

JUST SAY NO

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

Human beings love a good time. We laugh, sing, dance, make love and go to parties. We drink, smoke, stick in our veins and sniff up our noses any potion that makes us feel good. Feeling good and having a good time temporarily alleviates our usual burdens of overwork, anxiety, anguish and dread of death.

We are ingenious at distilling intoxicants from flowers and weeds that grow around us. Sex is our most compelling drive; getting high and feeling good might be considered a close second (often overlapping with the first). It is true that too much intoxication ruins lives. Alcohol and heroin kill. But so does too much chocolate, butter and steak. Cigarettes also.

The United States is probably the most pleasure seeking culture in history with more choice of sins than notorious sultans. But among us dwell some who do not like anyone to have fun. A few because they believe life must be miserable to appease fierce gods. A few others because feeling good and having a good time interferes with productivity.

We are familiar with piously despotic theologians who detest life and its pleasures and attempt to eradicate our use of stimulants with the same fervor they attack sex. Less acknowledged is the perception that our bodies and minds belong to a political state which is concerned about harmful drug or alcohol abuse only because these addictions inhibit our usefulness. Licensed forms of soma are acceptable to relieve pressures of the daily grind; others are not (and none are acceptable at the workplace). Concern for the wellbeing of the masses is not among the many and often capricious reasons one form of intoxicant is preferred and another is not.

Most of us know that we must be cautious in our use of intoxicants. We want our drugs — our martinis, our cocaine, our Valium — but most of us are careful most of the time about the types and quantities of chemicals we propel through our body fluids in recognition that too much whoopee will damage our brains, livers, kidneys and sexual performance. Side effects are not only hazardous to ourselves but can injure and kill others — driving while drunk or stoned; rage and violence as a result of intoxication; and because many popular drugs are illegal, robbery and murder by those who sell and buy them.

Most people who drink or drug do not become alcoholics or addicts but there are millions of each in the United States, which is the world's largest consumer of drugs its government declares illegal. The latest massive use of drugs other than our standard cultural lubricant began in the hedonistic 1960s when America's rebellious youth experimented with hallucinogens such as LSD, mescaline and marijuana in hopes they might find God and freedom in psychedelics. Drugs upscaled as former seekers of oneness sought material upwardness. Designer drugs were fashioned for the affluent. Downscale, crack cocaine hit the streets accompanied by the worst violence in an ugly history of it. Drugs pour into the country from all over the world and those who supply them are just as diverse. Almost every nation is involved in the drug trade, producing, manufacturing, marketing, or like Hong Kong laundering drug money. The U.S. is involved in all categories but most especially it is the world's major market for their use.

People who overuse drugs generally become addicted, which would normally be a private tragedy. Where it gets nasty is when the drugs they use are prohibited; instead of health care they get jail, treated as criminals instead of persons with a medical problem. The real criminals are retailers who control the supply and manipulate the costs of illegal drugs. Hardcore drug use is not user friendly nor is the average transaction between seller and buyer of addictive drugs. Contraband chemicals cost money and those who need them are increasingly unemployable in ratio to their addiction. Drug suppliers usually cut the potency of their products with other substances (milk, powdered sugar, etc.) while continually raising the price. The unemployed addict is forced to find ever larger amounts of money for smaller portions of drugs necessary to get through the day. It is at this point the addict's personal tragedy involves society.

Drug dealing is raw entrepreneurial capitalism. Its overhead is low (no office rental or land taxes, business license, etc.) and provides an exceptional business opportunity to snowball a small investment into a large profit. Illegal drugs are in great demand and the customers keep coming back. Drug prices soar far beyond reasonable market value because they are illegal and although the risks of supply are great, so are the profits. Of course the competition is intense and often deadly.

Competition between drug suppliers is literally murderous. Drug gangs kill each other at an unprecedented rate and they are little concerned about the innocent who get in the way of their bullets. They have gunfights on crowded streets (armed with automatic weapons) and they kill, beat up and set on fire customers who are slow to pay their debts. Cities all over the country are terrorized by drug gangs and residents who try to



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fight back are murdered. Newer more vicious gangs supplant the older gangs: Chinese gangs, Jamaican gangs, black and Hispanic gangs from American ghettos, even newer immigrants from Italy and Sicily move in on the Mafia, which controlled the illegal drug market in the U.S. for most of this century.

Drug laws are the problem. A simple desire to get high is transformed into bloody gang wars and vicious terrorizing of the public. If indeed the War On Drugs is good against evil as preachers and politicians piously insist, it is not the drugs that are evil but the money. Money is the most dangerous addiction of narcotics and it corrupts the society. On all levels drug money buys cooperation and protection: cops, lawyers, judges, politicians who make laws that ensure immense profits of illegal drugs by keeping them illegal; high level involvement by corporate and political officials who assist in the supply side of the drug trade (providing facilities and protection for refining, transportation, etc.) or on the consumer side by purchasing bulk quantities of drugs from crime cartels for their own networks of use and distribution.

Perhaps the major hypocrisy is the federal government's longtime investment in the drug trade to generate cash flows for Cold War strategies and support for covert rightwing sabotage and terrorist campaigns. Anti-Red dictators were kept in power with U.S. sanctioned drug money and drug flows into this country by pet despots tacitly overlooked to make useful allies of them. The CIA transported opium in Southeast Asia; Nicaraguan

Contras ran their own cocaine network. But as one congressman has said, "Proving government complicity with drug traffickers is something like catching a ventriloquist moving his lips."

The government's War On Drugs is simultaneously contradicted by its complicity in the drug trade. "Just Say No" is undermined by cutbacks in funding for narcotics treatment and education centers: prisons get most of the money. Meanwhile large drug syndicates grow ever richer and powerful, controlling or influencing lawmaking and enforcement with their money, and the drugs they supply are causing the worst crime wave in U.S. history as addicts turn to crime for money to purchase drugs and drug gangs fight each other for control of supply and profits in the nation's streets and neighborhoods.

At its most basic the purpose of law is to protect people from the violence and distress of lawlessness. The immense profits and easy availability of illegal drugs combined with the sharp increase of poverty by high unemployment and eradication of programs designed to help the poor spawn a lawlessness that threatens virtually every person and community in the country.

Drug problems are part of a pattern of poverty generated by a social and economic system that deprives the urban poor of jobs and the education necessary to not only subsist but develop self-respect and the sense of being worth something. Blacks and Hispanics in particular seem condemned to a living death of poverty and drugs as a result of the virulent racism that



"He didn't say 'al dente,' did he?"

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