

The U.S. Should Expand Drug Decriminalization

PRO

As humans we've been programmed to rebel. Some rebel against their parents at a young age, while others rebel against their teachers, society, friends, and even their own character and morals. This has been the cause of many going down the wrong path and getting themselves involved in things detrimental to their lives that their family, friends, and the larger society have warned them against. This is why we have murderers and thieves; but a murderer and a thief are not the same as a drug dealer. Yet here we are dealing similar punishments to them.

Believe it or not, the drug dealing business is a very fruitful endeavor that plays a role in the economy. People have become dispensaries for both serious and less serious drugs, serving the vast demand in our country. Around the nation, drugs are an issue - both legal and illegal (just look at the legal opioid issue we face) - and the attitude toward those who provide them is as well. The truth is, we have a drug culture that drives many people to crave these drugs; and as long as there are people who enjoy that high there will always be those willing to give it to them to earn a living or make ends meet. This relationship - as wrong as it may seem to some - makes me wonder why it is the buyers and the messengers who pay the price when there are other individuals who supply and support this demand.

Most drug dealers who are placed in jail or are set to serve some type of severe punishment are merely pawns in the game. The majority of those who are incarcerated are simply the vending machine, not the soda company; they are the doormat of a castle, a single lyric in an anthem.

Our main goal in locking up these individuals, these misled people, in our jail cells is for the "betterment" of our society. But there's no betterment, no progress when we are doing damage to our overall society. According to the Drug Policy Alliance, as a nation, we are increasing our jail costs and our jail population by incarcerating individuals for drug-related crimes. Police officers are busy cracking down on people with marijuana when there are much more important and dangerous crimes occurring.

We are focused on the wrong things when we think this way. According to *Rolling Stone Magazine's* Ethan Nadelmann, "the U.S. made 1.63 million arrests for drug law violations in 2017...Over 1.4 million of those arrests — 85% of the total — were simply for drug possession." Think about the impact of this. We are potentially locking up a family's breadwinner and condemning that individual to a future of rejection thanks to their past. This simply nudges them farther down that wrong path.

Drug decriminalization needs to be expanded because we are prosecuting people for crimes that are not worth prosecution. If we have decriminalized cigarettes and alcohol, two substances that have their own dangers, then we really need to take a look at other drugs as well and expand drug decriminalization laws.

- ZOPUTA DIFINI

CON

Decriminalization of drugs will continue to be a major issue in the United States until we learn to address it more effectively and honestly. Ultimately, it is more than just a political issue as drug use affects our entire society. However, there is a difference between one drug being decriminalized because of its seemingly harmless effects, such as marijuana, and all drugs being decriminalized. Simply decriminalizing all drugs is unethical and any political leader should know better than to do that.

According to The Drug Policy Alliance, twenty-two states have already decriminalized the possession of small amounts of marijuana, which works to limit the number of individuals who are arrested for simple acts associated with the drug. While this form of decriminalization is a valid move, what it misses is the fact that by decriminalizing any drug, even something seen as fairly benign like marijuana, legislators are potentially opening a gateway for the government to decriminalize more serious and dangerous drugs.

Further decriminalization could be the cause of those drugs being sold on the streets, especially to minors. Just think of all the dangerous substances that could end up in the hands of young teens if decriminalization reached beyond marijuana. Young people could be exposed more easily to cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, opioids, and other drugs.

If deadly, addictive substances are more accessible to teens that means they, at such an early, vulnerable stage in their lives, will be forced to make difficult choices. That early exposure would already be a fatal increase by a million people that will have an addiction and/or arrests. All they should be worried about is their education, their after-school activities, and friends and family.

Don't think drugs other than marijuana are an issue? Think again. In 2001, Portugal took a big leap in executing an "experiment" that included decriminalizing all illicit drugs from marijuana to cocaine. Their government thought this would reverse the problem of drug use and/or distribution and view it as more of a medical challenge than a felony. Keith O'Brien of The Boston Globe studied the data that came out of Portugal in the first ten years of the new policy and spoke to NPR reporter Neal Conan in 2011.

One important data point that he mentioned regarding drug use in Portugal at this time is that the number of users definitely rose. He stated, "...in fact, there has been an increase, and the data bears that out. In those reporting drug use, personal drug use over the course of their lifetime has gone up about 40 to 50 percent in the last decade."

If the U.S. government decriminalizes any drug, they are going to bring it out of the shadows and into the mainstream. We have to think about how our society would be affected as a whole, especially the effect it would have on minors.

- GIORDANA CAMPBELL

In Defense of Pence

Why Mike Pence Would be Better for the Presidency

ALANA CAMPBELL
OPINIONS EDITOR

Over the past few weeks, following the uncovering of Donald Trump's controversial call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, serious discussions of impeachment have ramped up. The House of Representatives has officially opened an investigation into Trump's repeated requests for Zelensky to look into 2020 presidential hopeful Joe Biden, which could potentially amount to a formal vote for impeachment.

While it's very unlikely that the Republican Senate would vote to indict and remove Trump from office, the possibility of a Pence Presidency is more likely now than ever. Liberals have expressed this as a negative thing. They point to Pence's record on LGBTQ and reproductive rights as governor of Indiana and believe that his political experience as a five-term congressman would make him more dangerous than our current president as he could more swiftly execute the Republican agenda. However, it's Trump's divisive rhetoric, complete dishonesty, and moral corruptness that has

not only ruined this country's political discourse but degraded our democratic institutions and the office of the Presidency. Pence, despite his very conservative policy stances, would bring a more traditional approach to the office that would eliminate distractions and scandals and allow us to focus our attention on what really matters: policy.

What makes Trump dangerous, not only to our country's political environment but also to our democracy, is his populist platform. A populist is a politician who appeals to the interests of regular people and their struggle against elite groups, and while that definition doesn't seem negative, it excludes the damage that governments run by populists typically inflict. According to researchers at *The Atlantic*, populist governments lead to increased corruption and are four times more likely to cause damage to democratic institutions. To remain in power, populists delegitimize their opposition often by lying to their citizens, something that Trump has done countless times not just in tweets but official press conferences. Pence, during his multiple gubernatorial campaigns,

did not rely on populism but rather experience and conservative values. While Trump's populist rhetoric has hurt the political atmosphere in this country already, it's caused a lot more damage to the general discourse. In fact, the FBI reports that hate crimes increased 17% from 2016 to 2017 alone and politically-motivated mass shootings increased since he took office. His anti-immigrant and far-right rhetoric has further polarized the political parties as well. Pence, is much more reserved and rarely makes bold statements unprovoked.

The danger of Trump's populist rhetoric is only amplified by his proclivity to lie to voters on everything from where his father was born to the effectiveness of his immigration plan. *Politifact*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning fact-checking website, has profiles on both Pence and Trump and, though Pence is no stranger to bending the truth and misrepresenting the data, he's a much less prolific liar than Trump. Out of Pence's 50 statements recorded on the site, less than half were labeled "False," compared to 70% of Trump's 720 statements on the

site. Some of the President's lies are due to complete ignorance, but just as many are intentional misrepresentations of the truth to manipulate the American people into thinking he's doing a better job than he actually is. Both of these are dangerous for their own reasons, including fueling the "fake news" epidemic as well as degrading values of truth and honesty within our society.

Trump's volatility is one of his many character traits that have led to a scandal-ridden administration. After three years, he's surpassed the total turnover of the past five presidents in their entire first terms, with a large number of the exists being voluntary resignations. Conversely, Pence kept the same Chief of Staff for 12 years while he was a congressman, governor, and for the first few months of his vice presidency. With a more level-headed leader like him, the White House wouldn't constantly be in such disarray. Possibly the worst aspect of Trump's volatility and unpredictability is his propensity to tweet controversial things every day. While the majority of his tweets are petulant and inflammatory,

news outlets can't ignore them because they're coming from the leader of the free world, so they subsequently must devote entire segments to fact-checking and analyzing them. Such a heavy focus on tweets often distracts from Trump's many harmful executive orders and downright corrupt practices. When you look at Pence's twitter, it's a breath of fresh air in comparison, and the normalcy of a Pence presidency would almost force news outlets to spend time on analyzing actual policy.

The probability of a Pence Presidency may be unlikely, but it's still important to recognize aspects of the Trump administration that are harmful to our country. It's not just his far right views, but the polarizing language he uses to spread them. It's not just that he tweets, but the inflammatory nature of them and how they envelop our news coverage. It's not just that he lies, but how often and the effects these lies have. He has done almost irreparable damage to this country and we can't get rid of him soon enough.

Mental Illness Does Not Discriminate

JORDAN SHORTER
SPORTS EDITOR

I find it a bit sad that I feel the need to write this article, but in the year 2019, there is still so much ignorance surrounding mental health.

As National Suicide Prevention Month just passed, this is the perfect time for this conversation. For starters, let's talk about teenagers. As a teen myself, I can say that we're going through many life changes, so it seems normal to feel stressed, anxious, and confused. However, there are still some adults who can't wrap their minds around teens with mental illnesses. I have never been diagnosed with a mental illness such as depression myself, but I still get offended when I hear an adult comment on how teens are too young to struggle. It irks me when I hear an adult say, "They're too young to be depressed" or "How could

someone so young feel suicidal?" It really shocks me how some adults have the nerve to invalidate someone else's reality. This is, essentially, ageism, as adults use their power to make the youth feel like their mental health is less important than that of others. It's wrong and it needs to stop now.

Something else that I feel like needs to stop is automatically assuming that all wealthy, successful people are happy. Although I am well aware that a significant number of people's issues stem from a lack of resources or poverty, this is certainly not the only factor that causes one to be mentally ill or unstable. Take Robin Williams. Everyone loved this guy, he made millions laugh, and he had a very successful career. However, this wasn't enough. His success could not fill whatever void he needed to continue living.

Another prime example is the well-known designer Kate

Spade. Ask any girl in school if they have heard of her, and they will most likely say yes. Her bags and wallets are used by young women from all over, including myself. So again, why would someone so well-known, successful, and loved by many end their own life and leave their family behind?

I am not a doctor or expert but there is an obvious theme here. Mental illness doesn't discriminate. No matter your beauty, wealth, race, gender, or social status, mental illness can find you.

If nothing else, I want you all to remember to check up on each other - even the "happiest" person you know. Don't make assumptions based on what you see on the outside.

Try to remember that most people are going through something that you have no idea about, so just be kind and compassionate.

"No matter your beauty, wealth, race, gender, or social status, mental illness can find you."

Homecoming Means More Than Just Fun & Games



MR. KEAGLE
GUEST WRITER

"We're going home" - Paul McCartney

"Be true to your school now / And let your colors fly" - The Beach Boys

I remember my freshman homecoming quite vividly, if not necessarily fondly. The whole thing started on the wrong foot. Apparently, I had marred the honor of a girl in my class by not asking her to be my date, as, according to her close friend, it was so clear that I was going to ask her, and why did I ask this other girl, and never mind, she'll find some other date, some other guy, way better than you, betrayer of hearts. It was a

tragedy of high school proportions.

The spirit of homecoming is more than a dance, more than a football game, but it wouldn't be homecoming without these, either. The game and the dance are, foremost, ritual representations of a much more ancient tradition: War, and the celebration of its returning warriors. To return home was to signal a victory on many levels. Victory for the warrior, who has returned safely. Victory for the family, who is made whole. Victory for the tribe and for the nation, who have overcome their enemy. In victory, it is right to celebrate and to dance. But it is also right to remember. For conspicuously missing from the parade of victorious warriors are those who will never return home.

The very concept of a home implies its opposite: that which is circumscribed outside, the world of chaos and uncertainty; for what need is there of hearth and fire, if the lion does not prowl about, roaring mightily in the night, waiting to devour? Leaving home is never without risk; creating a home is never without sacrifice. And so we dance, and we celebrate, but we remember.

A school is a tribe, a tribe is a nation, and a nation is a home to all within its borders. To fly your school colors is to celebrate belonging, to acknowledge citizenry, to commit to communal bonds. It is to make a home where there was none. At the football game, when we stomp and scream

and cheer, we are participating in a ritual remembrance: that we will battle the Enemy together and be victorious, and in victory we are made whole.

On April 17, 2019, artist Beyonce released her documentary film "Homecoming," described by *The New York Times* critic Jon Caramanica as "potently political and visually grand" and positioned

Take a Moment to Enjoy Your Senior Year

ZOPUTA DIFINI
STAFF WRITER

Senior year. I've been waiting for this ever since the very first day of high school. I was excited for this very experience back then. I was excited for the homecomings, new people, new relationships, and new opportunities that awaited all of us. I became envious of the seniors then, envious of them taking their girls to prom and getting to go to beach week with friends, having fun in an Airbnb and envious that they could finally get out of here and actually start their lives.

You see, I dreamed of being a senior. But now that it's here, I'm simply terrified. A year from now I'm going to be away from the safety net that are my parents, away from the guiding hands of my teachers, and thrown into those that are cold and harsh. And it terrifies me because this is the last year of my childhood, and to say that I'm ready for what lays ahead would be nothing more than a lie. I'm about to enter a world where I will be forced to grow up and I just don't know if I'm ready.

But that's what this year's for. It's the year we prepare for a major part of our future.

Our whole academic career we've been studying, learning, and testing in order to try to get into a good college because in our mind that's the key to a successful life. This is the life desired by all. For many of us, senior year is the final year for us to do something that makes us seem memorable or unique on paper, making us scholarship worthy, and most importantly, "college material."

But what does that do for us? How does something of that magnitude, something that causes so much pressure, affect us?

It hurts us. It hurts us because we stress, we push ourselves to the limit in order to accomplish a goal so coveted that we allow ourselves to forget we need sleep, forget we all need a social life. To lose sight of these things would be a shame, because our FINAL year is meant to be cherished, not hurried.

Let us enjoy the relationships we have made over not only these last four years, but for some, the last twelve. We need to enjoy the homecomings and proms, the beach week, and each other. After this, we enter a world where rejection is waiting in every direction, and a world where people can be beyond cruel. Even though it appears scary, it's actually isn't, because at the end of the day we'll have a new freedom that is just simply amazing. All I'm trying to say is, do your work! Do what needs to be done. Just don't let school's reality prohibit you from experiencing the joys of your senior year.

ALOOK BACK:

To commemorate PB's 50th Anniversary, we are re-publishing an opinion/editorial that ran in a previous issue of *Mainstream*. This month's piece is from November, 1972.

Editorials PASS-FAIL

On March 27, 1972, a new policy regarding the pass/fail system of grading was passed by the Montgomery County Board of Education. It permits students to elect pass/fail grading for any courses not required by state law for graduation.

This new policy is perhaps the most useless piece of legislation the board has passed in years. In an attempt to appease two radically different groups of people who disagree on the theories behind grading policies, the board has adopted a watered-down version of a true pass/fail system.

The two most objectionable provisions of the policy are that the minimum standard for a pass grade will be achievement at the level of C, and that the teacher will maintain the letter grade equivalent to the pass/fail in his classroom gradebook.

From an interview with William Colman, who is president of the schoolboard, it was learned that

MCR, county faculty members, and the board worked together to make this policy. It is probable that parent pressure groups, too, played an active role in the policy-making, although Mr. Colman did not state so. It was also learned that the placement of the standard for a "pass" at the level of C was set by the School Board "because the Board did not want an erosion of academic standards." It is in this provision, specifically that the influence of parent pressure groups can be seen. This provision is designed to discourage students from electing a pass/fail grading system. Why should students who decide to keep the traditional letter grades have a lower standard to meet for earning a credit than a student who opts pass/fail?

This whole matter seems unimportant when we look beyond it to the provision which calls for teachers to maintain the equivalent letter grade in his classroom

gradebook. This provision defeats the entire purpose of pass/fail. Pass/fail is meant to be a two step grading system, containing only the information that a student did or did not receive credit for a course.

According to the Study Committee on Grading and Reporting Practices, "pass/fail is less finely discriminating than traditional letter grades, but it is also less explicitly competitive."

This pass/fail policy should not be initiated into the school system until a "pass" can be defined as a minimum set of performance tasks, or a basic mastery of the objectives of the course. At this point, grades are being determined by traditional means and then converted into a "pass" or "fail." If we are going to adopt a pass/fail system of grading, we must learn to think in terms of pass and fail. Otherwise this system will be even less valuable than the present grading system, and the purposes behind it become meaningless.

squarely within "the lineage of Southern black musical traditions," most prominently those of HBCUs. Caramanica's characterization of the performance as more "ancestral tribute and cultural continuum" than "contemporary concert" is exactly the point: homecoming is a participation in the ancient and historical. By participating in history, we make ourselves a

part of history, and to be part of history is to be remembered.

Through remembrance, through homecoming, we knit together our disparate threads of past individualism into a cloth of communal future. Where we have come from, and where we are going, is home. And so we dance, and we celebrate, and we give thanks. And we remember.