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Welcome to Course 323: The War on Drugs. I've been working on this course now for close to a year, and I'm getting more and more excited as I go. There is no shortage of fascinating politics, sociology, social justice, neuroscience, and moral issues associated with this course. And they're not settled science so there's lots of room for discussion and debate. Interested? Read on ...

Drug abuse has reached crisis proportions. Drug overdose is now [the leading cause of death](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/overdoses-are-leading-cause-of-death-americans-under-50/) [\\_ \(https://www.cbsnews.com/news/overdoses-are-leading-cause-of-death-americans-under-50/\)](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/overdoses-are-leading-cause-of-death-americans-under-50/) in Americans under the age of 50. Despite government expenditure of [\\$1 trillion](https://www.cnn.com/2012/12/06/opinion/branson-end-war-on-drugs/index.html) [\\_ \(https://www.cnn.com/2012/12/06/opinion/branson-end-war-on-drugs/index.html\)](https://www.cnn.com/2012/12/06/opinion/branson-end-war-on-drugs/index.html) in the War on Drugs since 1971, the scourge of drug abuse is only getting worse. How is it that we can dramatically lower death rates from cancer while overdose deaths dramatically rise? This course will explore this question from a variety of viewpoints. We'll start from a historical and policy perspective, examining the social and racial factors that led to drug prohibition early in the 20th century. We'll look at the political and racial drivers of the War on Drugs, as successive Presidents from Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton increased drug penalties, sending a [wave of millions of mostly black inmates](https://www.nap.edu/read/18613/chapter/4#68) [\\_ \(https://www.nap.edu/read/18613/chapter/4#68\)](https://www.nap.edu/read/18613/chapter/4#68) into prison, devastating families and neighborhoods. We'll look at the science of addiction in an attempt to understand the biological, psychological and social drivers of addiction, and the difficulties involved in curing addiction. The economics of the drug trade will be key to understanding its structure and the challenge of interdiction. And the interplay among the institutions supporting the drug trade versus those arrayed against will be key to understanding the successive waves of drug abuse, from heroin and marijuana to cocaine and crack cocaine, methamphetamines, and most recently the opiate crisis. We'll finish the course on a hopeful note, examining promising policy and treatment options that offer hope in turning the tide toward a better future.

The goal for each of us is to better develop our own opinions on the many issues surrounding the War on Drugs and the scourge of drug abuse. We will welcome a variety of opinions on these issues and be respectful of each other during class. The class

format is facilitated discussion, with discussions based off SGL study questions, SGM's questions, and Powerpoint and Youtube presentations by the SGL (typically 10-40%). If the class is receptive we will have class debates on the issues of legalizing marijuana and drug policy alternatives.

There is no book for the course. I will prepare 10-15 page weekly readings on the Canvas page, each with links to additional pdf files and internet links as interesting optional readings. For an example you can look at the completed materials for [Session 1 \(https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-1\)](https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-1). Members will be encouraged to submit discussion questions ahead of time so that we focus the discussion on the topics of majority interest to the class. I'm confident that this will be a great course, with passionate discussions on fascinating topics! If you have any questions or comments, please email me at [ocurme@gmail.com \(mailto:ocurme@gmail.com\)](mailto:ocurme@gmail.com).

Best

Ollie

### Seminar Syllabus

Session	Topic	Date	Link
1	Drug Use Before Prohibition: Jefferson, Franklin, and Freud	9/12	<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-1">Info 1 (https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-1)</a>
	Yom Kippur (No classes)	9/19	
2	After Prohibition: Harry Anslinger versus the Mafia	9/26	<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-2">Info 2 (https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-2)</a>
3	The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia	10/3	<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-3">Info 3 (https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-3)</a>
4	Nixon's War on Drugs	10/10	<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-4">Info 4</a>

			<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-4">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-4">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-4</a>)</a>
5	The Science of Addiction	10/17	<b>Info 5</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-5">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-5">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-5</a>)</a>
6	The Cocaine and Methamphetamine Trades	10/24	<b>Info 6</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-6">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-6">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-6</a>)</a>
<i>Feed-back</i>	<b>Mid-Semester Feedback (For 12 Week SGs)</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382</a>)</a>		<b>Feedback</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/quizzes/91382</a>)</a>
7	The Prison Industrial Complex	10/31	<b>Info 7</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-7">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-7">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-7</a>)</a>
8	Race and Mass Incarceration	11/7	<b>Info 8</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-8">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-8">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-8</a>)</a>
9	The Great Marijuana Debate	11/14	<b>Info 9</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-9">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-9">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-9</a>)</a>
	Thanksgiving (No Classes)	11/21	
10	The Prescription Opiate Crisis	11/28	<b>Info 10</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-10">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-10">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-10</a>)</a>
11	Heroin and Fentanyl	12/5	<b>Info 11</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-11">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-11">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-11</a>)</a>
12	Hope for the Future: Policy and Treatment Options	12/12	<b>Info 12</b> <a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-12">(<a href="https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-12">https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/session-12</a>)</a>

**Go to Additional Documents & Links for more resources. (<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/41939/pages/additional-documents-and-links>)**

 **Canvas Resources for HILR Instructors (<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/hilr-committees/resources-sgls>)**