the death of Trayvon Martin was generally regarded as a national tragedy. After Obama spoke, Martin became material for an Internet vendor flogging paper gun-range targets that mimicked his hoodie and his bag of skittles. (The vendor sold out within a week.) Before the president spoke, George Zimmerman was arguably the most reviled man in America. After the president spoke, Zimmerman became the patron saint of those who believe that an apt history of racism begins with Tawana Brawley and ends with the Duke lacrosse team.¹²¹

The speaker's perceived (racial) identity always frames their message in American politics.

When Bill Clinton proposed massive health care reform in 1993, race was hardly mentioned as an issue, but when Obama proposed similar legislation in 2009, race became a rallying cry. As Michael Tesler discovered, "racial attitudes had a significantly greater impact on health care opinions when framed as part of President Obama's plan than they had when the exact same policies were attributed to President Clinton's 1993 health care initiative."¹²² This despite the fact that during his first two years in office, Obama talked about race *less* than any other democratic President since 1961.¹²³ He even went out of his way to avoid dog whistle racism: his

2011 “State of the Union” speech was the first since 1948 to conclude without mention of poverty or the poor.¹²⁴ White politicians who use coded and overt racial appeals are seldom accused of race baiting; a black President can avoid nearly all reference to race, yet still find himself center-stage in the unavoidable debate.

Trump’s Best People: In 2005, Republican National Committee Chairperson Ken Mehlman spoke before the NAACP and confessed that, “by the ‘70s, and into the ‘80s and ‘90s . . . some Republicans gave up on winning the African American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican Chairman to tell you we were wrong.”¹²⁵ In 2010, Republican National Committee Chairperson Michael Steele one-upped his predecessor while speaking to students at DePaul University, where he explained how, “for the last 40-plus year we [Republicans] had a ‘Southern Strategy’ that alienated many minority voters by focusing on the white male vote in the South.”¹²⁶ As shocking as these admissions are, they were platitudes; as early as 1963, Republican senators were speaking out against the coded racist appeals being utilized by their fellow Republican candidates to secure racist white votes—what Republic senator Jacob Javits referred to disparagingly in 1963 as the “Southern Strategy.”¹²⁷

Conservative reporter Robert Novak’s report on the Republican National Convention in Denver during the summer of 1963 reveals his discontent in the observation that, “a good many, perhaps a majority of the party’s leadership, envision substantial political gold to be mined in the racial crisis by becoming in fact, though not in name, the White Man’s Party.”¹²⁸ The Republican party is the party of the white man; this is neither mistake nor accident. As López opines, “The rise of a racially-identified GOP is *not* a tale of latent bigotry in that party. It is instead a story centered on the strategic decision to use racism to become ‘the White Man’s Party.’”¹²⁹

Anslinger understood in the 1930s what Wallace grasped in the 1960s, and what his successors perfected throughout the next 60 years: techniques for exploiting unspoken American racist sentiments are extremely successful when expertly executed. In 2016, the Republicans pushed their old tricks to new levels, and Donald Trump rode a wave of post-Obama racial animosity all the way to the White House while blowing some of the largest dog whistles the world has ever seen.

My crystal ball glows. Decades from now, when Trump's advisors are interviewed on *60 Minutes* and they explain the strategic positioning of men of color directly behind Trump during speeches to make it appear as if he had the support of communities of color, those who voted for him will feign ignorance—*how could we have known?* When Trump's speech writers confess to the *strategic* inclusion of Mexican “rapists” in his campaign announcement, and “the ol’ days [when people of color] would have been carried out on a stretcher” for protesting his rallies, his obtuse Republican base will raise their collective eyebrows: *we didn't realize he was racist!*¹³⁰ When some of Trump's great-grandchildren choose the path of Pastor Robert W. Lee, a distant nephew of Confederate General Robert E. Lee who recently lost his pulpit when he labeled his ancestor a white supremacist, will Trump's aged supporters feign surprise: *we wish someone had told us then!*¹³¹ In 2040, when the remnants of the GOP party release a statement apologizing (again!) for *centuries* of intentional race bating and Klansman courting, will the words again ring new in the ears of Republican voters? One hopes not, but the past suggests that this faux apology may in fact be part-and-parcel of the Republican political strategy concerning race: every few years admit how awful and racist you *used to* be, apologize, forget, repeat. America's collective willingness to embrace delusion has become a historical pattern.

Trump's new job as President of the United States provided him a number of perks, including the ability to pardon anyone convicted of a federal crime. He used this privilege just once during the first year of his Presidency—to pardon Anslinger's apprentice, Joe Arpaio, after he was convicted of disregarding a court order to cease and desist the unconstitutional arrest and detainment of suspects based solely on their race.¹³² The man who ran on a platform of “law and order” used his magic wand once in the first year of his presidency: to pardon a white man who was convicted in a court of law of having used his position of power to illegally harass and detain people of color. This is the law and order of Conservative Republican politicians. Official white crime is pardoned, especially when perpetrated against people of color in the furtherance of white supremacy. Judy Garland is advised to take a vacation; Joe McCarthy is given a legal, state-funded supply of opioids; Anslinger takes morphine until the day he dies. Victor Licata is spun as a racialized tale of drug-induced violence; Billie Holiday is chained to a hospital bed and forced to die in agony; our prisons are packed with people of color sentenced for drug crimes. These are the casualties of the war on drugs.

One last note on Trump brings all of these loose ends back to the war on drugs. During his campaign, amidst a permanent cacophony of dog whistling that often left critics scrambling to keep up, Trump repeatedly promised to fill his cabinet with “the best people”: “we want experts—our finest people. We don't want B level . . . we have to get our absolute best.”¹³³ Trump's best speaks for itself. Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III is a third-generation namesake—he has the same first name as his father and his grandfather, all three named after Confederate President Jefferson Davis.¹³⁴ Lest the coded support of America's enemy during the Civil War be misunderstood, the Attorney General's unique middle name is also a shout out to one of America's best known traitors, Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, a man who deserted

his position at West Point to become one of the first Confederate Generals during the Civil War.¹³⁵ Three generations of Sessions have carried through their proud legacy of naming children after honored enemies of America. Jefferson's name does not mean he is a white supremacist; it simply means he comes from a long line of proud white supremacists (at least three generations). His very name is a clever, coded dog whistle: Anslinger would have loved it. He has yet to disown his revealing family legacy, and despite numerous allegations of racism that prevented him from obtaining Senate approval for a judgeship in 1986, Sessions has now risen to the position of United States Attorney General, in large part through his early, vocal support of candidate Trump's bombastic dog whistle concerts. Jefferson Beauregard is Trump's "best."

The Opioid Crisis: Now that the characters are in place, hand selected for their individual abilities to further the political aims of white supremacy, the choreography begins. Amidst a national uptick in opioid overdose deaths—an increase that has been limited almost entirely to white American communities—white America is afraid.¹³⁶ On October 28, 2017, our braggadocios leader steps to the lectern and provides the solution: "starting today my administration is officially declaring the opioid crisis a national public health emergency under federal law . . . I am directing all executive agencies to use every appropriate emergency authority to fight the opioid crisis."¹³⁷ President Trump stopped short of requesting federal funds for rehabilitation or treatment; he neglected to sign an executive order providing local and state municipalities leeway in reducing the addict population without criminalizing users. He simply communicated a message—here is your crisis; here is your solution. I will save you and your children.

The result: Trump’s declaration of a national health emergency freed up just over \$57,000 in federal emergency funds—just over \$1,000-per-state for the treatment of addiction and the prevention of 64,000 overdose deaths per year.¹³⁸ But a few weeks later the real solution was offered by Jefferson Sessions, who began a press conference about the opioid crisis by thanking the Drug Enforcement Agency for playing “a vital role in our efforts to reduce opioid threats in America—really the centerpiece in the government’s efforts in that regard.”¹³⁹ Here we go again.

Sessions went on to dictate new language for the fight—an updated, government-sponsored rhetoric for the war on drugs. He unleashed a remixed, greatest-hits concert of dog whistle politics, focusing on street level dealers and law enforcement rather than emphasizing the importance of saving lives and reducing overdoses. The speech is a choreographed dance: in one breath Sessions explains that the rise in opioid overdoses is, “driven primarily by opioids: prescription pain medications, heroin, and synthetic drugs like fentanyl.”¹⁴⁰ In the next he turns an abrupt corner into the familiar territory of criminalizing users and street level dealers through increased law enforcement efforts rather than danger minimization and education.¹⁴¹ In a suspiciously-reasonable statement, Sessions explains that we need to “change the perception in this country and reduce [addiction] through prevention.”¹⁴² Then he swerves immediately back to criminalization:

By enforcing our laws, we keep illegal drugs out of our country, reduce their availability, drive up their price, and reduce their purity. Those are all tests of how well law enforcement has been working, and over the last several years the trends have been very bad indeed in those categories.”¹⁴³

Mr. Sessions knows better.

The so-called “Iron Law” of prohibition states that whenever a substance is prohibited, the available supply will become *more* potent.¹⁴⁴ Prior to alcohol prohibition in America, the

most common cocktail was beer; after prohibition took effect strong liquor became the norm (more than 90% of all alcohol sales).¹⁴⁵ The same scenario occurs when beer is banned from spectator sports and fans resort to smuggling-in strong spirits rather than watered-down brew.¹⁴⁶ As for opioids, smugglers risking their freedom are remiss to traffic bulky, diluted pills when they can make more money off stronger products like heroin and fentanyl. When opioid patients lose their legal access to low-grade pharmaceutical pain killers, they often resort to cheaper and stronger street drugs; thus, the trope of the teen heroin addict who started on pain pills and turned to heroin when the doctors cut off his prescription. Oxycontin, a high-grade pharmaceutical opioid, is often three-times more expensive than heroin on the street, making the latter a tragic economic choice.¹⁴⁷ The very issues responsible for numerous deaths and even more crime related to drug use—inconsistent purity, reduced availability and high prices—are spun by Jefferson Sessions as a gage for measuring the *success* of overdose prevention efforts. Yet time and again, ratcheting up enforcement of drug laws *increases* potency of the drugs users consume; when users can't get beer they resort to liquor, and when we can't get Oxycontin we resort to heroin.¹⁴⁸ This is why “the drug war doesn't prevent overdoses—it massively increases them.”¹⁴⁹ Let the bodies hit the floor.

In the last clause of his damning statement—“over the last several years [Obama's Presidency] the trends have been very bad indeed in those categories”—Jefferson makes invisible the mass incarceration of people (of color) for drug crimes throughout the last three decades.¹⁵⁰ The Attorney General ignores the historically *low* crime rates that America is actually experiencing, choosing instead to spin an Anslinger-like world of fear and phobia based on alternative facts, and putting “all gang members and other organized thugs on notice: we are coming for you. We will find you, we will hunt you down, and we will bring you to justice.”¹⁵¹

A century into a war that has seen zero ground gained and innumerable bodies buried, America's Attorney General and living Confederate Monument Jefferson Sessions had the audacity to reinforce the war's oldest and most ridiculous claim: "I am convinced this is a winnable war."¹⁵²

The rhetoric of Anslinger, so successful in decades past, is often borrowed to the point of plagiarism. The weaving together of fact with fiction is a staple of the war on drugs, and when it comes to the best tools for the job, the spin doctors stick with what has always worked. Nearly a century after Anslinger first declared a "relentless warfare against the despicable dope-pedaling vulture who preys on the weakness of his fellow man," Jefferson Sessions echoed the platitude: "the department has been relentless in going after criminals who are spreading addiction in America . . . including the cartels who exploit the vulnerable and profit off addiction."¹⁵³ This line has been utilized by other political figures who have used it to further their careers. In 1972, Richard Nixon warned Americans that, "above all else, society must be protected from these despicable narcotics profiteers who spread the drug plague for personal gain."¹⁵⁴ Political capitalism: stick with the recipe that sells.

In 1982, First Lady Nancy Regan coined a catchy-yet-ineffective (and misinformed) slogan: "Just Say No."¹⁵⁵ In October of 2017, Jefferson Sessions repackaged the worthless cliché: "you won't get addicted if you don't start."¹⁵⁶ Remixed and remastered, then repackaged as new, these platitudes are worthless feel-good slogans that ignore the violent reality of the war on drugs.

Russian Hacked Dog Whistles: Home of the American Dream, the land of opportunity, a melting pot, a place where everyone has a fair shot—Americans would like to believe that the rest of the World associates these ridiculous themes with the United States. Our imperialistic *hubris* leaves us unable to detect the note of sarcasm in international descriptions of America;

with the United States housing 25% of the world's inmates, the joke is implicit in "the land of the free."¹⁵⁷ But during the 2016 Presidential election, as the Republican throwback who promised to "Make America Great Again" rose to power through clauses of overt racism and snapshots of proud misogyny, Russian state-sponsored organizations were meddling in our election through the clever use of social media bots programed to share biased or made-up news stories. Much like Anslinger's genius of decades past, Russian-backed groups utilized a burgeoning media infrastructure that was already in place and growing exponentially; once the story was spun, the machine did most of the work for them.

As Weisburd, Watts and Berger discuss at length, Russian efforts were not necessarily aimed at placing Trump in the Presidency; rather, "these efforts seek to produce a divided electorate and a president with no clear mandate to govern. The ultimate objective is to diminish and tarnish American democracy. Unfortunately, that effort is going very well indeed."¹⁵⁸ Simply put, Russian government-backed entities have made a habit of pinpointing a nation's vice and then using it to divide that nation's citizenry against itself. In America, it should come as no surprise that the most effective tools proved to be those of our historical legacy of white supremacy. In 2015, Russian social media "bots" added fuel to the racial fire at the University of Missouri with a Tweet claiming that the KKK was marching with police officers and assaulting black people.¹⁵⁹ Even the Student Government President bought the lie, spreading the fake information on Facebook before the tweet could be debunked. Freshman enrollment dropped 23% the following year.¹⁶⁰

The so-called "hacking" of America's social media continued. *Newsweek* has reported that during the 2016 Presidential election, "around 50,000 Russia-linked Twitter accounts sent more than 2 million election-related tweets—many praising then-candidate Donald Trump and

villainizing Hillary Clinton.”¹⁶¹ Many of these stories were dog whistle symphonies, expertly phrased and shared with targeted precision in an effort to rile up racial tensions by reinforcing platitudinous stereotypes of brown and black folks as dangerous, criminal and immoral. The dog whistles were crisp and high-pitched: *voter fraud is rampant* (by Latinx populations hellbent on destroying America); *Obama and Ted Cruz are not citizens* (because black and Latinx people are *always* suspect in America); *the United States is under attack by terrorists* (non-Western Muslims who hate America).¹⁶² These dog whistles echo Anslinger’s original overture. As Clint Watts testified, “part of the reason active measures worked is because they [Trump and his administration] . . . parrot the same lines.”¹⁶³ As the following chapters will further detail, these messages, once legitimated by state endorsement and picked up by news outlets, continue to (mis)inform consumers’ views of the world regardless of their (in)accuracy.¹⁶⁴

Breaking the Encyclopedia: America is a nation of immigrants. All men are created equal. Justice is (color)blind. All Lives Matter. Make America Great Again. Phrases such as these will continue to occupy American history textbooks for generations to come. These clauses are well-fashioned rhetorical daggers, cleverly designed dog whistles that serve to reinforce hierarchies of oppression. Couched in the translucent language of whiteness, they are cultural lies meant to unite small groups while dividing each against the others.¹⁶⁵ As Paula Rothenberg tells us, “referring to ‘us’ as a nation of immigrants manages both to render invisible the Native Americans and the genocidal policies carried out against them, and to implicitly deny the reality of the slave trade and the economic importance of slave labor in building the nation.”¹⁶⁶ The war on drugs relies on such euphemisms—false claims that nonetheless circumvent logical thought and enter the realm of American mythology. Until America confronts these false stories head-on,

fearlessly and self-critically, the same broken histories will continue to be (mis)communicated to future generations.

As Tupac Shakur said, “instead of war on poverty, they got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.”¹⁶⁷ It is time to admit that the war on drugs was decided before it began: drugs won. Harry knew this even as his diatribes were being published for a nation full of white supremacists to consume as a new outlet for their racial animus. Reagan knew this even as he intentionally associated black people with drug use in an effort to delegitimize their political voices. Jefferson Sessions knows now, even as he extends his namesakes’ legacies of racial exclusion based on white supremacy by increasing war efforts in America’s most vulnerable communities. As the following sections will show, the inescapable barrage of media that permeates American culture is responsible for our collective misunderstanding of drug use, addiction, criminality and race. The messages we consume influence our beliefs about how the world around us operates. The rhetoric of Sessions, Reagan, Anslinger, and other crusaders in the war on drugs is not accidental; it is strategic and laser-guided

¹ Billie Holiday, with William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (New York, NY: Lancer Books, 1972), 130.

² National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, “Provisional Counts of Drug Overdose Deaths, as of 8/6/2017,” published by the Center for Disease Control. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health_policy/monthly-drug-overdose-death-estimates.pdf

³ Federal Bureau of Prisons, “Monthly Offenses,” updated July 29, 2017. https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp

⁴ Drug Enforcement Administration, “Methamphetamine Lab Incidents, 2004-2014.” <https://www.dea.gov/resource-center/meth-lab-maps.shtml>

⁵ Joshua Bamberger & Mishka Terplan, “Wound Botulism Associated with Black Tar Heroin,” *JAMA* 280, no. 17 (November 1998): 1479-1480. See also, Center for Disease Control, “Syringe Exchange Programs---United States, 2008,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 59, no. 45 (November 19, 2010): 1488-1491. See also, National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Heroin: What is Heroin?” (July 17, 2017), <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/heroin>

⁶ Beau Kilmer, Susan S. Sohler Everingham, Jonathan P. Caulkins, et. al., “How Big is the U.S. Market for Illegal Drugs?” RAND Corporation, (2014). Originally requested by and published on whitehouse.gov, but pulled down by Trump administration.

⁷ U.S. population levels taken from U.S. Census Bureau on 11.23.17, <https://www.census.gov/popclock/> U.S. and world overdose rates taken from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2017, Executive Summary: Conclusions and Policy Implications* (United Nations: United Nations publication, 2017), 10.

⁸ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010/2012). See also U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons information page, <https://www.bop.gov/>

⁹ Johann Hari, *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015), 36.

¹⁰ Rufus King, *The Drug Hang Up: America's Fifty-Year Folly* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton Company & Inc., 1972), 16. See also James A. Inciardi, "America's Drug Policy: The Continuing Debate," in *The Drug Legalization Debate Second Edition*, ed. James A. Inciardi (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999), 3.

¹¹ Linder v. United States, 268 U.S. 5 (1925).
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/268/5/case.html>

¹² Richard DeGrandpre, *The Cult of Pharmacology: How America Became the World's Most Troubled Drug Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). See also Hari, *Chasing the Scream*.

¹³ DeGrandpre, *The Cult of Pharmacology*, 126. See also King, *The Drug Hang Up*, 18.

¹⁴ Hari, *Chasing the Scream*.

¹⁵ Tim Rhodes, "Risk Environments and Drug Harms: A Social Science for Harm Reduction Approach," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 20 (2009): 196. See also John Strang and Hugh Gurling, "Computerized Tomography and Neuropsychological Assessment in Long-Term High-Dose Heroin Addicts," *British Journal of Addiction* 84, (1989): 1011.

¹⁶ Karishma S. Kaushik, Ketoki Kapila, and A. K. Praharaj, "Shooting Up: The Interface of Microbial Infections and Drug Abuse," *Journal of Medical Microbiology* 60, (2011): 408-422.

¹⁷ Merrill Singer, *Something Dangerous: Emergent and Changing Illicit Drug Use and Community Health* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2006), 30.

¹⁸ Tim Rhodes, "Risk Environments and Drug Harms: A Social Science for Harm Reduction Approach," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 20 (2009).

¹⁹ King, *The Drug Hang Up*, 17.

²⁰ Phil Nicholas and Andrew Churchill, "The Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the States, and the Origin of Modern Drug Enforcement in the United States, 1950-1962," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 32 (2012): 595-640.

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