

RONALD REAGAN'S WAR ON DRUGS:  
A POLICY FAILURE BUT A POLITICAL SUCCESS

Master Thesis  
in American History  
Leiden University

by

Lotte Berendje Rozemarijn Westhoff  
S1222708

18 August 2013

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Adam Fairclough  
Second Reader: Prof. Dr. Eduard van de Bilt



Ronald Reagan Foundation

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who provided me the possibility to complete this thesis. I would like to thank the Ronald Reagan Library and foundation in Simi Valley, California, for their assistance in my research trip. I would like to thank all the archivists at the Ronald Reagan Library and in particular archivist Kelly Barton, who personally helped me with my research. I give my gratitude to my sister, Maartje Westhoff, for her assistance on my research trip to the Reagan Library. I would like to thank my professors within the American History faculty of Universiteit Leiden along with the second reader of my thesis, Dr. Eduard van de Bilt. I want to give special thanks to my thesis supervisor professor Dr. Adam Fairclough, whose contribution to my thesis, stimulating suggestions and encouragement I am very grateful of. Lastly, I would like to thank my loved ones who have supported me throughout this entire process.

*“Let us not forget who we are. Drug abuse is a repudiation of everything America is.” – Ronald Reagan*

## **Introduction**

President Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 when the concern surrounding drugs infiltrating society was just starting to brew. It was still such a new topic that it was not even highlighted as a major issue in the 1980 campaign, in fact it was not mentioned at all. Reagan’s platform of “moral leadership” that was aimed at spiritually reviving the country came the closest. Specific topics were never mentioned, leaving the approach rather ambiguous. It was at the start of the 1980s that public concern grew regarding the effects of drug use. This fear was intensified as a result of the emergence of crack cocaine in inner cities. (Levine and Reinerman, 1988, 1987; Reinerman and Levine, 1989) When crack cocaine became readily available, there in turn, was a decline in the use of other drugs. The age group of 18-25 years old showed decreases in marijuana usage of 15% in just the three-year gap between 1979 and 1982, a period before the War on Drugs was in full swing (Nunn, 2002). It was the Reagan Administration that made the War on Drugs a policy priority; something the topic had never been before. The War on Drugs was the response of the Reagan Administration to these concerns. It was part of the overall change in American culture. It was during the Reagan presidency that drug policy would be altered forever and the effects would stream down to American politics, law enforcement, justice systems, education, and even American culture. The Reagan Administration should be highlighted because of its lasting impact on American drug policy. It was during the 1980s that most significant changes were made in regards to drug laws and policies. Debatably, during this time was also the largest shift in American political attitude, which mainly stemmed from fear of drug crimes.

The immense impact of the War on Drugs on American history is the reason for this thesis. Not only do people who lived in the 1980s remember the War on Drugs, it is often referred back to and continues to be a point of debate today. Although most of the policies born out of the War on Drugs are still in place today, recently there have been challenges to these policies, as it is clear that the War on Drugs will not end any time soon. The fact that the Reagan Administration managed to get the entire nation onboard and supporting its plans for a drug free America is of historical significance in and of itself. The major shift in American culture and politics during the 1980s was

directly related to Reagan Drug Policy. It was also directly responsible for many of the unresolved problems the United States has with crime and drugs.

According to Dan Baum, historian, White House drug policy shifted from the domain of public health to law enforcement during the War on Drugs. He claims that drug policy certainly changed during the Reagan Administration but not for the better. Baum claims that Reagan's drug policy was highly unsuccessful as it purely made the executive branch look good. The entire drug policy orchestrated by the Administration allowed for government to be almost entirely crime fighting and missed the real fix to the drug problem. Government did not focus on attacking the general social issues present in the country that seemed to be the cause of the drug problem. Not only did government focus all its attention on controlling drug crimes, it also got caught up in the massive fear and hysteria that surrounded the topic of drugs. Having been caught up in creating an overdrive in crime fighting policies Government eventually deteriorated the Fourth Amendment's defenses to police overindulgence.

According to Murray Rothbard, American historian and political theorist, Reagan was master at creating a big gap between his rhetoric and what he actually accomplished. "All politicians", Rothbard claims, "of course, have such a gap, but in Reagan it is cosmic, massive, as wide as the Pacific Ocean. His soft-soapy voice appears perfectly sincere as he spouts the rhetoric which he violates day-by-day" (Rothbard, 1985).

By shedding new light on activities within the Reagan Administration, motivations and tactics for the War on Drugs will be revealed within this thesis. Key documents and notes from within the Administration obtained from the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, will provide the backbone for these insights on the War on Drugs. These documents bring forward new findings on the implementation, development and reception of the Reagan drug policy. Although it cannot be said that they paint a complete picture of the Administration and its member's views on the matter, they do offer an inside view of the policy. These documents give us a historical perspective that especially highlights the political context of the War on Drugs. What the political strategy was for the War on Drugs, how the Administration's policies were implemented, how it assessed these policies and what the consequences and results were of the War, are the questions that will be answered. This thesis will outline the historical significance of the Ronald Reagan drug policy and will analyze the War on Drugs in terms of crime, health, and politics.

## **Chapter 1: Reagan Administration Political Strategy and the Role of the War on Drugs**

*“Are you better off than you were four years ago?” (Ronald Reagan, 1980)*

Although the War on Drugs was not introduced during the Reagan Presidential campaign, it became an important and controversial aspect of the Reagan Administration. On June 24, 1982, President Reagan signed Executive Order 12368. This was the first major step in the Reagan-era War on Drugs. This Order gave the White House more control of the anti-drug efforts on a national level; it made radical changes to drug policy. Addiction treatment programs were deemed not as important and their funding was cut. The Order marked a new age of aggressive action that amplified law enforcement efforts and increased prison sentences. The initiation of the War on Drugs coincided with an expanded propaganda battle in which there were no gray areas--all drugs were bad and anyone who used them was labeled an irresponsible member of society.

When Reagan started his campaign for the 1980 Presidential elections his main political platform was lowering taxes and federal expenditure. He believed that these changes would strengthen the American economy. He was an advocate of reducing the scope of the federal government, arguing “Government is never more dangerous than when our desire to have it help us blinds us to its great power to harm us” (Ronald Reagan, 1980). However, Reagan also wished to strengthen the military and restore America’s prestige and influence internationally. He vowed to support the military more by increasing wages and benefits. He believed that these benefits would result in more enlistment in the army and create an interesting option for young people looking to find jobs.

Reagan tended to stay more focused on the domestic issues rather than making foreign policy. However, something on everyone’s mind was the relationship the United States had with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979. It was the height of the Cold War, which led the United States to increased interests in the situation in Afghanistan. It was important that the Soviet Union did not succeed in establishing another communist government. In order to prevent that from happening, the United States began funding the rebel forces against the Soviets. Since the idea of communist control caused an uneasy feeling with most Americans, Reagan was known to often critique the relationship the United States had with the Soviet Union and used it habitually throughout his Presidential campaign. Reagan sought to defeat communism by strength in

numbers. Therefore, he was a proponent of the North America Accord, which would patch up the relationships with Canada and Mexico, so that the security and support for the United States would be strengthened. Reagan believed that this was increasingly important as they were direct neighbors and that the United States needed to stand strong with them in order to avoid alienation.

Reagan's main message for the 1980 presidential election was the ideal of moral leadership. Reagan was very adamant on this and believed it would lead to a spiritual revival within the nation. He stayed away from social legislation that would normally accompany values-centered leadership, such as abortion. It was not his mission to discuss issues that could possibly be too controversial but he aimed at creating a general atmosphere that appealed to many Americans, in their longing for traditional American values. Reagan appealed to the women of America by vowing to actively help end the discrimination towards women. He vowed to work together with state governments across the country to retract statutes that were deemed discriminatory towards women. He went for the feel-good tactic, instead of focusing on specific policies, which could well be controversial; he focused on the moral reconsideration of American life, which generally appealed to most.

Reagan was not only focused on the Presidency but also on an overall political change within the country. Reagan was a huge believer and preacher of patriotism and American exceptionalism. He exhibited pride in the country and wanted to bring back the United States to its former glory. He vowed it would be "morning again in America", the morning that stood symbol for a new era, new opportunities, and a growing economy. The idea of American exceptionalism so held dear by Reagan was a significant tool in reminding the citizens of the United States that they were part of something worth fighting for, worth believing in. In Reagan's "City on a Hill" speech the notion of American exceptionalism seeped through every word.

*You can call it mysticism if you want to, but I have always believed that there was some divine plan that placed this great continent between two oceans to be sought out by those who were possessed of an abiding love of freedom and a special kind of courage.*

*Standing on the tiny deck of the Arabella in 1630 off the Massachusetts coast, John Winthrop said, 'We will be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.' Well, we*



*have not dealt falsely with our God, even if He is temporarily suspended from the classroom.*  
(Ronald Reagan, *City on a Hill* speech 1974)

Due to the patriotic, feel-good, and vacuous nature of the Reagan Presidential campaign, Reagan did not introduce the policies he had in mind for a drug free America and it was, therefore, not a highlight of his presidential campaign. This was most likely a choice made to avoid seeming overeager to push his own agenda. Introducing less specific policy suggestions and topics would allow for less backlash and disagreement from the American people. His campaign managed to skim the surface of what Reagan stood for without going into much depth at all. Reagan, the patriot and the preacher of American exceptionalism received popular support without much question.

The hostage crisis played an important role in securing Reagan's victory in the 1980 election. In turn, the crisis harmed Carters re-election campaign, as he was unsuccessful in freeing the American hostages that had been taken as a result of a diplomatic crisis between the United States and Iran. The hostages were released after the signing of the Algiers Accord, which occurred almost immediately after President Reagan, was sworn into office. After the embarrassment of the hostage crisis in Iran, Reagan was in prime position to step into the foreground, symbolizing the cure the nation so desperately needed. He aimed at restoring faith in the minds of the people and told Americans that they should believe in themselves and remember the country in all its glory. Reagan's main slogan was always "America's best days are still to come." Although in retrospect his campaign strategy could be seen as rather simplistic and often times radical, his deficiencies were obviously less important than replacing Carter as sitting President. It was Jimmy Carter's decline in popularity, the faltering economy, and the pull the American population felt towards conservatism that led to the election of Ronald Reagan as America's 40<sup>th</sup> President. Reagan had beaten Carter by winning 44 million votes or 50.7 percent, and 489 electoral votes. Carter received 35.5 million votes or 41 percent with only 44 electoral votes. This election was the first step taken that initiated a deviation from the path that President Roosevelt had paved towards larger government and liberalism (Walsh, 2008). An ironic aspect of this political change was that Reagan himself went through a similar change. Reagan was himself a Democrat before he got actively involved in politics. Eventually, when he started exploring politics more, he found himself identifying increasingly with the conservative side, and he eventually made the switch to becoming a Republican.

When Reagan came to office in 1981, the atmosphere that lingered seemed to be a general sense of positivity. The public was generally optimistic that Reagan would bring about change.

Ronald Reagan had conveyed the message that government was the problem and not the solution. The ideals of the domestic programs brought forth by the Great Society in the 1960s and the New Deal in 1933 were no longer held to as strongly by Americans (Gamble, 2009). These domestic and economic programs in which government played the leading role, were replaced by Reagan's philosophies of limited government intervention. The landscape of American politics had begun to change as the power liberalism had enjoyed on U.S. domestic and foreign policy for the past years seemed to be ending.

Russell Kirk, American political theorist and a proponent of traditionalist conservatism had once said, "by 1980, both American Liberalism and British socialism lay in the sere and yellow leaf," (Kirk, 1986). This seemed to be an adequate description of the conservative movement in the United States. The United States seemed to respond well to Reagan's ideas and liberalism was slowly fading into the past. Therefore, the conservative movement seemed to have "supplanted in power America's latter-day liberalism" (Kirk, 1986).

Reagan kept his plans for his War on Drugs under wraps until 1982, when he signed Executive Order 12368 and declared that illegal drugs were a threat to national security. Almost immediately after this, Nancy Reagan aided her husband's efforts for a drug free America and spread the message by visiting various public schools in the country in order to make students aware of the danger of drugs.

### **Reagan's Domestic Policy**

His main focus as well as that of the Administration was to keep the country safe and to protect its citizens from crime. At the time many people considered the liberal policies of the 1960s to be a failure. Many conservatives even believed that these liberal policies in the 1960s had contributed to the increase in violent crime. Therefore, Reagan, as a fellow conservative, made tackling crime and criminals a priority. In 1984, the United States Congress passed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act, which the Administration had constructed. Prior to this Act, there were many disparities in the sentences that were given to defendants who had committed almost identical crimes. This gave the courts a lot of leeway and the sentence would depend greatly on where the trial was being held and who was trying the defendant. The Act provided a comprehensive guide to sentencing. For example, the Act restricted the use of the insanity defense in criminal court

cases. The act also focused a lot of attention on crimes related to drugs and, therefore, penalties for drug related crime increased.

Nixon had laid out the groundwork for America's War on Drugs. In 1972 President Nixon announced that heroin addiction was "public enemy number one" (Nixon, 1972). In 1972, the Department of Justice prosecuted Auguste Ricord for smuggling huge amounts of heroin from Paraguay to the United States. Nixon increased the budget of the Bureau of Narcotics from 14 million to 74 million solely in the first three years of his first term. The Nixon Administration also increased the surveillance of drug trafficking, particularly from South America. The Bureau of Customs, the department that led the operation against drug trafficking, grew from 9,000 to 15,000 employees in the first years of Nixon's presidency.

One of the main tactics that Nixon used in fighting his War on Drugs was to meet with various U.S. ambassadors who were stationed in countries that were known to grow poppies used for the production of opium. Opium in turn could be made into morphine and eventually into heroin. Therefore, he sought to control the production of the poppies as it led to various other illegal drugs. He gave the ambassadors the main goal to influence the governments in Central and South America to exert more control and monitor these farms more closely. Reagan hoped American ambassadors would exert enough pressure on opium producing countries in Latin America to create an effect. Nixon was also the first President to reorganize the federal drug law enforcement effort. He did this by establishing the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and set up the National Institute on Drug Abuse (Thomas W. Dennis files, 1982).

Although the War on Drugs may stem from the Nixon era, Reagan truly put his personal stamp on it. The Reagan Administration had decided to ride the wave of public concern with regards to drugs and drug abuse. Instead of solely focusing on international drug trafficking and diplomacy, the Reagan Administration decided its focus should primarily be at home. Americans were personally starting to get involved with the War on Drugs, and that is exactly what the Reagan Administration decided to focus on. Its plan was to get everyone involved and everyone aware of drugs. It was also the first time in any presidential Administration that the President, First Lady, Vice-President and Attorney General were all simultaneously working together to solve the country's drug problem. This portrayed an image of unity and solidarity. This solidarity was a political intention that it hoped would give the country a team to look up to and would promote the participation of citizens on this topic (Thomas W. Dennis Files, 1982). As will be discussed further on, this portrayed unity concealed the fact that the First Lady's approach would be quite different from the views of her

husband. The Administration's emphasis on unity, however, did allow for sponsorship from ordinary citizens such as, parents, teachers, and even members of the business world (Thomas W. Dennis Files, 1982). The Reagan Administration was very focused on preventing future drug related crimes as well as stopping the current drug problem. Therefore, it wanted to direct most of their attention on the education of young citizens and the prevention of drug abuse.

### **Gathering Public Support**

The goal was to spread more awareness of the issue and to be more involved with the people. Reagan was a very charismatic president and was known to be the "great communicator." An underlying reason to initiate the War on Drugs was to cut off the supply of money that was being fed to revolutionary groups in especially South America. The administration considered this a major threat because it was feared that these groups were using the money earned through drug trade to fund revolutionary wars that would decrease U.S. influence in the region. In the drug production industry drug cartels were forming. These cartels were terrorizing South American countries and this was of concern to the Administration as well (Scott, P.D. & Marshall, J., 1991). With this international issue being very prominent and in dire need of attention, the Administration needed to get the support of the American public in this war against drugs. It drummed up this support by appealing to the American public and their concerns for the country's future.

As discussed before, the War on Drugs was part of the Administration's effort to come up with more conservative policies. The Reagan Administration decided to use the fact that many Americans were starting to doubt the liberal politics that had been prevalent during the previous two decades, and used the sense of failed liberalism to its advantage. America needed hope after what many considered was a time of failed liberalism of the 60s and 70s. Ronald Reagan was the epitome of the all-American man. He personified everything the country wanted to become again. Voting behavior during the elections echoed the country's rejection of liberalism. The Reagan Administration was no stranger to this fact and knew it had to position the President as a conservative traditional leader who would bring the United States back to its full potential. Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy formed the ultimate American team, a team that upheld traditions and had solid values. The Reagans were a couple that American parents and grandparents could relate to. The Reagans, therefore, took on the role of projecting an image of being caregivers, focused primarily on American children and their wellbeing.

The positioning of the Reagans was an extremely important factor in the launching of the War on Drugs. They were genuinely concerned about the influence of drugs in American society and they were positioned to be the people to look up to and follow to fight against the takeover of drugs. They were portrayed as concerned parents, looking out for the nation. Drugs were eroding education and they were negatively effecting the development of young citizens. Nancy and Ronald Reagan had told the American nation that they were not just speaking to them as the President and the First Lady but as parents and grandparents. These tactics, therefore, hit home for American families.

When the Administration launched its War on Drugs in 1982, it is important to note that some drug use was in decline. Surveys from the National Institute on Drug Abuse in 1982 showed that during an extended period of time there were significant drops in the number of people who used certain drugs in American society and that this involved many different age ranges. The age group of 18-25 years old showed decreases in marijuana usage of 15% in just the three year between 1979 and 1982. Not only was this drug use in decline, it continued to decline well into the 80s (Nunn, 2002). This change in drug use among Americans was a reflection of social change that was underway. People were becoming aware of the dangers of drug use. People were concerned that they were taking substances that were dangerous and detrimental to their health. This decline was not mentioned by the Administration and instead it played on the attitude change that was underway within the country. Therefore, this declaration of the War on Drugs rode on the wave of public sentiment that was being established against illegal drugs. The people who viewed drug use as harming society and dangerous were the same people who in turn found common ground in Reagan's policies.

This cultural shift and public support within the nation are extremely important in understanding the political value of the Administration's War on Drugs. Despite the war's extensive and intrusive nature, the cultural climate allowed for public support of these policies. It is also important to understand that at the time the war was not just a Republican idea, both the Republicans and Democrats supported it. Not only were the two parties working together to exploit the cultural and nationwide sentiment against drug use, the war also required extensive cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of government. When the Administration had handed in policy proposals it was important that Congress would swiftly pass the initiatives along with plenty of funding (Nunn, 2002). It was important that all branches of the United States government supported the policy. This way, no one could be held accountable for being too soft or lenient on the issue.

## Chapter 2: Implementation of the Policy

*We must reject the idea that every time a law is broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions -Ronald Reagan*

In 1982, the Administration established a five-pronged approach to the problem of illegal drug use: International efforts, domestic enforcement, education and prevention, treatment and detoxification, and research (Richard Williams Files, 1982). By using words like ‘battle’ and ‘war’ Reagan described the anti-drug crusade in military terms. In fact, the War on Drugs is commonly referred to as “America’s war at Home.”

From the Rose Garden, Reagan called on foreign governments to join the fight against drug trafficking and made it clear that any solution other than tough law enforcement was simply another form of surrender:

*Drugs already reach deeply into our social structure, so we must mobilize all our forces to stop the flow of drugs into this country, to let kids know the truth, to erase the false glamour that surrounds drugs, and to brand drugs such as marijuana exactly for what they are—dangerous, and particularly to school-age youth.*

*We can put drug abuse on the run through stronger law enforcement, through cooperation with other nations to stop the trafficking, and by calling on the tremendous volunteer resources of parents, teachers, civic and religious leaders, and State and local officials.*

*We’re rejecting the helpless attitude that drug use is so rampant that we’re defenseless to do anything about it. We’re taking down the surrender flag that has flown over so many drug efforts; we’re running up a battle flag. We can fight the drug problem, and we can win. - Ronald Reagan, 1982*

American society was made to view drugs as a pernicious evil. In order to support the War, the country was constantly reminded of the fact that there were drug users within American society who needed to be held accountable for their actions. The image of the drug user shifted from being an

innocent victim who had lost his way and needed help to someone who was dangerous and should be locked up behind bars. The Administration reflected the existent cultural shift towards a less liberal and permissive society by changing its attitude toward drugs and drug users. This attitude would in turn support a harsher policy towards drugs that included a tougher approach toward criminals, higher minimum sentences and mandatory sentences which took away part of a judge's discretion. In general, there were lower tolerance levels and heightened police attention on the subject.

### **Changes in Laws and Policies**

Executive Order 12368 in 1982 gave the White House more control over the nationwide anti-drug crusade. One of the first major changes was a sharp increase in the budget allocated for the War on Drugs. Reagan urged also harsher prison sentences for drug-related crime (Crawford, 2010).

In 1984 Reagan signed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act. The Act included increased federal penalties for the cultivation, possession and sale of marijuana. The legislation focused on marijuana because the Administration argued that it was the common starting ground for all drug users. Many of the Administration's drug advisors, including Carlton Turner, believed that marijuana was a stepping-stone into other drug use. Marijuana was considered a gateway into the world of drugs that would most likely spark further exploration. The Act focused on marijuana in order to nip drug use in the bud. Part of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act, the Sentencing Reform Act, aimed to create a higher level of consistency in federal sentencing. The Act not only changed sentencing but also dealt with victim rights, the duties of probation officers, and criminal forfeiture.

According to Harold Perl, "Polls show that the U.S. general public considers drug control to be the number one issue of domestic concern" (Perl, 1989). This sheds some light on the cultural phenomenon going on within the United States at this time. People were paying attention to the situation regarding drugs and drug control policies. They had a certain elevated level of concern for drug related crime. This fear intensified punitive action against drug crime. This attitude is then obviously reflected in the passing of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 in which the Administration and rest of U.S. government established minimum sentences and guidelines to sentencing. The question remains whether the Administration's policies reflected the concerns of the public or if the Administration was a major contributor to the shaping of this public concern.

In 1986, the Reagan Administration passed the Omnibus Drug Act, another turning point in the War on Drugs. The Act allocated \$1.7 billion to the enforcement of drug laws and educational

programs (Newcomb, 1991). The Act aimed to tackle the supply of drugs that entered the country. On the other hand, individual states and communities were left with the task to focus on demand reduction. The Administration's emphasis on supply reduction in fighting drugs indicates the shift of American attitudes on drugs. The Government saw this as a moral problem more so than a public health issue and, therefore, felt that the situation demanded a more punitive response (Newcomb, 1991).

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986) allocated even more funding for law enforcement, laws, increased penalties, and prevention and educational programs (Perl, 1989). The legislation even authorized the death penalty for drug-related crime. The death penalty could only be used in severe cases when a drug kingpin or a very active and dangerous drug trafficker was involved.

Towards the end of his second term, in November 1988, Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. According to the President, the new Act would "give a new sword and shield to those whose daily business is to eliminate from America's streets and towns the scourge of illicit drugs" (Ronald Reagan, 1988). The Act focused on the demand for drugs rather than the supply. The Act denied drug users certain Federal benefits like student and business loans (Department of Justice, 1997). The Act also required that Federal contractors and grantees ensured that their workplaces were drug-free. Public housing officials became more aware of drug-free living environments, which included provisions such as the termination of leases of those tenants who were caught taking illegal drugs. The monetary penalties of drug possession increased as well up to \$10,000. With the new policies aimed at harsher punishment for the drug user, the Administration eventually believed that drug use would subside.

### **The Drug Czar**

Carlton E. Turner was the main policy maker for the War on Drugs. He came to the White House in 1981 as Senior Policy Advisor for Drugs. Before coming to the White House Turner was involved in training narcotics agents on the Federal, State and local levels since 1971. He was the leader of a marijuana research project that took place at the University of Mississippi. Mostly he was known for working as a consultant for governmental agencies and private firms, as well as the United Nations (Carlton Turner Files, 1982). Turner had become one of the country's leading experts on the pharmacology of marijuana. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1983 Turner was appointed as Special Assistant to the



President for Drug Abuse Policy. The President had appointed Turner as Director of the White House Drug Abuse Policy Office, in the Office of Policy Development.

Turner soon gained the title Drug Czar, and it marked the first use of the “Czar” title for White House assistants. Drug “Czar” is an informal name given to the individual who directs most of the drug policy and propaganda for the presidential Administration. Carlton Turner’s main task was to advise the President and other White House staff on all drug-related matters and to develop a national policy. He and his staff set policy goals and priorities. Turner and his staff were also directly responsible for developing and supervising the implementation of the various drug abuse programs (Carlton Turner Files, 1981).

The appointment of Carlton Turner underlined the importance that White House gave to its drug policies. Turner argued that, “initially the American people took a very liberal view about drug abuse – a view that it is the right of an individual to use a drug” (Carlton Turner Files, 1986). In this permissive atmosphere most Americans tended to see drugs as either hard or soft, and believed that “the use of marijuana or cocaine was not a matter to be concerned about, only the use of heroin” (Carlton Turner Files 1986). Turner rejected this view, and condemned the use of both hard and soft drugs.

In 1981, Turner and the President initiated public awareness programs. “We began to communicate...to talk about the health consequences, the effort encompasses the United States’ strong prevention and education campaign under the First Lady, Nancy Reagan,” Turner stated (Carlton Turner Files, 1981). Turner argued that the Administration needed to do more than simply inform the public about its drugs policies. “Our kids don’t read government pamphlets,” he explained (Carlton Turner Files, 1981). Turner advised the Administration to publicize its goals more vigorously and imaginatively.

Although policy matters were often discussed with Turner and his staff alone, Cabinet Council working groups within the drug policy department were responsible for the actual developments of the policies and policy strategy. Another aspect of the team was the Cabinet Council on Legal Policy. This Cabinet Council was responsible for reviewing matters pertaining to interdepartmental aspects of narcotics control and drug abuse prevention and treatment of drug users. Rudy Giuliani chaired a working group, which also included Turner. The working group addressed the international as well as domestic aspects of controlling the supply of illegal drugs (Carlton E. Turner Files, April 1982)

On March 12, 1985 Reagan appointed Turner to be Deputy Assistant to the President for Drug Abuse Policy. He announced that, “Dr. Turner will continue to be the primary adviser for drug abuse policy and provide assistance to the First Lady with her drug abuse education projects, both domestic and international” (Ronald Reagan, 1985).

Carlton Turner took the “traditional values” view that was washing over the United States to pump up support for the War on Drugs, a concept that Reagan personified. According to Turner, drug use clouded the minds of young people and contributed to “the present young-adult generation's involvement in anti-military, anti-nuclear power, anti-big business, anti-authority demonstrations” (Schlosser, 2003). Turner was, therefore, a strong supporter of the conservative politics practiced by Reagan. Reagan knew Turner supported him and in turn Reagan supported Turner. He, therefore, gave Turner a relatively free hand within the Administration.

From the time of his appointment as Drug Advisor in 1981, Turner sent out the message that all drugs were bad. He believed that too much attention on the treatment of drug abusers actually promoted drug abuse. Therefore, the Reagan Administration wanted to do everything to get people to stop seeing drug users as people they should pity or help, and start seeing them as a menace to American society. The Administration, therefore, increased spending on law enforcement while reducing federal spending on drug treatment programs by 75%. Although Nancy Reagan had been very active in the area of drug treatment and prevention, the Administration accorded these programs a low priority.

Though supported by Reagan, Turner occasionally ran into problems. According to the Reagan Administration Files, individuals had been mailing the Administration and in particular Carlton Turner because they did not agree with certain claims made about drug abuse. Carlton Turner had apparently published inaccurate information on the effects of drug use when he explained that cannabinoids were stored in the brain (Latimer Letter, 1982). The fact that the highly positioned drug advisor to the President could make such an error is striking. Of course, it must be said that during this time many people did not know anything about drug use and there was not that much research on the matter. Also, research at the time highlighted the negative effects of drug abuse and it became a taboo to nuance or moderate drug effects, that the subject got exaggerated.

## **Media Support of the War on Drugs**

The Administration worked together with the American media to pitch the War on Drugs to the public. White House staff records show that the Administration maintained close contact with networks such as PBS and ABC to ensure that drugs were portrayed negatively in their programs and series (Carlton Turner Files, 1984). The files show how PBS coordinated its programs on drugs with the Administration. PBS had asked for input from the Administration on programs that outlined the negative effects of drug use. It particularly wanted to focus on programs that were aimed at younger teenage viewers who would be most influenced through television to change their view on drugs. The idea was that if these young school-aged children watched their favorite programs on television they would be sprinkled with anti-drug messages. Carlton Turner was very involved with getting the issue of drugs into the media. In a memo to Dennis Thomas, Assistant to the President, he states, “local press attention is building to a peak and the community level as smaller newspapers, radio stations, and television stations follow the lead of the national press” (Turner, White House Files, 1984). It was clear that he was focused on this snowball effect the media hype was creating. Turner also maintained contact with networks such as ABC. “ABC has also informed me that they have started airing PSAs (Public Service Announcements) featuring its best-known actors and is working on a series geared toward the very young” (Turner, White House Files, 1984). Most of these television shows that highlighted drugs and in particular drug usage were constructed in such a way that it would begin with characters that were on the right path in life. The characters would be doing well in school and after school activities. The lure of drugs would be introduced and one of the characters would give into the lure. The stories usually ended up being a moral lesson at the end, leaving people aware of the consequences of drug use.

The Administration also maintained close contact with the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. The Academy was actively promoting ongoing awareness of the problems of drug abuse; its goal was to reflect this awareness in almost all its broadcasts. The National Association of Broadcasters established “On-Air Initiatives” in 1983. It would especially design programs that were against drug abuse. The Media-Advertising Partnership for a Drug-Free America was the largest drug abuse awareness campaign in history. It provided around 1.5 billion dollars in free media time and space to “unsell” illegal drugs (Richard Williams Files, 1988).

It had become increasingly popular to broadcast “real life stories” of drug users and how their life changed as a result of their drug use. All of these messages were aimed at creating an image in

the mind of the American public that drugs caused great damage and that people needed to steer clear of them. Working very closely with broadcasting networks, the Reagan Administration was able to keep drugs on the public's mind and, therefore, it believed this would allow for the maintenance of support for the War on Drugs and its policies. The focus was on the younger generation in the United States, as these youngsters were the leaders of the future and were statistically the group at highest risk of drug use. Through the Partnership of a Drug Free America, media and advertising groups worked side by side to try and reduce drug use. Research showed that this tactic actually had a very positive effect in changing young people's attitudes regarding drugs. Young people were very aware of these advertisements and considered them highly reliable as they came from a governmental source. Reports also show that not only attitudes changed because of the media but also behavior, as they made young citizens less likely to use or try drugs (Johnston, 1993).

Not only did the White House influence television shows and youth series, the influence was also extended to news channels and news coverage stories. The channels were often asked to report on drug related crime. Therefore, there was an overrepresentation of news articles that were linked to drugs; and moreover they gave a face to crime. The young black male had, during the War on Drugs, become the face of crime. Research shows that in comparison to their white counterparts, African American high school seniors consistently have lower rates of licit and illicit drug and substance use. This statistic also holds true for all school age groups (Johnston, 1991). Although statistically there was no evidence to show that African Americans used drugs more than their white peers, due to overrepresentation in drug related news items, they had become misrepresented. Reporters would come back with images of black "crack whores" and black "crack babies" along with black young male drug dealers. The media flooded the audience with images of African American citizens involved in drug scenes. These images led to preconceived notions that drug use was mainly common amongst African American groups in society and not amongst the white people in the community.

### **Crack Cocaine**

In 1985 a "crack panic" spread across the country as crack cocaine became widely available in the United States. This became one of the most important health problems affecting the United States during this time. Not only was crack cocaine in itself a very harmful and dangerous drug, but it also contributed to a series of sexually transmitted disease outbreaks such as HPV and more seriously

the spread of HIV. Crack cocaine use was linked to increased occurrences of violent crimes and homicides. Crack cocaine was more affordable than regular cocaine so it led to an increase in addiction, especially people from low social economic status started using this drug.

During the early 1980s the supply of cocaine originated in Latin America it then passed through the Bahamas and reached U.S. soil in Miami. Eventually there was an excess supply of cocaine in these areas, which led to an 80 percent drop in the selling price (Department of Justice, 1990). This is when the drug dealers decided to alter the cocaine and change the powder form into crack. The big profit in creating crack cocaine was that it was very easy to produce and at a very little cost while attracting a whole new market in return. The first noted occurrences of crack were predominantly in Los Angeles, parts of southern California and Miami along with the Caribbean.

It was only during the second half of the 80s that crack really started to surface as a serious problem. In 1985, it was reported that hospital emergencies caused by cocaine use increased by 12 percent. In 1986, it increased by a dramatic 210 percent and then almost doubled again by 1987 (Department of Justice, 1990). By 1987, crack was available in almost all American states. In 1984, the first “crack babies” were born, many of whom were severely underweight and consequently died. It was during those years, however, that Reagan implemented the War on Drugs. Some scholars claim that this crack epidemic was a direct result of moral outrage. Some of them believe that trafficking only increased because of the increased media coverage about drugs (Reinarman, 1994). In fact, some of them go as far as insinuating that the CIA was directly responsible or behind the emergence and availability of crack cocaine in the United States. There are people that claim that the U.S. government and CIA specifically targeted the African American community by introducing the drug into the market. In an interview, Libertarian member of the House of Representatives, Ron Paul explains that he believed the CIA intentionally injected cocaine into U.S. ghettos. Paul also states, “we have received information that the CIA has given (Manuel) Noriega 200,000 dollars a year and they kept feeding him money” (Paul, 1988). Civil Rights advocate and writer, Michelle Alexander, took it a step further as she states in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, that the CIA was behind the emergence of crack cocaine in the ghettos to establish social control. “The nature of the criminal justice system has changed. It is no longer primarily concerned with the prevention and punishment of crime, but rather with the management and control of the dispossessed” (Alexander, 2010).

## **Momentum of Worry**

In order to maintain public support for the War on Drugs, the Administration kept the topic current by regularly expressing its remaining concern. Reagan's advisors had conducted many polls to see if the American public was still worried about the subject. The polls showed that a large portion of citizens still felt strong concerns about drug. The Administration then used this information to its benefit. Officials used public speeches and radio access about the dangers of drugs to validate the fear the Americans still held (Carlton Turner Files, 1987). Drug use was in decline, so there was no real need to be afraid. Reagan's advisors had discussed with Turner that he should do his best to promote this fear and that by doing so he would position himself as the prime leader of the country's anti-drug efforts. In a White House memo regarding issues placed on the national agenda to Carlton Turner in 1985, Pat Buchanan had stated, "To the extent we elevate our concern, our approach, our ideas, we prevail" (Carlton Turner Files, 1985). Therefore, the Administration deliberately expressed elevated concern in order to validate the fear and worry Americans had on the subject. This legitimized the Administration's policy actions and helped keep public support for these policies.

## **Foreign Intervention and Policy**

At the time, and into the early 90s, control of drug trafficking was the highest concern in America. This concern ranked higher than immigration, foreign debt, and even communist expansion in Central America as the top concerns regarding the relationship between the United States and Latin America (Bagley, 1989). In 1988, a New York Times/CBS poll showed that 48 percent of people thought that drug trafficking was the most important issue in foreign policy at the time. The least important issue was the unrest in Palestine which only 4 percent of people deemed most important.

During Reagan's time in office there was a lot of pressure for a world free of drugs. One of the Administration's main goals at the time was to transform drug control policies and drug related operations in Latin American countries. Therefore, when the War on Drugs was launched the United States actually initiated a new era of drug diplomacy. This was established through Reagan's choice of foreign policy toward Latin America.

Between 1980 and 1987, the budget for overseas narcotics control increased from \$40 million to \$200 million per year (Bagley, 1989). Foreign aid during the Reagan Administration was conditional on how a country performed with regards to the War on Drugs and whether it was putting in enough effort to stop the drug flow. Therefore, when Latin American countries did something that stood in the way of the war's efforts, they received a sanction. This happened to Bolivia in 1986 and 1987 because it was believed that Bolivia had not seriously tried to stop the production of its local coca crop. In 1988, the Administration along with Congress had decertified General Noriega and Panama. Congress did not stop here, as certain Congressmen started pursuing attempts to decertify other Latin countries such as Paraguay, Mexico and Peru. However, President Reagan was against this pursuit towards decertification because he was afraid that this would further damage the relationship between the United States and Latin America. Also, he feared this would deviate from his initial plan, which was to join forces with other countries in the world to stop the flow of drug trafficking and win the war against drugs.

The US military became increasingly more involved with the War on Drugs due to a sudden increase of US-Andean cocaine trade. Reagan wanted to get the military involved in this matter, which led him to reform the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act. This Act had always outlawed the military to be involved in civilian law enforcement. It was evident that the drug flow reaching the United States originated in Latin America with transit stops in the Caribbean. This was of increasing concern to the United States. The military was utilized to intervene in the situation. Therefore, Latin American countries along with the Caribbean were targeted in 1980s and 1990s. Eventually in the late 80s the United States had more than thirty government entities that were directly part of the intervention in Latin America. These entities included the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), US customs, the CIA and the Bureau for International Narcotic Matters (Beckley Foundation, 2010). Although Reagan had his reservations about the harsher approach taken against Latin America, the Administration and U.S. Congress made some proactive strides against drug trafficking. The amount of cocaine that was seized increased from 1981 to 1986 from 3 tons to 27 tons. Law enforcement on state and federal

levels worked together during this time to capture a half-ton of heroin, 9 tons of hashish and over 1,000 tons of marijuana (Bagley, 1989).

Individual drug traffickers were also of major concern to the Administration and in particular the illegal business and money laundering they brought with them. One of the major reasons the Administration issued more military involvement in the matter was to remove these high-powered traffickers from their positions. Since it was seen as a threat to national security, drugs and especially drug traffickers were taken very seriously and major efforts were made to stop these individuals. In fact, during the Reagan Administration a lot of important arrests had been made within the international drug industry. In particular in Mexico and Colombia major drug criminals were arrested.

However heroic the cause, it remained relatively unclear what American forces were fighting for in South America. As the Cold War was trickling to its end, the Administration's policymakers were using the War on Drugs as a way of giving the U.S. forces a "modern military assignment", according to Carlton Turner (Carlton Turner Files, 1986). The Reagan Administration was keen on taking the War on Drugs to the international level. One of their tools in doing so was to bring down drug trade stemming from South America. However, the Department of Defense was very reluctant to get involved in a war in Latin America and the Caribbean. It believed this would strain international relations. This is why the military's role in the War on Drugs remained relatively small.

### **Nancy Reagan's Involvement in the War**

*Drugs take away the dream from every child's heart and replace it with a nightmare, and it's time we in America stand up and replace those dreams.* - Nancy Reagan

Nancy Reagan was the second wife of Ronald Reagan and like him she had a background in acting. Nancy Reagan was not just any First Lady; she got extremely involved in important issues and was not afraid to get her hands dirty. When she came to office with Ronald Reagan in 1981 they were both, in comparison, much older than other White House couples. Nancy soon took it upon herself to help the American youth. With her age and the fact that she was a mother as well as a grandmother, Nancy Reagan portrayed herself as a "mother to the nation." The country warmed up easily to her and still today she is considered to be one of the most loved First Ladies.



During their first few months in the White House, the Reagan's were highly criticized and in particular Nancy Reagan, for being too easy with money. She completely redecorated the White House living quarters and had spent a lot of money on new china dishes as well. The American public did not take the White House spending lightly. Advisors to the First Lady urged Mrs. Reagan to take the public's minds off the issue and focus her attention on the country's youth (Nancy Reagan Files, 1982).

In the seventies Mrs. Reagan had become aware of the immense drug problem within the United States and especially amongst the youth she found her niche. She had become aware of the drug problem when she, through speaking with her friends, had found out that their children were using drugs and in some cases these children had committed suicide as a result of their drug usage. For Mrs. Reagan this issue, therefore, became very emotional and personal and she soon felt it was her calling to do something about this growing problem. During the 1980 campaign, she had come to Daytop Village in New York, which was a drug and alcohol abuse treatment facility (Reagan Foundation, 1982). This facility mainly worked with the youth. Nancy saw how the staff of this clinic worked with these young people and this interaction had a profound effect on her. It was during this trip that she felt her passion to help out youth that had steered onto the wrong path. Soon after her husband took office in 1981, Mrs. Reagan started on her own personal input in the War on Drugs.

The First Lady started making visits to drug treatment centers across the country. She made regular visits to the National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth. She spoke to the national Parent Teacher Association and other organizations. She invested a great deal of time in the drug problem and did so before her husband declared most of the Administration's plans for a drug free America. In a way, it was not the President but the First Lady who initiated the national crusade against drug use. It is often forgotten that up until 1982 Nancy Reagan was the face of the War on Drugs within the Reagan Administration. In a memo to the staff, Ann Wroblewski, Special Projects Director for the First Lady, she explained, "Mrs. Reagan has been at the forefront of the Administration's drug strategy. This will soon change. Sometime in the latter part of this month, the President will announce, in detail, the Reagan Drug Strategy. The Strategy is a five-pronged approach: international efforts, domestic enforcement, and research. Mrs. Reagan will be named as the chief administration spokesman for education and prevention" (Ann Wroblewski, White House Files, 1982).

Nancy Reagan's most influential contribution towards the War on Drugs was her "Just Say No" campaign. The title for her campaign came from a school visit in Oakland. According to Nancy

Reagan during her visit, “A little girl raised her hand and said, ‘Mrs. Reagan, what do you do if somebody offers you drugs?’ Nancy Reagan had responded with, “Well, you just say no” (Reagan Foundation, 1982). This, over time, had become a very popular line and people were remembering it well. This was the reason that the phrase was used as the name for programs and groups that focus on anti-drug promotion. Towards the end of the Reagan Administration there were over 12,000 “Just Say No” clubs across the United States and even some outside the country.

During her campaigning for a drug-free America, Nancy Reagan traveled all over the country and even internationally to promote drug awareness. She had traveled to 33 different states and various cities within those states. Internationally, she travelled to 9 foreign countries (Reagan Foundation, 1982). Nancy Reagan played a very active role in the Reagan Administration and headed the drug education and prevention team within the Administration (Nancy Reagan Files, 1986). In one year she made over 110 appearances in the spirit of a drug free America. Continuing where she had initially been inspired to help with the cause, she also frequently visited drug rehabilitation centers. She helped the Administration by gaining support for the War on Drugs by appearing on television and radio with public announcements to express her concern and to promote her efforts to stop drug use amongst the youth.

The Reagan Administration was keen on using the War on Drugs to reach common ground with world leaders. Reagan wanted a global war against drugs and Nancy helped him with that goal as well. In 1985, Nancy Reagan had invited the 18 first ladies from influential foreign countries to come together to be part of the First Ladies Conference on Drug Abuse in Washington (Reagan Foundation, 1985). Her platform was to get the first ladies involved in a similar movement back in their countries in support of the Administration’s goals to create a global movement.

Nancy Reagan addressed the United Nations General assembly in 1988. She wanted the country to do more in its fight against drugs. She spoke about focus on education and increased efforts on the part of law enforcement towards drug users. She highlighted the nation’s goal of stopping the production of drugs and smuggling into the United States. She encouraged developing nations to work together with the United States to stop this, but argued that the U.S. should focus more attention to its own citizens in order to reduce the demand for drugs.

Nancy Reagan’s main concern remained eliminating drug use among young people. She very clearly put a great deal of her time and effort into this cause and all her efforts were not in vain. Nancy herself is most proud of the reduction of drug abuse amongst the youth in America since her launching the crusade. From the time Nancy Reagan made it her mission to fight for the country’s

youth and aid her husband in the War on Drugs, high school students who used cocaine had dropped by one-third. In 1978, 10 percent of high school students said that they had used marijuana daily. That shocking statistic decreased to 3 percent by 1987 (Reagan Foundation, 1989).

### **The Drug War as a tool in The Cold War**

*My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.* - Ronald Reagan

Reagan's joke above is an example of the lengthy Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The issue of establishing normal relations between the two nations has been a primary topic on every Presidential Administration's agenda since 1945, and Reagan's Administration was no exception.

Although the War on Drugs was for the most part a domestic issue, the Administration believed that it could be used as a tool to reach a common ground with the Soviet Union. The Reagan Administration believed that the War on Drugs could become a war that extended past the borders of the United States. The Administration believed that the 'War at home' showed that it was taking care of its citizens and it exhibited an overall strengthening of the nation. The two nations had always had difficulties finding common ground and a similar goal. The War on Drugs was considered the perfect instrument to use to obtain this common ground. The Soviet Union was also dealing with drug problems, yet had done very little to combat these problems. By focusing on a shared issue, the Administration believed it would create a distraction from the rivalry and competition that had always existed. Since the United States was the first to start a full-blown War on Drugs, they were in a unique position to offer the Soviet Union help by pointing out that they had similar problems.

The Administration had asked Jack Matlock, the American Ambassador in the Soviet Union whether he thought that this would be a good idea. The Administration believed that if common ground would be reached, animosity between the two nations would cease to exist. In a letter from Carlton Turner to Jack Matlock, Turner lays out a suggestion that entailed bringing the First Lady in first to talk to Raisa Gorbachev about United States and Russian drug problems. Turner states in the letter, "I do not see how it could hurt, and if the wives become friends and establish trust in dealing with a common problem, maybe the husbands might find it easier to do the same with lowering the

arms race” (Carlton Turner Files, 1986). Jack Matlock replies that it was too much too soon and that it would not work to United States’ advantage but would harm the relationship between the two countries. “The Soviets have only begun to acknowledge that they have a drug problem. I do not think we should suggest that the First Lady make a speech on the topic there. The Soviets would not apply it to their own situation but would try to use it to “prove” how bad things are in the United States” (Dennis Thomas Files Series IV, 1986). A note written by Reagan shows that Reagan supported Carlton’s suggestion of establishing common ground but shared Matlock’s concern on Soviet reception. Reagan wrote, “Maybe it is something the two first ladies could discuss during the summit. But, I’d bet the Soviets are touchy on this, and won’t want to make a big thing of it – except to point out how *they* could help us correct *our* problem” (Ronald Reagan note, Carlton Turner Files, 1986). This shows that the Administration was hoping to use the War on Drugs in order to facilitate the ending of the Cold War, but backed off the idea in the end.

### **1986: The Administration’s Six-Point Plan**

In 1986, the Administration came up with a six-point plan and a list of final goals for the Reagan Administration with regards to the War on Drugs. During the introduction of this plan, Reagan highlighted the positive changes and accomplishments that the War on Drugs was responsible for. He highlighted the work of his wife in her campaign “Just Say No” and he stated that drug arrests and confiscations were still up (White House Files 406226, 1986). Reagan also talked about how more people were getting involved and that it was growing into a world effort as many foreign countries were cooperating with the War on Drugs.

The goals that the Administration laid out included federal policy options, and Reagan mentioned that without full discussion and debate with the members of the Administration, there would be no final decisions made. Reagan’s goal was not to come up with a short-term solution to the drug problem, but instead to call for an increased national crusade against drugs. He wanted the fight to be a sustained continuous effort to stop drugs from destroying the country and asked for the involvement of every segment of American society. It was also the first time since the launch of the Reagan War on Drugs that he mentioned the increased importance of focusing not only on the supply of drugs but also the demand of drugs within the country (White House Files 406226, 1986). It became evident that Special Research and Issues Director to the President, Anthony Dolan, was behind the idea of straying from enforcement and interdiction by looking focusing more attention on

the user and the drug market. He explains in a memo to Dennis Thomas, Assistant to the President, “It is vital to dry up the source of the drugs: the user, the market. Not a glamorous point; it calls for gradual social and cultural change and does not lend itself to media events or cheer lines. Still, the President emphasizes we as society have to engage in a social and moral interdiction of drugs. That is: by government, in the schools, above all, in the family” (Mike Dolan, White House Files, 1986).

The first goal in the new plan was that the Administration wanted to secure drug-free workplaces for everyone. The reasons for this were to protect working people from drug use effects and to increase the productivity of the country.

The second goal was drug-free schools, which included grade school up to university level. Local educators were asked to become highly aware of drug laws and ensure that these were being observed within school settings. The change was made to include drug abuse education as part of the health curriculum in schools.

The third goal was an interesting addition within the Administration’s plans. In the very beginning the Administration very much portrayed the drug user as an irresponsible villain within society. There was not that much attention placed on rehabilitation and helping of drug addicts but more emphasis was placed on preventing other people from ending up like them. Nancy Reagan was the first to realize the importance of drug rehabilitation and prevention. Nancy believed that this was the most effective and long lasting solution to ending drug use. Ronald Reagan had seen the positive effects Nancy’s programs had encountered. Initially, although supporting his wife, Reagan felt that it did not deserve a prime position on the agenda, and that law enforcement and punishment were the main way to stop drug related crime. Now, the extreme importance of helping those caught up in the path of drugs was realized, as the Administration wanted to encourage States and communities to develop programs to treat specific mental and physical health problems that are related to drugs. They wanted to increase research in the health department of the effects of drug use and the treatment of this addiction.

The Administration’s fourth goal was to push for even more international cooperation. Since earlier in 1986, President Reagan had raised the priority level of drug abuse by declaring it a threat to national security. The Administration’s plan was to gain full and active support of countries with which the United States worked with to defeat drug trafficking internationally. The goal was to encourage more attacking of drug traffickers at the source. They also wanted stronger international action against money laundering since that was the source of income and the enabler for the drug traffickers.

The fifth goal of increasing law enforcement efforts does not come as a surprise. Reagan wanted the criminal justice system to give prompt and harsher punishments to drug peddlers on all scales of the industry. They also wanted law enforcement efforts to be increased at surveillance at the U.S. border with Latin America, and to thoroughly investigate everyone coming from that area to ensure that they are not involved in drug trade.

The Administration's final goal in 1986 for Reagan's final term of Presidency was to yet again increase public awareness on drug abuse. He called on more personal involvement of American citizens to join the fight against drugs. He called on people to join Nancy's campaign in all cities across America to spread the word and increase drug knowledge. The goal of this effort was to make "drug users understand that their fellow citizens will no longer tolerate drug abuse" (President Reagan: White House Files 406226, 1986). They wanted to change the drug abuser's behavior by showing the users the affect their actions had on their neighbors. More awareness was spread about the dangers of drug use and the consequences, which was also intended as a shock to steer people away from drugs.

### **Chapter 3: Assessment of the Policy**

*Thirty-seven Federal agencies are working together in a vigorous national effort, and by next year our spending for drug law enforcement will have more than tripled from its 1981 levels. We have increased seizures of illegal drugs. Shortages of marijuana are now being reported. Last year alone over 10,000 drug criminals were convicted and nearly \$250 million of their assets were seized by the DEA, the Drug Enforcement Administration. And in the most important area, individual use, we see progress. In 4 years the number of high school seniors using marijuana on a daily basis has dropped from 1 in 14 to 1 in 20. The U.S. military has cut the use of illegal drugs among its personnel by 67 percent since 1980. These are a measure of our commitment and emerging signs that we can defeat this enemy. - Ronald Reagan, 1986*

Ronald Reagan's drug policy, especially during his first term in office, can be described as a moralist approach to drugs. This view saw the drug user as a sinner and as someone who lacked

morals. This view on the issue, therefore, took the focus off the drug as a health issue and placed it on the criminal. Along with the moralist drug policy, came harsher punitive measures taken against the drug user in an attempt to send out a message to deter people from drug use. A moralist drugs policy views drug use as a crime and the drug user a criminal. The Administration also took a slight temperance view approach whereby it is believed that the supply of drugs was a threat to the public, and, therefore, according to this view focus was given to stop drug smugglers from bringing the drugs into the countries and also to arrest drug dealers for supplying it to the people.

When Reagan started his War on Drugs, public opinion was receptive to a harder stance on crime. Policies like mandatory minimum prison sentences for criminals drug dealers and smugglers, increased surveillance, and law enforcement agencies created more departments that solely focused on drugs and the arresting of drug related criminals. Internationally, Reagan attacked drugs at the source by spraying herbicides on marijuana and cocaine farms in Guatemala, Colombia and Mexico. The United States also increased its border patrols in order to catch drug smugglers before they could enter the country. By doing this Reagan stuck to his supply-side approach in dealing with the drug problem in the United States. Reagan was the first to name a drug czar signaling the importance and the scope of the War on Drugs within the Administration.

Reagan was, therefore, very obviously focusing on eradicating the supply of drugs, which included the production, transportation and eventual distribution of the drugs. The interesting thing to note is that after the implemented policies, the United States saw a significant decrease in crime. However, according to the anthropologists at John Jay College in New York, the policies implemented under the Reagan Administration did not stop the flow of drugs and the drug market, but it made the drugs cheaper likely due to the increase in drug flow (Wendel et al, 2007). The fact that the drug price decreased made being involved in the drug industry a slightly less dangerous occupation seeing as there was a reduced need for drug users to commit a lot of crime.

Travis Wendel from John Jay College claimed that because the price of drugs decreased, users committed less crime in order to feed their addiction (Martin, 2011). Alexander Hotz from *The New York World* agreed that the increased availability and drop in price of drugs led to less crime. Hotz writes that, "the price of cocaine fell from \$400 to \$460 per pure gram in the early 1980s to less than \$200 by the early 2000s. Similarly heroin dropped from \$3,000 to \$3,600 per pure gram in the 1980s to about \$2,000 by the 2000s" (Hotz, 2011). The border clampdown had caused Colombian and Mexican cartels to change their production from marijuana to cocaine and heroin. Cocaine and heroine was the smarter choice for these cartels as they are both easier to smuggle and reap larger

profits. Therefore, the results show an increase in supply of both cocaine and heroin globally. The increased supply allowed for a significant drop in price, making drugs more accessible. Although Reagan had aimed and failed at reducing the supply of drugs, a strange turn of events resulted in a drop in crime rate instead.

The Reagan Administration also made a big change in the Supreme Court. Ronald Reagan appointed very conservative Judges such as, Anthony Kennedy and Antonin Scalia. Reagan was very keen in changing the way judges ruled. He ultimately wanted them to make more decisions based on the interpretation of the constitution. The Supreme Court has upheld the sentencing guidelines that Reagan had installed along with the 1984 Federal Bail Reform Act that gave way for prosecutors to have the power to request the defendant in a drug trial to be held in jail without bond until the trial would begin (Merritt, 2004). The Supreme Court with Reagan appointees resembled a conservative majority and highly likely to follow all of the new drug laws and procedures established under the Reagan administration.

### **The Reagan Administration Reflects**

The Reagan Administration was extremely proud of the accomplishments made in the two-term presidency. They believed that the shift in attitude away from drug abuse as an individual issue to a problem facing society as a whole was a success. They discussed how times changed since before the Reagan launch of the War on Drugs. They believed that at the start of the Reagan Presidency, the majority of American citizens would have been split in two directions: those who were aware that illegal drug use existed and that it was becoming an huge issue and those who believed in the idea that drugs were not that detrimental to society; that it was glamorous; and that it was not a national and global problem (David Addington Files, 1989). By 1989, most Americans had become very aware of the dangers of drug use and became very intolerant of it.

The Administration was very proud of the intensive education and prevention efforts that were implemented during the presidency. It was content with the effects that the campaign had on the younger generation. This was also a very personal issue to the President as Nancy obviously played a huge role in the campaign, therefore, it also demonstrates the unique teamwork displayed by President Reagan and Nancy Reagan. The anti-drug efforts were ordered by the President but supported and pushed forth by the First Lady. The Administration was particularly pleased about the



way the couple was portrayed to the American population and that together as parents and as grandparents they took a firm stance and always expressed concern on the subject of illegal drugs. When the Administration refers to the crusade against drugs it even uses the First Lady's slogan, Just Say No. Its belief was that the crusade against illegal drug use was one of the best investments that could ever be made for the future of the country. According to White House documents it is clear that there was a level of confidence that the efforts made during Reagan's time in office allowed for the younger generation to reject the use of illegal drugs.

However, the Administration was aware of the fact that many people started to doubt their efforts and their policies during the course of the War on Drugs. In 1989, it became clear that there was a second trend that started to arise next to the general anti-drug trend. Not only were people afraid of drug related crime, the concern was also starting to grow regarding the health consequences of drug use and its effect on a community. This second trend was feared by the Administration because it could possibly have undermined the confidence Americans had in the Administration's fight against drugs. Towards the end of Reagan's presidency, there was a sudden increase in drug-related illnesses which included death by drug overdose and AIDS, which is often times contracted by drug use administered through and IV. There was an increase in babies born with defects stemming from drug use by the mother and even babies that were born as drug-addicts due to the exposure of drugs through the mother's body as a fetus. This was of great concern to the American population at the time and the Administration got the impression that many of these people believed that America had lost the fight against drugs.

However, at the same time that people starting seeing this aftermath of drug use, it also reflected the long-term consequences of drug use, and made the remaining group of people who believed that drug use was glamorous, harmless and even without victims, understand that this was not the case (David Addington Files, 1989).

When the Reagan Administration first started making policies within the framework of its War on Drugs, its main focus was to be tougher on drugs, which coincided with a general "tougher on crime" attitude. This policy included the most prominent change, which was the establishment of mandatory minimum sentences. These minimum sentences, the Administration deemed the most important factor in fighting the war against drugs. When the Administration reflected back on the steps taken against drugs, it was positive towards the U.S. law enforcement agencies that have responded to the trafficking and sale of drug in a serious way and have increased their efforts to take on the drug criminals (David Addington Files, 1989). However, it came to understand that just

putting people in prison and increasing law enforcement efforts was not enough to fight the “War at Home.” It deemed law enforcement to have been necessary but at best only half of the required attack against drugs in American society (David Addington Files, 1989). This points to a somewhat of an attitude shift within the Administration, as it initially believed law enforcement was the best resource to stop drug use.

Reflecting on its policies, the Administration came to realize that the major obstacle to stopping the influx of drugs into American society was the unwillingness and incapability of drug users to stop their poor choices. It realized when there is a will there is a way, and when this demand increased the supply of drugs to the United States it managed to support this demand. Therefore, this did cast doubt on the Administration’s supply-side initiatives.

Although the Administration was very pleased with the results of the “Just Say No” message that President Reagan and the First Lady so passionately supported, it realized later, at the end of the second Reagan term, that it had left out a very important group of people, perhaps the group it should have tried to influence the most. One part of the young generation did not hear the “Just Say No” message. This group mainly consisted of high school dropouts, the group that is statistically the most inclined to turn to crime and drugs. The Administration came to realize that leaving out this group could potentially have jeopardized its accomplishments that have been made in the war against drugs. Some Democrats at the time attributed the successes of the War on Drugs mainly to Nancy Reagan: Charles Rangel, a Democrat and member of the House of Representatives stated, “for the last eight years, while I have criticized the Reagan Administration on Drug Abuse Policy, I have always lauded the First Lady, and supported her Anti-Drug efforts. More than any other person in America, Nancy Reagan has symbolized the drive for a drug-free society. Nancy Reagan has made ‘Just Say No’ a national crusade” (Rangel, 1988). Research conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Michigan had found that there were less young people using illegal drugs in the 1980s than in the 1970s. Research found that the number of high school seniors that used marijuana decreased from 50.1% in 1978 to 36% in 1987 and 12% in 1991 (Benze, 2005). The percentage of other drugs used by students also decreased significantly. Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign may well have made a significant contribution to this decline.

The Administration believed that people who silently consented to illegal drugs were believed to be standing in the way of the progress to eradicate drugs from society. In the end the Administration concluded that the best policy remained to push the idea that a drug user is an irresponsible member of society, whose behavior should not be excused. It believed that the reason

why illegal drugs were still available and people still used them was a sense of misdirected compassion amongst the American people for the drug addicts, and this understanding or compassion stalls any proactive steps to stop the illegal use of drugs (David Addington Files, 1989).

The Administration believed that for the future people across the country needed to continue to be against drugs and that government needed to make them realize that the wrongdoers of society were the drug users and that their addiction should not be supported. The Administration believed that eventually its policies would pay off because people across the country would become so intolerant of drugs, that everyone would see the horrible habit as insupportable. This would eventually stop the use of drugs. According to the Reagan Administration the key was to continuously spread negative thoughts of drug use in the hopes that eventually everyone would reject the idea and drug use would be seen as something you just did not do.

Although the Administration seemed to have learned from the ineffectiveness of solely a law enforcement based solution, considering for example the slight shift in emphasis towards health effects during Reagan's second term, its ideas of what eventually would work still look relatively similar throughout both Presidential terms. It believed in the future even more knowledge should be spread about drugs. To deter people from choosing the wrong path it believed more action, in particular, legal action should be taken against drug users to show the position they held in society and that it was not something people should support. The Administration thought that in order to be effective the action taken against drug users should not be kind and delicate but forceful and quick (David Addington Files, 1989). Policies that supported this quick and forceful approach included steps such as more fines and seizures of personal property along with the forfeiture of driving and other privileges. The Administration suggested imposing more random drug screening and mandatory work within community service, which would allow drug users to reflect on the consequences of their habit. It believed that this would deter many people from drugs.

The Administration eventually concluded that there was no one set way that would be the best approach to win the war against drugs. Government officials looked back at their time in office and concluded that they had taken on a comprehensive strategy to fight the War on Drugs. The Administration introduced aspects like international eradication, interdiction, and enforcement programs. However, towards the end of the Reagan's last term the Administration broadened its focus to include treatment programs, educational programs especially aimed at the younger generation that went hand in hand with prevention programs. It believed that for the country the best solution to the drug problem was a comprehensive strategy (David Addington Files, 1989). The

Administration believed if somehow Reagan's term could have exceeded the eight years, it would consider the next step to be a slightly more difficult change, which required the users in society to become aware and understand the damage that their habit has inflicted on themselves along with their community. It wanted to reinstall the method of personal responsibility and accountability for people's own actions, a method, which had been the starting point to the Reagan Administration's War on Drugs. It wanted to challenge every person in the United States to leave their mark on the war, to either stop the support or the use of illegal drugs or to take action that drug use would no longer be supported by their community.

### **Carlton Turner Reflects**

Towards the end of the Reagan era, Carlton Turner stated that there was a "definite decrease in drug use in the United States" (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989). According to Turner, the reason for the success was strong law enforcement efforts. Turner focused on the aspect of decreased drug abuse within the country and believed this had to do with "a law enforcement and eradication program that works" (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989). He was confident that the Administration had taken the right steps in order to ensure the problem be dealt with. Teenagers in the United States and in countries all over the world were agreeing that drugs were the biggest problem in their countries at the time. Therefore, according to Turner not only did the Administration succeed in bringing the subject of drugs on everyone's mind in America but also helped start a global movement towards the eradication of illegal drugs.

Turner believed that in the early stages of the Reagan War on Drugs, public awareness was key in tackling the problem. Still towards the end of the era he stood by the belief that public awareness was the way to go. He reflected on the changes the United States went through during the Reagan era. This was a shift in public attitude from a permissive society to an enlightened society. The Administration had helped bring this forth (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989). He claimed that people's views on drugs before the Reagan Administration had been very liberal, they believed it was the right of an individual to decide whether or not they wanted to use drugs. However, bringing public awareness to the country and informing people about the dangers of drug use was the turning point. People no longer saw drug use as a personal choice but instead a choice reflecting an entire community and the country, something that installed a sense of responsibility in people. As people started seeing the effects of drug use on society as a whole, it was seen as a threat to the core

foundation of American democracy (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989). This allowed for personal involvement in the matter and people, therefore, got very attached and outspoken on the issue. This eventually led to the support of drug policies within the Reagan Administration.

Turner also gave a lot of credit to the First Lady, who, with her Just Say No campaign affected many children and people across the country to stand up against drugs. With her strong prevention and educational program it boosted the country's shift in public attitudes. According to Turner, "Americans no longer are allowing the drug user to finance organizations that subsequently put terror on our society" (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989).

The message Reagan passed on during his Presidency was that drugs were a threat to national security. This is a statement Americans took to heart and started believing in. Through the Reagan era, Americans began seeing drugs as the root to many of their problems both foreign and domestic. Receiving information that many terrorist organizations are funded by drug money, they began to recognize the possible connection between terrorism and drug trade.

The Administration had been very concerned about the drug marijuana. Although marijuana is not considered to be a very dangerous drug, the Administration believed that it was in many ways a "starter drug". The belief was that marijuana was the first drug people tried before trying other, more dangerous, drugs. Because Marijuana was deemed a "starter drug", focus had always been on the importance of drug prevention of school-age children, the age at which they may be offered or confronted with drugs for the first time. It was Turner who in 1982 claimed that attacking marijuana was the best first step to take. Turner stated that there are hardly ever drug users who did not start the drug journey with marijuana. However, towards the end of the Reagan Administration it became clear that there was no real evidence that marijuana acted as a motivator for trying other drugs. Therefore, when his time in office was approaching its end, Turner revealed that he eventually felt that it had been wrong to focus on one specific drug and that all drugs, including alcohol, should be seen as problems and treated equally (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989).

Although the focus of the Administration at the initiation of the "war" had been on tougher law enforcement practices, Turner reflected that the initiatives taken to stop the use of drugs in American society, acknowledged that more focus should have been placed on the treatment and rehabilitation of drug users. Instead of individuals solely having responsibility for themselves, the country had a moral obligation to reach out and help drug-users as well.

This communal responsibility for others in society is also the reason Turner justified the increased budget for the war and the effect this had on American taxpayers. He stated, "Successful

drug prevention requires the efforts of the community” (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989). However, Turner did contend that the initial approach of the Reagan Administration had been a logical one as, “initially you have to have a strong drug enforcement campaign before anything else works” (Carlton Turner Files 432128, 1989).

### **Competition Between Republicans and Democrats**

According to White House files, there was growing concern among Republicans on the Hill on the issue of drugs in the country, stemming from a political as well as policy standpoint (Kenneth M. Files, 1988). The Democrats had introduced omnibus bills in both chambers. Republicans believed that presidential candidates like Jesse Jackson and less so other candidates had effectively framed the campaign (Kenneth M. Files, 1988). The concern amongst the Republicans was that if they did not gain the upper hand on the drug issue, Democrats would use it to their advantage.

Therefore, towards the end of the Reagan Presidency, Republicans wanted to organize a task force to propose a strategy. Many members of the party had already brought up very familiar topics such as drug czars; death penalties for certain dangerous drug traffickers and even to increase the involvement of the U.S. military in the fight against drugs.

The Republicans eventually came up with a three-step approach to tackle the drug problem and gain the upper hand over the Democrats. The first part of the approach was to work on legislation that would focus on even harsher law enforcement and prosecution for drug abusers. And finally the Republicans realized that drugs as a main issue could be used as a campaign strategy (Kenneth M. Files, 1988). This is a significant shift from eight years prior, as Reagan did not make drugs an issue during his campaign at all. The issue of drugs had gone from not being mentioned in Reagan’s 1980 campaign to an important issue in George Bush Senior’s campaign in 1988. George Bush was very vocal on the subject of drugs both in his Presidential campaign and in his first two years in office. This shows how much of a public issue drugs had become in the country since the Reagan Presidency and how it became tool in campaigning.

Democrats and Republicans were pretty much seeing eye-to-eye on the topic of drugs. Whether this agreement came from genuine overlapping ideas and concerns or not was unclear. Since the American population was increasingly concerned with the effect of drugs on their society and were hoping for a tougher approach on drugs, both parties would have been heedless not to come up with a tough on drugs line of action in order to gain support for the upcoming presidential election.

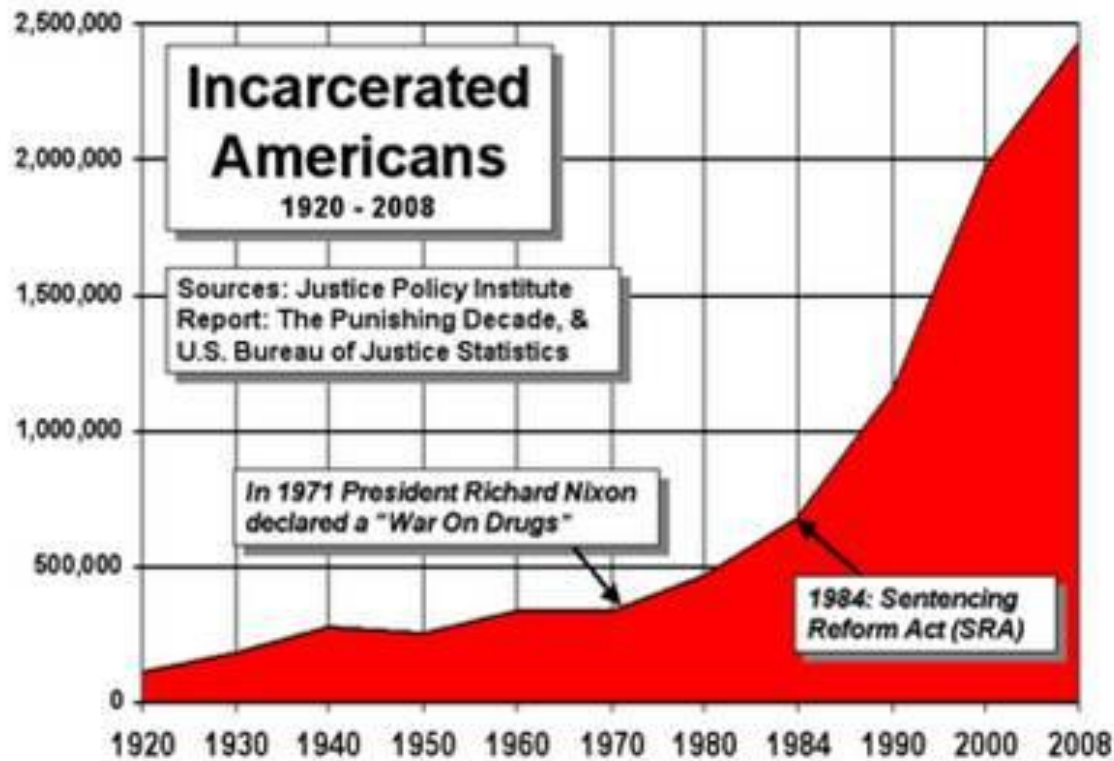
According to White House office files, Republicans claimed that although the Democrats' bill could have been subjected to charges of throwing money at the drug problem through ineffective means, they would have been very reluctant to try and challenge or oppose their bill, seeing as they would have to then come up with an attractive alternative (Kenneth M. Files, 1988). Since the two parties were fighting for the same goal, it did not make much sense to fight with Democrats on this issue. This was a direct result of the overall change in American society to "renewed conservatism". It wanted harsher laws and punishments for those who failed to obey the law.

### **Prison Population**

As mentioned previously, although the Administration was faced with threats to American health and safety, it never truly initiated a national public health campaign to fight against the dangers and consequences of drugs. Since the Administration's number one policy for dealing with drug related crime was law enforcement, its efforts resulted in major spikes in prison population. Because so little attention was paid to the effects of drugs on public health and forming more policies in this area, a huge area of the population that had been affected by drugs was not helped properly. This had left lasting effects on many communities.

One of the most obvious and highly controversial outcomes of the Reagan Administration's War on Drugs was that the American prison population skyrocketed after introduction of drug policies under Reagan. Due to minimum sentences people were incarcerated for a longer amount of time than prior to the 1980s War on Drugs. Since law enforcement became more involved with arresting criminals and stopping drug related crime, more people were sentenced to prison for drug crime than in previous years. Therefore, the combination of increased drug related arrests and increased prison sentences lead to overpopulated prison environments in the United States.

Statistics from the Department of Justice show that more than half of those sent to federal prisons were convicted of drug related crime. Between the period of 1985 and 1995 there was an 80% increase in the prison population as a result of increased drug related arrests (Department of Justice, 1996). Starting in 2000, the average sentence time for all offenses was 56.8 months and for drug offenses was 75.6 months, while the average sentence time for violent crimes was only 63 months.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice

### **Real Victims of the War on Drugs**

According to Kenneth Nunn, a war does not only require a military strategy but it requires an enemy as well. Since the War on Drugs is not a classic example of a war people generally assume that there is no victim. However, according to Nunn, for the constituency the Administration was appealing to, it was relatively easy to point to minority groups, in particular African Americans, as the enemy of the War on Drugs (Nunn, 2002). Although the majority of the United States is white, African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites (NAACP, 2012). According to Nunn, the Administration's anti-drug rhetoric was designed in such a way that it would tap into existent cultural stereotypes within the nation. William Elwood, a mass communications scholar, claimed that Reagan's rhetorical declaration of the war had a deliberate political effect, which absolved the federal government of the responsibility of fixing the drug issues the country had (Elwood, 1994). Elwood states, "Such rhetoric allows presidents to appear as strong leaders who are



tough on crime and concerned about domestic issues and is strategically ambiguous to portray urban minorities as responsible for problems related to the drug war and for resolving such problems” (Elwood, 1994). Since the punitive law enforcement policies of interdiction and prohibition were considered the weapons of the War on Drugs, the supposed targeted enemies were major drug traffickers in Latin American countries, but the actual enemies were the minority groups in American society (Nunn, 2002).

### **Effect of the War on African American Communities**

In the previous chapter it was discussed how the Reagan Administration used the media, as its major tool to convey to the American public the dangers of drug use and the severity of the situation. When they enlisted the media, their main goal was to, in Reagan’s words, “send shock waves across the country.” Since the media campaign was used only towards the end of the Reagan era, there was only one major thing that the media was reporting on, crack cocaine. In 1986, Time magazine had declared that drugs, but in particular crack cocaine, was the number one issue of the year. The media was the first to report the crack cocaine epidemic and it overwhelmingly depicted crack cocaine users as African American. Therefore, the first real drug images America received from the media was those of black “crack babies” and black “crack whores”. These images very much supported racial stereotypes that African American people were drug users and drug dealers. Reagan’s media campaign had worked. People all across the country were shocked at the images that they were presented and with that their concerns grew for the fate of the country. It had indeed sent shock waves across the nation. This led to a further push in favor of a more conservative political direction and people increasingly wanted to see drug users and dealers behind bars.

That overall arrest rates had increased during the War on Drugs is clear, but it must be stated that the ultimate victim of this is the African American community, having been stigmatized by the Reagan War on Drugs. Between 1980 and 1990, there was a drastic 400 percent increase in drug related arrests that led to prison sentences. Those arrested and sentenced to prison for drug related offenses were mostly African American and Hispanic. This created great disproportion in the prison population. African Americans only make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, but they are four times more likely to be under the correctional system than white citizens. Almost all people of the African American community personally know someone who went to prison. The largest group of concern is young men between the ages of 18 and 25, and one in nine of that particular group alone is behind bars.

This would lead many people to believe that along with their disproportionate representation in prison, their incarceration is directly linked to the differences in drug usage between whites and African Americans. This assumption is misleading. According to Lawrence Bobo and Victor Thompson who have written the article *Unfair by Design*, “There has been a sharp rise in black incarceration driven by policy changes not by changes in rates of violent crime or illegal drug use” (Bobo & Thompson, 2006). An interesting aspect to note is that research shows that whites tend to use illegal drugs more than African Americans do. The statistics are shocking. Although African Americans comprise only 15 percent of drug users, they account for 37 percent of the arrests related to drugs. Around 60 percent of that group eventually gets convicted for the drug offense and 80 percent of that group end up in correctional facilities.

As mentioned, when Reagan used the media to rally support for the drug war, the media tended to focus most of their attention on the outbreak of crack cocaine and its use by African Americans. This fueled the public’s negative perception of drug use among African Americans and subsequently encouraged the Reagan Administration to take a tough stance. The most shocking example of racial disparities was the difference between the sentencing of crimes relating to powder cocaine and regular cocaine. According to scientists there is no real physiological difference between the effect powder cocaine has on the body and crack cocaine. However, soon after the outbreak of crack cocaine and the media coverage surrounding the issue, Reagan introduced his Anti-Drug Abuse Act. One of the laws that this Act brought about was that crack cocaine offenses were punished one hundred times more severely than crimes involving the powder form of cocaine (Davis, 1996). If an individual would be caught possessing five hundred grams of cocaine in powder form they would be sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison. However, if someone was caught with only five grams of crack, the same minimum sentence applied.

This is particularly striking as African Americans are more frequent users of crack cocaine and whites use powder cocaine more often. In the United States 80 percent of sentenced crack cocaine users are African American (Gunja, 2003). Since there is no difference in physical effect between the two types of cocaine it is unnecessary to have a higher sentence for crack cocaine than powder cocaine. Many people, therefore, believed that the American government was deliberately stigmatizing the African American population when these laws were made, or at least was riding an anti-African American wave brought about by the media. It may have been the lack of information on the part of the Administration and a false sense of danger that was “fixed” by increased sentencing for the particular drug in an effort to stop the use from spreading.

When the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act was implemented it was because Congress felt that crack cocaine was more dangerous than regular powder form cocaine. Congress stayed true to this decision, as at the time Congress believed that crack cocaine was a rapidly growing trend. The price of the drug was also of concern because at a lower price it was available to a larger percentage of the population. Since the implementation of the Act, the United States Sentencing commission and drug experts have done extensive research and found no significant differences between the two types of cocaine. Although there was scientific proof that the sentencing disparity was unwarranted, it has been extremely difficult to reform this Act.

It must be said, however, that finally in March of 2010 the first major step towards reexamining this law was made. President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which changed the ratio of sentencing to 18 to 1 from 100 to 1. The Act has been important in improving fairness within the U.S. justice system. This, however, obviously does not entirely fix the problem but it is a good step in the right direction. Many politicians and non-profit organizations have since been resuming their efforts for continued reform (American Civil Liberties Union, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The War on Drugs has been one of the most controversial campaigns of any Presidential Administration in American history. In the previous chapters an analysis has been made through research into the Reagan Administration and the situation in the United States during the 1980s. Their motivations for launching the War on Drugs, implementation of the policy and the reception and review of the campaign have been outlined.

The Reagan era marked a significant change in American culture. It was a time where people had started to turn their backs on Liberalism and started looking for a change. The country was in search of something new but at the same time something that would unify Americans again, something that would remind the country what America was all about. Afraid of the criminal activity extended liberalism would bring to the country, many Americans looked towards more traditional leadership. The country was in need of a leader who would re-establish everything American culture held dear. Ronald Reagan positioned himself in such a way that he was the only choice for the country's future. He stood symbol for everything America was but had been drifting away from. He

portrayed that he would lead with a firm hand, bring the economy back up, uphold traditional values and bring back the country to its former glory.

The Reagan War on Drugs and the overall harsher on drugs and tougher law enforcement seemed to be the perfect way to respond to and to promote a sense of public responsibility in a country that needed to clean up its act. Through eight years of Ronald Reagan, the American public was directed to stand strong against drugs and citizens were disciplined in such a way that it had become the prevailing cultural attitude. The media played an instrumental role at gaining public support for the War especially during Reagan's second term. The media broadcasted anti-drug messages and news reports showing images of what drug use can do for the individual as well as their community. Drugs were bad, and everyone was being held accountable for their actions. Law enforcement, educational programs, and even surveillance had increased so drastically that there was nowhere to hide. People had to make the choice, were they against drugs or were they going to be targeted by the masses.

American Historian, Murray Rothbard, took it a step further, and arguably too far, by claiming that the outbreak of "drug fascism" shows the connection between civil liberty and economic freedom. Rothbard explained that under the façade of combating the drug problem, the government had managed to break down citizen's economic and financial privacy. In his words, "Carrying cash has become prima fade evidence of "laundering" drug money" (Murray Rothbard, 1989). Rothbard claimed that the drug war was used as a tool in order to get people to stop using cash but transfer to government-controlled banks. The result is that there is a legal obligation to report significant amounts of money that are taken out of the country, a development that invades financial privacy.

Although the goal of the War on Drugs was a noble one, it left the United States with arguably more victims than by the time of its initiation. When Reagan started his crusade, he mainly aimed at getting people to stop using drugs by understanding that it was a moral wrong. The focus was placed mostly on punishing drug related crime and drug users. While the Administration and law enforcement agencies were taking care of the punishment side of the equation, Reagan's wife Nancy focused on prevention. The idea was that educating the new generation on drug use was the most efficient way to stop drug use in America. There was nothing wrong with prevention-based education, in fact it was a positive implementation. However, this type of drug education left out a portion of society that may have needed the help and attention the most. Drug addicts were now labeled immoral, irresponsible members of society that were forever labeled criminals. There was

relatively less attention paid to rehabilitation centers and programs to help people who had lost their way. During the first half of his Presidency, Reagan did not spend much time or funding on drug prevention and rehabilitation efforts. His Administration had purely felt that the emphasis be on law enforcement and that prevention and rehabilitation would just be like pacifying the irresponsible citizens in society. Seeing Nancy Reagan's phenomenal work in the area of drug prevention and rehabilitation, Ronald Reagan realized that it was indeed a very important part in combatting drug use. It was through Nancy Reagan that funding and political attention was spent on drug rehabilitation from Reagan's second term onwards, as it received a more prominent role in Reagan Drug Policy. As a result, during its second term, the Administration did amp up efforts to help the abusers. But it was too little too late. What these drug users needed was expert rehabilitation and not extended prison time.

Still today, the largest group of victims of the War on Drugs is the African American community. The target of the War on Drugs was specifically young African American men between the ages of 18-25. Many people believe that when President Obama took his oath for becoming the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States the country had finally overcome its issues with race. The image of Obama in the oval office coincided with the promise of the "land of the free" and that equality truly existed. This, however, could sadly not be more from the truth. Michelle Alexander, civil rights advocate and writer, shares some reality-facing facts in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, on how the United States is most certainly not the pillar of equality. "Since 1971, there have been more than 40 million arrests for drug-related offenses. Even though blacks and whites have similar levels of drug use, blacks are ten times as likely to be incarcerated for drug crimes" (Alexander, 2010). Michelle Alexander claims that the War on Drugs has allowed for the country to step back in time and create a situation that is amongst the worst times African Americans have faced to date as she states, "There are more blacks under correctional control today -- in prison or jail, on probation or parole -- than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began" (Alexander, 2010). Alexander stated that racism and racial control exist in the modern world in a different sense of the word but that it is no less harmful. Alexander shared, "Race plays a major role-indeed, a defining role – in the current system, but not because of what is commonly understood as old-fashioned, hostile bigotry. This system of control depends far more on racial indifference (defined as a lack of compassion and caring about race and racial groups) than racial hostility – a feature it actually shares with its predecessors" (Alexander, 2010). Alexander goes as far as to say that it is most certainly a new way of social control as she states that as of 2004 more African American men were disenfranchised (as a result of

felon disenfranchisement laws) than in 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the grounds of race or ethnicity (Alexander, 2010). Due to the disenfranchisement laws, rehabilitation was increasingly difficult and it shut out an enormous proportion of the African American community from society. The War on Drugs blocked possibilities to end the racial caste in America. Those who believe the racial caste system is of the past may not understand that it has not ended but it has been given a makeover and been reformed to fit in with modern day society. This system has consigned millions of African Americans to a life long second-class status, ultimately alienating them from society.

Although President Reagan may have tried to spread awareness of drugs to the American people, he also spread the image of African American people as the face of drugs and drug related crime. The tools Reagan used to convey his message to America about the dangers of drugs has become a hurtful weapon against the African American community. The sad reality of this particular consequence of the War on Drugs is that this disparity is still apparent today.

At the start of the 1990s, the legacy Reagan left behind was one of twisted priorities where crime and punishment stood at the top of every political agenda. The levels of violent crime in the country had skyrocketed, one of the highest levels the country had ever seen. The crime and arrest rates were causing the destruction of entire communities. Investments were tilted far more in the direction of the penal system, which left gaps where social investment was needed desperately. The War on Drugs had not put a stop to drug crime as the wrong approach to the crusade had just aggravated the situation even more. The United States now finds itself more than 30 years later dealing with the after math of the failed war. Thousands of people have died in the attempt to stop drug cartel existence in Mexico. Prisons are overcrowded with the non-violent offenders and the country has spent over 1 trillion dollars on the war but for what? Although Ronald Reagan, Nancy and the rest of the Administration may have had the right intentions, it seems agonizingly clear that through these methods the United States are not going to win their “war at home” anytime soon.

In general people today remember Ronald Reagan for his launch of the War on Drugs and the failure of this war. They remember that one of his main goals was the limit the size of government influence yet towards the end of the Reagan era it was clear that the government was more on people’s backs than ever before. The charismatic actor was seen as just words and no action, someone who had promised many things but delivered little. Reagan was considered the face behind the Administration but invested insufficiently himself to pursue the goals he told the country he

would meet. Due to all of these negative connotations with his name, many seem to dismiss the successes that he and his Administration have booked.

Reagan enacted the American “tough-on-crime” philosophy towards drugs. His laws determined United States Drug Policy for more than 20 years and mainly still do today. The War on Drugs was a clear example of the overall shift in the United States, which allowed for a shift in attitude from a generally liberal point of view to a harsher stance on crime, a conservative wave that swept across the nation. Ronald Reagan had been the epitome of a conservative leader who wanted to bring America back to its glory days. After what many Americans considered a period of failed liberalism in the two decades that preceded Reagan, they were searching for a stronger leadership that would reinstall the country’s core values and beliefs. When Reagan came to office he and the First Lady were the poster couple of traditional America, they represented all the values that America had grown up with. The yearning for the country to go back to its better days was the reason why Reagan was elected and why he was such a success when he first came to office. The War on Drugs was a classic example of conservatism seeping back into American politics and culture.

Democrats as well as Republicans shifted to a more conservative political attitude. Since the start of the 1980s, the two parties started to compete with one another to show that they were both hard on crime and proving that they could be tougher on crime than the opposing side. By the 1990s, Republicans and Democrats argued about how high the sentences should be, staying focused on the details, but were seldom in disagreement about first principles. In fact, President Bill Clinton once said, “I can be nicked a lot, but no one can say I’m soft on crime” (Alexander, 2010). Despite being a Democrat, Clinton was extremely harsh on crime and especially drug related crime. Clinton contributed to the largest increase in prison population under any American president. Therefore, it is important to note that the War on Drugs under the Reagan Administration was partly a response to and a reflection of the general shift in attitude in all of American life and politics. The effects of the War on Drugs are still very evident today as the American prison population is only growing and legislation is still in place that aim towards increased punitive action against any crimes relating to drugs.

Something that cannot be taken from Reagan was the immense influence he has had on the political landscape of the United States. He is most certainly the President who has transformed U.S. politics the greatest since Roosevelt, something obviously very difficult to accomplish. In 1933, Roosevelt broke the political agreement at the time and created a new consensus, which ultimately held strong for 50 years. Ronald Reagan managed to do the same, altering the political consensus

from what had held strong for all those years to something clearly the country was yearning for. Ronald Reagan should also be recognized for redefining American Conservatism. Before the Reagan era, conservatives were known as politicians who did not know what it meant to evolve with the years and modernize. They were often pictured as old men and women who worried about petty things that did not really matter. Ronald Reagan changed the public outlook on conservatism. People were not regarding it as backward anymore but they started seeing promise in the branch and made conservatism move from a concept of the past to a promise of a better future.

Historian and interpreter of American conservatism, George Nash believed strongly in what Reagan preached and all that he stood symbol for. Nash said, “Reagan reaffirmed with eloquence the continuing validity and vitality of the American Dream. In this more than in any policies or decisions lie his legacy and enduring claim to greatness” (Nash, 2009).

Russell Kirk, American political theorist as well as a friend to Reagan wrote fondly of him in his memoirs. “To the American people, Ronald Reagan had become the Western hero of romance—audacious, faithful, cheerful, honest, and skilled at shooting from the hip” (Kirk, 2002). Kirk wrote as a reminder that Reagan had managed to successfully reduce taxes and inflation and lower unemployment as well as improving education. On the subject of foreign policy, Kirk explained that Reagan stood up to Libya and the Soviet Union (Kirk, 2002).

Reagan’s War on Drugs epitomized the new definition of conservatism. Reagan should be accredited for recognizing this wave of renewed conservatism and for choosing the War on Drugs as a means for him to become part of the movement, and ultimately to become the new face of conservatism. Over time, the tough attitude on drugs undoubtedly became the position most politicians would generally uphold, no matter what side of the spectrum they were on, as passion for the topic was sure to book success during election times.

Ron Paul, candidate in the Republican primaries in 2012 had expressed strong opinions on the subject matter the War on Drugs and prohibition. Ron Paul stated that the War on Drugs was a complete failure and that America lost sight of the goal of protecting the people and instead it had started to undermine their civil liberties. He claimed that the government had gone too far in criminalizing drugs and users. He believed conservative politicians do not understand the compassion that is asked from the sick and even dying patients who may find it medically beneficial to use marijuana. The conservatives aim to criminalize this special group of drug users as well. Instead of helping sick people who may need marijuana for medical reasons, they put these people in prison as the federal government overrode state laws. Ron Paul advocated during the Republican primaries of



2012 that the focus should not be on the illegal drugs like marijuana but on the legal drugs such as prescription drugs and alcohol, seeing as these substances kill more people than the illegal drugs. “We spent a trillion dollars on this war, and believe me the kids can still get the drugs, it just has not worked” (Paul, 2012).

Ron Paul’s rather un-American view on drug policy, especially for a Republican candidate, can be seen as the first step or a foreshadowing to a shift in overall U.S. political change of opinion that we may encounter in the years to come. Ron Paul was not in favor of drug use but explained that extremely strict laws were not the right response. In fact, some major changes happened in 2012 that marked a new era in American history. Colorado and Washington have become the first states to legalize marijuana for recreational use. This marks a significant change in political opinion. Many predict other states will be quick to follow. The wave is spreading across the country and will most likely first start to effect direct neighbors to Colorado and Washington. For example, Oregon’s largest city, Portland, is located across the Columbia River from Vancouver, Washington, where Marijuana is now legal. Oregon currently allows the medical use of marijuana so predictions are that recreational use will be soon to follow. “We have decades of evidence that says prohibition does not work and it is counterproductive,” says Peter Buckley who is the co-chair of Oregon’s state legislature budget committee. He believes that there is a source of revenue to be found that is rational since predictions are people will otherwise go across the border and bring the drugs back, which would create higher costs for Oregon to punish their drug offenders.

Ronald Reagan’s War on Drugs proved hugely successful as a political strategy that sculpted Ronald Reagan as a modern day Conservative who appealed to all Republicans and even many Democrats. It helped Republicans seal consecutive election victories in the 1990s. Although the War on Drugs was a successful political strategy, it failed on substance. Its policies did not improve the drug problem in the United States, it had a negative effect by stigmatizing and hurting the African American population through biased media coverage and legislation and it did not stop the inflow of drugs into the country. So strong was the appeal of the War on Drugs, nonetheless, that its legacy has been largely untouched for more than twenty years. It is only recently being challenged, a sign that finally the reality is dawning on the American people that an effective drug policy requires a different approach.

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