

**ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series**

PUH2017-0017

Athens, 3 July 2017

**“Ending the “Drug War;” Solving the Drug Problem:  
The Public Health Approach**

Steven Jonas

Athens Institute for Education and Research

8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

ATINER's conference paper proceedings series are circulated to promote dialogue among academic scholars. All papers of this series have been blind reviewed and accepted for presentation at one of ATINER's annual conferences according to its acceptance policies (<http://www.atiner.gr/acceptance>).

© All rights reserved by authors.

**ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series**

PUH2017-0017

Athens, 3 July 2017

ISSN: 2529-167X

Steven Jonas, Professor Emeritus, Stony Brook University, USA

**“Ending the “Drug War;” Solving the Drug Problem:  
The Public Health Approach**

**ABSTRACT**

“Ending the Drug War.” That has been a rallying cry for drug policy reformers almost since the “Drug War,” aimed primarily at the trade in and use of marijuana, heroin, and cocaine, was first declared in the U.S. by President Richard M. Nixon, in 1971. A basic premise of the “Drug War” is that there is a dichotomy among what can be called the “Recreational Mood-Altering Drugs,” the RMADs. But the “Drug War” is not a war on the RMADs themselves, as substances, or on general RMAD use. Rather it is rather a very limited war, on certain users of certain RMADs, the entirely artificially defined “illicits” (see above). However, the “licits” --- primarily alcoholic beverages and tobacco products --- are orders of magnitude more widely used and more harmful to the health of any nation than any of the illicits.

Unfortunately, the drug policy reform (DPRM) around the world for many years has a) bought into the “Drug War’s” artificial dichotomy, and in certain countries like the United States of America, b) has become more-and-more focused on marijuana legalization rather than dealing with the negative health effects of all RMAD-use. The latter, as proven by the experience of the U.S. National Smoking Cessation Campaign (first established in 1964) is best approached using legal/public health measures.

Of course, for the U.S. the DPRM *critique* of the “Drug War” is right on track. It: a) has been totally ineffective in achieving its publicly stated objectives, b) has a racist basis that has become ever more apparent over the years, c) is enormously costly, d) has led directly to the problem of massive incarceration of minority young men, and e) like the original Prohibition in the U.S., has created a large, very profitable, criminal enterprise that would otherwise not exist.

As a public health physician for many years I have worked on dealing with the negative health outcomes of the use of the illicits, but also with the much more widespread negative health effects of the use of the licits, as well as the social, political, and economic inter-relationships between the two groups. And so, beginning in the late 1980s, I developed what I call the Public Health

Approach to the Drug Problem (PHADP). It is based on five important principles:

- 1) The drug problem is a unity not a duality.
- 2) The United States has a broad-based Drug Culture, which promotes not only the use of the “licit” RMADs themselves. It also heavily promotes the use of both pharmaceutical and over-the-counter drugs as problem-solvers, starting in childhood --- “have a problem? Take this pill” --- when such use is not always indicated and can easily become excessive. (Further, both government and private interests promote gambling, potentially a highly addictive behavior.)
- 3) RMAD-use, part of human culture apparently since there has been human culture, will never be eliminated, nor should any attempt be made to do that; rather the focus should be on reducing both the negative health effects of their use and the numbers of people who use them in a health-harmful way, to the extent possible, using tried-and-true public health methods which have been shown to work.
- 4) that there is a series of major Stakeholders in the maintenance of the “Drug War,” which range, among others, from certain political interests to the drug cartels themselves;
- 5) Along with its many negatives the “Drug War” actually interferes with solving the drug problem.

Fortunately, there is an outstanding example of how the PHADP can be very successful, over time --- in dealing with cigarette smoking. It has been introduced in many countries around the world. In the U.S. it is of course the United States’ Public Health Service’s National Anti-Smoking Campaign which, since 1964, has reduced the adult smoking rate from 45% to 18%. And guess what? It did so without locking up even one cigarette smoker.

The PHADP has approximately 20 separate elements, ranging from the development of a rational classification system for the RMADs, through the development of a regulated sale model, to the development of a rational RMAD-use control educational and advertising campaign.

My recent book on the subject can be found at: (e-version) [https://www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War](https://www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War) and: (printed version) [https://www.amazon.com/End-Drug-War-Solve-Problem/dp/3659843733/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479229890&sr=1-3&keywords=End+the+Drug+War](https://www.amazon.com/End-Drug-War-Solve-Problem/dp/3659843733/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479229890&sr=1-3&keywords=End+the+Drug+War).

This paper is based on an article on the subject that I published in a short-lived, online, open source journal, the Journal of Preventive Medicine, at: <http://preventive-medicine.imedpub.com/ending-the-drug-war-the-public-health-approach-to-the-drug-problem.pdf>. Here is the reference list for that article:

## References

- Jonas, S., "Why the 'Drug War' Will Never End," in Inciardi, J., Ed. The Drug Legalization Debate, 2nd edition. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.
- National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse. Second report: Drug use in America - Problem in Perspective. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973.
- <http://www.thomhartmann.com/forum/2012/09/nixons-drug-war-re-inventing-jim-crow-targeting-counter-culture#sthash.vvCfkdWD.dpuf>.
- Alexander, Michelle, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, New York: The New Press, 2012, chap. 3.
- SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results for the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings, NSDUH Series H-44, HHS Pub. No. (SMA) 12-4713, Rockville, MD, SAMHSA, 2012; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings, NSDUH Series H-48, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4863. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014 (full); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (September 4, 2014). *The NSDUH Report: Substance Use and Mental Health Estimates from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Overview of Findings*. Rockville, MD; see esp.: SAMHSA, 2012, pp. 1, 7; 2014 (full), Tables 2-4.
- Wikipedia, "Drug Policy Reform," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug\\_policy\\_reform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_policy_reform).
- Drug Policy Alliance, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/mission-and-vision/history>.
- Lowinson, J., et al, Eds., Substance Abuse: A Comprehensive Textbook, 4th ed., Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 2004.
- Dai, Serena, "A Chart That Says the War on Drugs Isn't Working," The Atlantic Wire, <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2012/10/chart-says-war-drugs-isnt-working/57913/>
- Kandel, D.B., Jessor, R., "The gateway hypothesis revisited." In: Kandel DB, ed. Stages and pathways of drug involvement: examining the gateway hypothesis. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Jonas, S., "The Public Health Approach to the Prevention of Substance Abuse," chapter 79 in Lowinson, J., et al, Eds., Substance Abuse: A Comprehensive Textbook, 4th ed., Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 2004.
- Jonas, S., "Solving the Drug Problem: A Public Health Approach to the Reduction of the Use and Abuse of both Legal and Illegal Recreational Drugs," Hofstra Law Review, Spring, 1990, Vol. 18, No. 3. pp. 751-793.
- "Ending the 'Drug War'; Solving the Drug Problem: The Public Health Approach"; <http://www.puntopress.com/2016/04/22/drug-war-solving-the-drug-problem-by-steven-jonas-scheduled-for-early-spring-release/>, <http://>

[www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War](http://www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War), chap. 2.

Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, Report of the Surgeon General on Smoking and Health, Washington, DC: US Public Health Service, 1964.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Smoking and Tobacco Use," Atlanta, GA: April 15, 2015, [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/fast\\_facts/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/)

"Ending the 'Drug War'; Solving the Drug Problem: The Public Health Approach"; <http://www.puntopress.com/2016/04/22/drug-war-solving-the-drug-problem-by-steven-jonas-scheduled-for-early-spring-release/>, [http://www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War](http://www.amazon.com/Ending-Drug-War-Solving-Problem-ebook/dp/B01EO9RGKO/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1461783388&sr=1-4&keywords=Ending+the+Drug+War), chap. 5.