



# Call Off the Drug War

**America blames everyone but itself for its habits.**

**T**he State of New Hampshire doesn't require much from its school districts—a mutually satisfactory arrangement about to be abruptly terminated due to an asinine Supreme Court decision declaring our entire education system unconstitutional.

But I digress. One of the few things the state does require of my small grade school and every other one is that they post signs on the road warning motorists they are now entering a "Drug-Free School Zone."

It irks me. At board meetings, I'm tempted to stand up and demand we replace it with "You Are Now Entering a Latin-Free School Zone"—which at least has the merit of being indisputable. But it seems the best we can hope for from our public education system these days is that our children aren't heroin dealers by the time they've been through it. And instead of being quietly ashamed of this stunted redefinition of education, we flaunt it as a badge of pride, out on the highway, even at a rural north country elementary school. For even kindergartners and first-graders must understand that they, too, are foot-soldiers in the "war on drugs." Best of all, like almost all other awards in the American school system, you get it automatically: every educational establishment in the state triumphantly displays the same sign, regardless of whether it's a Drug-Free School Zone or a School-Free Drug Zone.

And that's more or less how the "war on drugs" goes for grown-ups, too. South of

the Mexican border, they're nailing up their 1999 "Proud to Be Recognized As a Full Partner in the War on Drugs" signs, recently shipped out by the U.S. government. It doesn't actually matter whether the Mexican authorities are cracking down on their drug barons or whether their so-called "drug czar" and half the cops are on the take; Washington still "recertifies" them, because not to do so could send "the wrong signal."

I have some sympathy for these harassed Latins. What's known here as "America's drug problem" might more properly be described as the rest of the world's America problem. Americans like drugs. Americans consume drugs in large quantities. And yet, because as a nation Americans are still sufficiently hypocritical (even in these Clintonian times) to be unwilling formally to acknowledge their appetites, the burden of servicing this huge market has shifted inexorably to the dusty ramshackle statelets in America's backyard. It may well be true that most Mexican police and most Colombian politicians are corrupt, but why wouldn't they be?

Personally, I know or care very little about Latin America, but I'm fond of the British West Indies, and the contorted drug delivery systems required by Washington are destroying one sleepy, shabby island idyll after another. That's why I'm rooting for the Europeans in this transatlantic banana war. You probably haven't noticed that we're in the middle of a banana war, except maybe for the extraordinary number of stories in business publications headlined "Yes, We Have No Bananas." As it happens, yes, everyone has plenty of

bananas, but that's still no reason for the United States and the European Union not to go to war over them.

Neither the U.S. nor the E.U. actually grows bananas, but this is the twenty-first-century version of those nineteenth-century imperial disputes, where the great powers line up behind one obscure tribe or another and stage a proxy war. In this instance, the U.S. has lined up behind Latin American bananas, while the British and French are on the side of Afro-Caribbean-Pacific bananas. Unless the E.U. ceases its banana protectionism, Washington will ban imports of...cashmere. Don't ask me why. Maybe they ran some numbers and discovered that Scottish cashmere workers are especially partial to bananas. In the West Indies, bananas replaced sugar cane plantations when the British figured out sugar could be more profitably mined from beets. But if the cowering, fetal-positioned Caribbean banana loses to its thrusting Latin neighbor, what's left to switch to? "If we lose the banana industry," says Eugenia Charles, former prime minister of Dominica, "we lose the country."

Dame Eugenia doesn't spell it out, but what she means is that the more economically depressed those small West Indian islands get, the more they degenerate into mere staging posts for drug-smuggling into the U.S. So the \$860 million given by Carl Lindner, Chiquita's top banana, to the Democratic and Republican Parties will look like chicken feed next to the budget increase the Drug Enforcement Administration will need to combat a more vigorous cocaine trade. But who cares? Washington objects to countries like Dominica living off the E.U.'s artificially distorted banana market; it would rather they lived off America's artificially distorted drug market.

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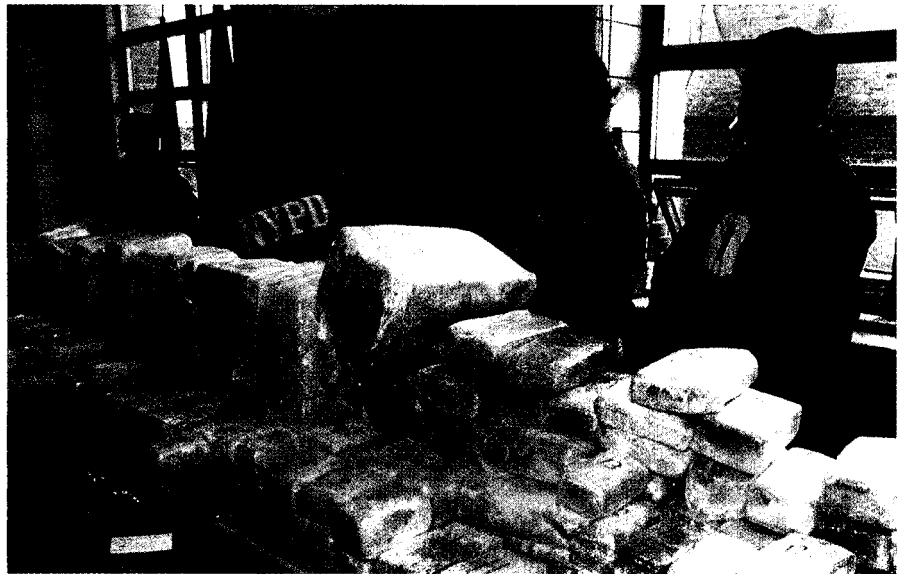
Back home, meanwhile, the “war” has been taking an interesting turn. In 1996, California and Arizona passed propositions decriminalizing marijuana or mandating it “for medicinal purposes.” Let us stipulate that, if you believe the latter, you’ve been inhaling too long: No doubt marijuana has no more medicinal properties than, say, butterscotch pudding. Let us stipulate, also, that most proponents of “medicinal marijuana” are those whose principal enthusiasm for the drug is strictly non-medicinal. But, even so, there’s something very curious about the vigor with which this administration—led by a president who smirkingly told MTV viewers that, given another chance, he’d inhale—has been determined to reverse the voters’ decision and harass any doctors who support it. Nothing, it seems, can deflect the federal government from its “war.” It’s an interesting case study in addiction: Like some crack-frazzled zombie, the government staggers on blindly, unable to be weaned from its self-destructive and sociopathic course.

In America there are two problems: drugs, and the “war on drugs”; and the “war” is the bigger one. Yes, drugs are a danger to society—though, on balance, they’re probably not as big a threat as America’s Number One addiction, food. The fact that over 50 percent of the population is now classified as overweight has far more serious consequences for society than drugs do. Yet no one suggests driving hamburgers underground, forcing junk-food junkies into the arms of back-alley “Mac” dealers. “Yeah, he, like, told me it was 100 percent pure ground Argentine, but, like, it turned out to be a lethal cocktail of dog turd and English beef. That’s real bad s-t, man—specially the English stuff.”)

Or take gay sex. Given HIV rates of 50-60 percent among homosexuals in New York and San Francisco, you could easily make the case that gay sex is harmful and should be banned. Nobody does, though. *Au contraire*, vast resources are devoted to finding ways of making it less harmful, from protease inhibitors to the race to invent the concrete condom. The government reckons that, since most guys who wanna do it are gonna do it anyway, better to figure out ways to make it safer.

Not so with drugs, where the “war” floats free of budgetary constraints and there’s enough government largesse to swill around the DEA, ATF, FBI, and at least 50 other agencies. When Vice President Gore suggested amalgamating these warring, inefficient, acronymic agencies into one slimmed-down ultra-efficient DEATFBI, the president ruled against it on

doesn’t think the federal government has the right to legislate what you grow in your yard and, anyway, to criminalize it only corrupts the feds. “The amount of drugs in this country, there’s no way they’re all coming in on Piper Cubs. Those guys have got foreign bank accounts, they’re running three or four cars, they’re wearing silk suits.” Funnily enough, federal agencies never



To the victor go the spoils.

the grounds that it would send (all together now) the “wrong signal”: having lots of agencies, no matter how useless, sends the right signal. So, across the country, undercover DEA agents are staking out undercover FBI agents who are selling drugs to undercover DEA agents who are staking out undercover ATF agents.

Still, the signals the present system’s sending are, to say the least, mixed. In 1996, it was revealed that, as part of their infiltration of one Latin American drug cartel, federal agents had successfully smuggled millions of dollars’ worth of cocaine onto the streets of America’s cities. At that level, it’s hard to see the difference between successful infiltration and full-scale participation. But given their adeptness at managing the drug trade, these guys might at least manage it on behalf of the U.S. Treasury rather than some pockmarked bozos from Colombia.

N. Scott Stevens, my near-neighbor in New Hampshire and the head of the White Mountain Militia, thinks there’s a lot of this going on. He doesn’t do drugs, but he

seem to notice those sorts of things. In 1995, over the river in tiny Cavendish, Vermont, a team of seven fully-armed DEA agents in bullet-proof vests swooped down out of nowhere at 3 a.m. on the home of a small-town lawyer, Will Hunter, and then announced to the world that “it is clear” he’d been laundering drug money: no “allegedly,” no “the investigation is ongoing,” just “it is clear.” They took three years to indict him for anything, and eventually settled for a single count of mail fraud. Hunter was making about \$20,000 a year and routinely took payment in cheese and maple syrup. Possibly, this was just a brilliant facade, albeit one he kept up 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. But I went round to his cramped little Cape, with one bath, with the family’s pet turtle in it, and all I can say is, if he’s laundering anything other than maple syrup, he’s doing it far more discreetly than, say, Aldrich Ames, the CIA traitor whose brand-new Merc and half-million dollar home paid for in cash apparently never aroused the suspicion of his colleagues.

PHOTO: AP/WIDE WORLD

But, with undercover federal agents now commanding such a huge slice of the drug business, the cannier dealers have begun to figure out that, instead of selling drugs in such a crowded and competitive market, it's easier and more profitable to sell drug suspects to the DEA. A Bolivian on the lam from his own cops, and wanted in Argentina for every scam going, washed up in Washington and, after a fruitless attempt to sell his wife's heart, lungs, and kidneys as she lay in a coma, finally hit the federal gravy train. He called a DEA office in Southern California and claimed that, if they could get the charges in Bolivia and Argentina dropped and fix U.S. residency for him, he could deliver them "Chama," the East Coast distributor for a huge South American cartel. Not only did they do that, they paid him \$30,000 plus expenses and several flights to California into the bargain. The phone call to a West Coast office was a stroke of genius: He knew that the Californians would be terrified of losing the case to East Coast agents and so would keep it a secret. The only problem was there was no "Chama," so instead he gave them the name of a guy he knew, a parking lot attendant who worked 60 hours a week for minimum wage. The guy punches a time clock, so his records can be verified, but so what? It never occurred to the DEA to wonder why the East Coast King of Cocaine is parking cars 60 hours a week and living in a one-room apartment. Instead, they call him up at home and try to entrap him. This is their end of the conversation:

Yeah, what I'm trying to do is—since it's a matter which is quite serious—big—and from the other things that I've seen like this, when we can't be playing with, with unclear words and... that's why what I, what you did, and I asked you if you'd spoken with him, because I know that he has the financial capacity and after all he's, he's a partner of, of, of, and, and in the end anything will yield a profit if we're hanging on to a big stick that's on a big branch and, and we won't have any problems. Right?

The minimum-wage car-parker, being Bolivian and not speaking much English but familiar with America's many telephone salesmen, replies: "Of course."

On the strength of this, the DEA

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launched an eight-month investigation costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. With most cases, the informant has to wheedle out a small sample of cocaine from the trafficker to prove to the feds that he's really in the business. No sample was forthcoming from the Bolivian car-parker, mainly because he wasn't a drug dealer, but, even if he'd wanted to be, he didn't know anyone who'd sell him any drugs and he didn't have any money to pay for them. But the beauty of this scam was that, according to DEA experts, true Class One dealers never give samples. Therefore, the fact that no cocaine was forthcoming, that there was no cocaine in sight, and that there was no evidence that the poor chump had ever been in the same room as any cocaine was only further proof that the guy must be a real Mister Big.

Which goes to show that no matter how crack addles the brain, it's nothing to what *investigating* crack does to it. We've learned to live with the remorseless corruption of the "war," but, even so, out in California, the government's pursuit of Peter McWilliams breaks new ground. McWilliams hit the jackpot: he's got AIDS and cancer. But because, like a majority of his fellow Californians, he believes in the right to "medicinal marijuana," he's sitting in jail, facing a ten-year sentence, while prominent supporters of his are staked out by various Federal agencies on apparently limitless budgets. No surprise there. Since 1980, the budget for the "war" has increased by over 1000 percent. Even if he'd been laundering drug money, the raid on that country lawyer in Vermont cost far more than he could ever possibly have laundered.

And all of this is completely unnecessary. If drugs were made legally available in

government drugstores, the price would decline, enabling the government to make a tidy profit and addicts to cut down on their property theft. You'd get rid of drug crime, drug murder, drug informers, drug cartels—and all those drug agencies. And that's why it'll never happen. Almost every drug agent could be reassigned to the new departments of the FDA necessary to regulate federal drugstores, supervise the mandatory labeling of every spliff, etc. But I can appreciate that that probably doesn't have the glamour of swooping down in your chopper at dawn and leaping out guns a-blazing. When I asked Agent Bradley, DEA agent-in-charge for Vermont why he didn't just drop by at Will Hunter's place at nine in the morning, he sighed "Mark, that's not the way we do things."

Pity. Because all the evidence shows that no one can regulate you into the ground like the U.S. government: Look at those smokers huddled on sidewalks; look at those tobacco companies, constantly fending off one government shakedown after another, no matter how furiously they spread their dough around Washington; look at the poor gun manufacturers, contemplating the same future. And then look at the Medellin and Cali boys snorting all the way to the bank. The "drug war" is a civil war: The problem is American appetites—and there are different ways to manage those. Speaking up for Peter McWilliams, legalization advocate Richard Cowan put it this way:

Everyone wants to talk about what marijuana does, but no one ever wants to look at what marijuana prohibition does. Marijuana never kicks down your door in the middle of the night. Marijuana never locks up sick and dying people, does not suppress medical research, does not peek in bedroom windows. Even if one takes every reefer madness allegation of the prohibitionists at face value, marijuana prohibition has done far more harm to far more people than marijuana ever could.

If only to deter the feds, I should say I loathe drugs and have no interest in partaking of them. But I don't believe America has the right to destabilize its neighbors, harass its own citizens, and corrupt its justice system to maintain a fiction. Cowan is right. ❧





# Clinton Bites

## So why didn't the media when Juanita Broaddrick spoke?

Words fail. Things fall apart. The president's apologists made the expected denials, but no one believed them, and even Geraldo Rivera had the grace to look embarrassed. Juanita Broaddrick had caused a problem. The *New York Times*, for one, tried to ignore it, although later it tried to make amends. It said in an editorial that Bill Clinton in his past confessions had presented himself as a "recreational philanderer," but now it seemed he might be "a serial masher or worse." The wording was close to whimsical—masher had a quaint ring to it—but you could excuse the *Times* for that. Some things are almost too painful to talk about, and the *Times*, and all the rest of the press, was having a problem. How do you deal with the idea of having a rapist in the White House? Or must you deal with it at all?

The rape story, of course, was not new. It had long been the subject of political and media gossip, and millions had read about it on the Internet. But what was new was Broaddrick telling the story herself, and allowing herself to be quoted—first in the *Wall Street Journal*, and then in the *Washington Post*, and eventually, and most prominently, on NBC's "Dateline." At the same time it was apparent that the reporters she spoke to believed her. As Dorothy Rabinowitz wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, Broaddrick was "a woman of accomplishment, prosperous, successful in her field, serious: a woman seeking no profit, no book, no lawsuit. A woman of a kind people like and warm to."

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Besides, even in the absence of eyewitnesses, virtually every fact in Broaddrick's account of the rape that could be verified was verified, most thoroughly by NBC. Measured by any reasonable standard, Mrs. Broaddrick was telling the truth. In 1978, while running for governor, then-Attorney General Clinton had raped her at the Camelot Hotel in Little Rock. He also bit her so savagely on the lips and mouth that her face began to swell. "This is the part that always stays in my mind," Mrs. Broaddrick told Ms. Rabinowitz, "the way he put on his sunglasses. Then he looked at me and said, 'You'd better put some ice on that.' And then he left."

It was all very ugly, and few in the press knew how to react, other than to talk about themselves and journalistic ethics. The *Wall Street Journal* story, for example, appeared on a Friday, and while the network news broadcasts ignored it, it was mentioned that night on "Washington Week in Review." Ken Bode, the moderator of the PBS program, bravely asked his panel of journalists what they thought of it. None answered directly, although all agreed that journalists had to have high standards. (A few days later, WETA, the Washington PBS station that produces the program, fired Bode. WETA's president, Sharon Rockefeller, is married to Democratic Senator Jay Rockefeller, but presumably Bode's mentioning the unmentionable had nothing to do with that.)

Meanwhile, the press had its big Hillary Clinton weekend. Her possible, but highly unlikely, senatorial candidacy was discussed on all the Sunday talk shows. Then she made the covers of *Newsweek* and *Time*.

*Time* used a lovely painting: a sedate but glamorous Mrs. Clinton with cute chipmunk cheeks and beatific smile. The headline on the cover was a sly question: "Senator Clinton?" It really should have been "What, Me Worry?" Nonetheless, *Time* did report on the rape charge in a one-page story. Its last sentence said a "weary nation" no doubt hoped it would go away.

And perhaps it will go away, at least in terms of press coverage. The usual rationale is already forming. On the big Hillary weekend, *Newsweek* disgraced itself by treating the rape charge as a joke. It mentioned it only in its Conventional Wisdom watch, where a supposedly funny item referred to "Jane Doe 5," and said, in its entirety, "Should have leveled (unproven) assault charge in '72 or '92. But sounds like our guy." In its next issue, however, *Newsweek* was more expansive. Jonathan Alter wrote a column that compared Clinton with the Republicans. Moral equivalence was back again. Alter concluded, as had *Time* the week before, that the public is "disgusted and bored—with all of them."

None of this is promising. It should be obvious by now that Bill Clinton suffers from not merely reckless but clearly compulsive behavior, and that he will, as always, do anything to save himself when he gets in trouble. On the day the Broaddrick story broke in the *Journal*, the most interesting, and appalling, item on the evening news broadcasts was a report by David Martin, the CBS Pentagon correspondent. The White House, he said, wanted to bomb Serbia, even though our NATO allies opposed it. It is to think the unthinkable that the proposed bombing had anything to do with diverting attention from Juanita Broaddrick, of course. The thought is too overwhelming. But it is also unthinkable that we have a rapist in the White House. Who could possibly believe that, either? ❀