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The Myth of the Responsible Recreational Drug User

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Successful professionals and the educated elites rationalize their 'recreational drug use' because their privilege positions delude them into thinking they are responsible users. The truth has two parts. First, they are self-centered cowards lacking a sense of responsibility for their role in the death and destruction they have inflicted on others. Second, their silence exacerbates the insanity surrounding the war on drugs.

For the most part, these are men and women who have yet to be tempered in the forge of adversity that gives rise to responsibility, self-confidence and courage. Our fathers molded in the crucible of the depression and tested in the forge of World War II handed a prosperous nation to their prodigy on a silver platter. This platter held the bounty that shielded 'the responsible recreational drug users' from the challenges and realities of life much as parasites living off a succulent host.

Think these analogies are overly hyperbolic? Cases in point will illustrate the magnitude of the problem, not only in the US but on a world-wide scale.

Twenty or so million Americans use illicit drugs. This works out to over eight percent of the population age 12 or older. These are Americans who knowingly break the law to satisfy their selfish desires or anesthetize their individual inadequacies.

This would not be so bad if it went no further than a simple violation of law. However, they have opened a Pandora's Box that destroys innocent lives, countries and ecologies in spiraling circles of death, destruction and corruption.

The first circle is the necessary but expendable foot soldiers of the drug world. They link the assorted professionals and elites that roam the halls of our universities, businesses, hospitals and government with everyone from the local marijuana grower to various drug cartels of the world.

Some argue these foot soldiers are rational beings that know the consequences of their choices. Hence, they deserve the punishment awarded for their crimes. This may or may not be the case but what of their children. There are some 400,000 children of these men and women who are in prison.

We are talking about Children whose lives are a series of hand offs from one relative to another with occasional intervention by Department of Children & Families (DCF) or like organizations. These are children raised on food stamps, Medicaid and other forms of public assistance. Their education is erratic and often interrupted by school transfers. They spend week-ends visiting a parent in this or that prison. Often, they look at crime and prison as a rite of passage.

The next circle is the drug cartels that cultivate, process and transport illegal drugs. One such cartel in Columbia was responsible for the death of 60,000 people within five years.

Then there is the money laundering circle. Investigation by the State of New York uncovered the flow of \$19 billion that moved through reputable Manhattan banks, such as the Bank of America, since 1997. These banks paid \$19.5 million in penalties to New York to avoid trial and no one went to jail. The big question that was not answered is where did the money come from and where did it go?

The circle most studiously ignored by the press is the chemical and biological warfare associated with the war on drugs. We have endangered the lives of untold numbers of people and created ecological desolation in both the production and destruction of these drugs.

The ecological destruction is trivial compared to the chaos and devastation visited on the average citizen of these regions. Interpol noted that the chief source of funding of terrorism is the drug trade: the UN reports illegal drugs are a \$400 billion annual business, which is 8 percent of the world's trade and bigger than the Pentagon's budget.

The circle of corruption associated with the war on drugs has morphed into generalized forms of corruption that undermines the underlying values and tradition of our nation. It is a war that has gone on for so long that the normal distortions in an economy associated with the temporary nature of a war have become permanent features on the landscape. The single biggest distortion is the amount of money spent at the state and federal level. Over one trillion dollars was spent on this war over the last 30 years.

In part, this money has contributed to making Washington the wealthiest among the nation's largest metropolitan areas.

The competition for monies associated with this war is intense and fought over by associated lobbying groups. In fact, one of the more successful lobbying groups brags about an eighteen dollar return for every dollar invested.

In Florida, private and state prisons alike have become a part of this lobbying effort. The main concern for both types of prison systems is to keep their beds full. This is a two prong effort.

The first prong is to keep the war on drugs alive because it accounts for about 60 percent of the 2 million plus men, women and children in prison nationwide.

The second prong is to raise recidivism rates. In Florida this is called 'get tough on crime.' In that period, recidivism has gone from a low of 34 percent in 1988 to a high of 57.5 percent in 1995 and has settled at about 47 percent for the past 5 years. Meanwhile, the prison population climbed from 31,823 inmates in 1988 to 84,901 inmates in 2005.

Using prisons, guns and the law to solve a social issue with medical dimensions is an invitation to anarchy.

This problem will continue as long as 20 million 'recreational users' let others take the fall for the death and destruction they are inflicting. Redemption could be 20 million men and women taking a public stand on the war on drugs; the body politic will listen and act.