Assignment: The Future of American Drug Policy

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The history of drug enforcement in the United States since 1972 has been cited as a "War on Drugs." Punitive policies and prohibition were designed to punish individuals participating in drug use and the drug trade. Nevertheless, criminal justice professionals advise that illegal drugs are more available now than in 1970 (Fritzvold, 2019). Criminologists debate whether drug abuse is a victimless crime, however, what is unseen is the adverse effect on family members of the drug user (Moskos, 2008). Communities also suffer from the drug trade and related gang crime. Steven Levitt in his ten-year study in Chicago discovered that the gang members who sold drugs at the street level experience a 25 % chance of dying in a single year (Levitt, 2004). Critics may point to the drug dealer in Chicago as making a conscious choice to sell drugs, but the unfortunate reality in many impoverished neighborhoods is that there are not many opportunities to escape the one's circumstances (Levitt, 2004).

At present 174 Americans are dying every day due to overdoses; and the opioid and prescription drug crisis is a large part of the epidemic (Christie, et al., 2017). Therefore, whether abuse is of legal or illegal drugs; addiction is a public safety crisis that must be addressed on a national level. In 1999, 16,000 Americans died in overdoses, and by 2016 the number increased to 63,000 deaths a year; outnumbering motor vehicle deaths, firearm deaths, suicide and homicide (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018). Without question, drug use is the greatest threat to the American public. Opioid use has reached epidemic proportions while methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and fentanyl are top contributory drugs to the emergency (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018).

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) classifies marijuana as a schedule 1 drug and reports that it has no accepted medical use and has a high potential for abuse. To highlight the

danger of marijuana, the drug is considered as dangerous as LSD, heroin, ecstasy, methaqualone, and peyote (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018). The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that the effects on the body include difficulty in learning, hallucinations, impaired judgment, distorted perception, confusion, paranoia, and anxiety (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018). Over 30 states have authorized marijuana for medicinal purposes or legalized possession of small quantities; however, opponents of legalization contend that it will increase marijuana use, create more crime, diminish traffic safety, harm public health, and lower teen educational achievement (Dills, Goffard, & Miron, 2016).

Concerning organized drug crime, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) are two Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO's) at the forefront of facilitating the drug trade in the United States. Estimates are that the Mexican cartels profit tens of billions of dollars from drug trafficking (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018). Criminal street gangs throughout the United States continue to cultivate relationships with Mexican cartels; and struggle for control of territory which in turn fuels violence in our communities (DEA Strategic Intelligence Section, 2018).

The American public suffers from increased health care expenses due to the use of illegal drugs. The Surgeon General estimates a cost of 193 billion dollars a year due to substance abuse; and there were 27 million Americans in 2015 who self-reported misuse of prescription or illicit drugs (Office of Surgeon General, 2016). Many Americans know someone with a substance abuse disorder, and historically our society has treated substance abuse as a moral weakness. Only 10 percent of people with a substance abuse disorder receive any focused treatment (Office of Surgeon General, 2016). Additionally, 40 percent of persons with a substance abuse problem have a mental health condition (Office of Surgeon General, 2016). In summary, unlawful drug sales and drug

use are a substantial threat to American public health, law enforcement, and national security. Furthermore, the policy shall consider the individual addict who suffers due to poor physical health, mental health issues, and community exclusion; wherein many frequently abandon their jobs, families, and homes due to the plague of addiction (Moskos, 2008).

Because of these facts, the Director of National Drug Control Policy advocates the following strategy to combat the unprecedented drug epidemic in America. It is the policy of the United States that legalization is opposed for all currently illegal drugs to include marijuana. Maintaining the view that drugs are harmful to the individual and the community at large is paramount in addressing the crisis. Legalization would legitimize and undermine the goal of prevention and eradication of illegal drug trafficking and drug use. Prohibited drugs are a health care emergency and a mental health tragedy that leaves many untreated and without hope. The federal government will partner with the states to institute new and comprehensive programs aimed at recovery from the disease of drug addiction. New drug courts will be established in every federal district to alleviate the burden on our criminal justice system, where law enforcement can refer low-level offenders and addicts to receive adjudication and treatment (Christie, et al., 2017). A nationwide prevention campaign will be instituted to target adults and children from using drugs in the first place. Funding for the National Drug Control Policy will be augmented with revenue recovered from increased enforcement efforts against Mexican Transnational Organizations and seizure of their illicit income. In conclusion, international cooperation should be dynamically sought with Mexico, Colombia, and other source countries to partner in the reduction and elimination of drug trafficking organizations. This strategy is comprehensive in scope through education, prevention, treatment, and enforcement.

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