Chasing the Scream

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHANN HARI

The son of a Swiss bus driver and a Scottish nurse, Johann Hari was born in Glasgow and raised in London, where he still lives today. After attending a series of prestigious private schools, Hari went on to study Social and Political Science at Cambridge University, where he also won national awards for his writings in a student newspaper. After graduation, he began working for the magazine *New Statesman* and writing a column for the newspaper *The Independent*, where he stayed for more than a decade. During this time, he also published work in a variety of leading global newspapers, and he won significant awards including the 2008 Orwell Prize for political writing and the 2010 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. However, in 2011, bloggers discovered that Hari had plagiarized parts of many interviews: he inserted real quotes from his subjects' other writing or media appearances into his articles, in order to falsely imply that these quotes came from interviews that he conducted. The public also learned that Hari had assumed a false identity in order to make biased edits to his own and many of his rival journalists' Wikipedia pages. Hari publicly apologized for his behavior, returned his Orwell Award, and lost his position at *The Independent*. For the next three years, he fell out of the public spotlight while traveling around the world and interviewing people to write *Chasing the Scream*, which he published in 2015. Then, he repeated this research process to study depression and anxiety for his 2018 book *Lost Connections* and focus and attention for his 2022 book *Stolen Focus*. While Hari's journalistic comeback has been controversial, he now meticulously cites all the sources and quotes in his work, including by publishing audio recordings of his interviews online. Today, Hari is probably best known for his extremely popular TED Talks about addiction and depression.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chasing the Scream covers a century of history in the war on drugs, which began with the 1914 Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, which outlawed the sale of cocaine and opiates (the family of drugs that includes heroin) except in a very narrow range of medical circumstances. This shifted the market for these drugs into the hands of criminal gangs, like the one run by Arnold Rothstein. During his long tenure at the head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, from 1930 to 1962, Harry Anslinger dramatically ramped up the war on drugs. He began igniting public fears about drugs by linking them to Black and immigrant communities, then targeted these communities (and the activists who led them) with often-fabricated drug charges. Eventually, he convinced the U.S. congress to effectively ban cannabis through the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, and his bureau aggressively enforced the new law, even though his efforts didn't significantly reduce drug use. Later, during the Cold War, he redirected his antidrug crusade against communists. All the while, he helped addicted white celebrities and politicians, like the actress Judy Garland and the anti-communist congressman Joe McCarthy, safely access heroin. After Anslinger's retirement, the Nixon and Regan administrations ramped up the drug war around the world, particularly in major drug-growing regions of South America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Over time, the drug war has contributed to widespread violence and poverty in these regions, without significantly reducing drug production, trafficking, or addiction. In fact, these efforts have often made drug use *more* dangerous, because they have given traffickers a strong incentive to sell stronger drugs. (For instance, the deadly opiate fentanyl is far more concentrated than heroin, so traffickers can make more money from transporting the same weight in drugs.) The drug war continues today—particularly in Central America and along the U.S.-Mexico border, where the conflict has escalated dramatically since 2006. Now, the border is the among the most dangerous regions in the entire world.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Besides *Chasing the Scream*, Johann Hari's other books are *God Save the Queen?: Monarchy and the Truth about the Windsors* (2002), *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression—and the Unexpected Solutions* (2018), and *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again* (2022). Throughout *Chasing the Scream*, he cites the work of numerous doctors, drug researchers, and scholars who have proposed alternatives to the drug war and the "drugs-hijack-brains" theory of addiction. These date all the way back to 1938, when the doctor Henry Smith Williams published *Drug Addicts are Human Beings* (1938). Recent books by the researchers Hari interviews in Chasing the Scream include Bruce Alexander's *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in the Poverty of the Spirit* (2008), Carl Hart's *Drug Use for Grown-Ups: Chasing Liberty in the Land of Fear* (2021), and David Nutt's *Drugs Without the Hot Air: Minimizing the Harms of Legal and Illegal Drugs* (2012). Some of the books that inspired Hari during his research include the doctor Gabor Maté's *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts, Close Encounters with Addiction* (2010), the literary scholar Stuart Walton's *Out of It: A Cultural History of Intoxication* (2001), and the drug researcher Ronald K. Siegel's *Intoxication: Life in Pursuit of Artificial Paradise* (1989). Hari also cites the memoirs of many people involved in the drug war, including Harry Anslinger's accounts of the drug war's

origins, *The Murderers: The Shocking Story of the Narcotics Gang* (1962) and *The Protectors: Our Battle Against the Crime Gangs* (1966), and Billie Holiday's autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956). However, the best sources on early figures in the drug war include John McWilliams's *The Protectors: Harry J. Anslinger and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1930-62* (1991), Leo Katcher's *The Big Bankroll: The Life and Times of Arnold Rothstein* (1994), and Rothstein's wife Carolyn Rothstein's *Now I'll Tell* (1934). Specific histories of crucial times, places, and events in the drug war include Larry Sloman's *Reefer Madness: A History of Marijuana* (1998), David Bewley-Taylor's academic study *The United States and International Drug Control, 1909-1997* (1999), and Charles Bowden's *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* (2010).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs
- **When Written:** 2011-2014
- **Where Written:** Primarily London and New York
- **When Published:** January 15, 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; Investigative Political Journalism; Political, Social, and Medical History
- **Setting:** New York City, Baltimore, Phoenix, Laredo (TX), Colorado, and Washington, United States; London and Liverpool, United Kingdom; Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico; Lisbon and Oporto, Portugal; Vancouver, Canada; Geneva, Switzerland; Montevideo, Uruguay
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

From Heroin to Heroine. The first chapter of *Chasing the Scream*, which recounts how Harry Anslinger persecuted the star jazz singer Billie Holiday for her heroin use in the early days of the war on drugs, inspired the major 2021 film *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*. As of 2021, *Chasing the Scream* is also being made into an eight-part documentary.

Centennial War. Hari published *Chasing the Scream* in January 2015 in order to mark the 100th anniversary of the Harrison Act, which banned heroin and cocaine for the first time in the U.S. in December 1914.

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Chasing the Scream*, journalist Johann Hari spends three years trying to understand the war on drugs by interviewing hundreds of people who have fought on its front lines. Some, like the cartel hitman Rosalio Reta and the sadistic sheriff Joe Arpaio, are partially responsible for its violence. Others, like the addiction doctor Gabor Maté and the former president of Switzerland, Ruth Dreifuss, have dedicated their lives to healing its victims. And many, like the ex-crack dealer Chino Hardin and the former police officer Leigh Maddox, have switched sides from the drug warriors to the activists.

In each chapter, Hari focuses on one or two people who represent a particular group's role in the war on drugs. By the end of his journey, he concludes that the drug war has been a misguided, fruitless mistake. While its leaders claim to be reducing addiction and creating a "drug-free world," in reality, the drug war has only made drugs *more* dangerous, *worsened* addiction, and produced an unfathomable amount of unnecessary violence and death. The criminalization of drugs is far more dangerous than drugs themselves, Hari concludes. By exploring places that have moved beyond the drug war—like Portugal, Switzerland, and Uruguay—Hari concludes that the best way to reduce addiction and drug-related violence is by legalizing illegal drugs and regulating them through the same system that already exists for alcohol, tobacco, and prescriptions.

Hari begins by explaining his personal connections to the war on drugs. His family and social circle are full of drug addicts (including a close relative and an ex-boyfriend), and after developing a serious pill addiction of his own, he starts to wonder why modern societies criminalize addiction and whether this approach has succeeded. In the first part of his book, Hari throws away his pills, flies to New York, and starts interviewing experts, who tell him about three people who set the stage for the drug war all the way back in the 1930s: Harry Anslinger, Billie Holiday, and Arnold Rothstein.

During Harry Anslinger's childhood, an encounter with a **screaming**, drug-addicted neighbor convinced him that drugs ruin anyone who touches them. He went on to spend most of his career running the U.S. Federal Bureau of Narcotics and "chasing the scream"—or scaring politicians and the public into criminalizing drugs in the U.S. and around the world. But in reality, Anslinger mainly wanted more funding for his department and an excuse to crack down on immigrants and Black anti-segregation activists. His principal target was the jazz singer Billie Holiday. Like most addicts, Holiday started taking drugs—in her case, heroin—to cope with childhood trauma.

Meanwhile, Anslinger's policies turned substances like heroin, cocaine, and cannabis from ordinary medicines that anyone could buy in small doses at their local pharmacy to vilified, illegal drugs that were only available in the black market. Predictably, in the 1930s, the drug market fell into the hands of organized criminals, like the ruthless gangster Arnold Rothstein. (This is exactly what happened to the alcohol trade during **Prohibition**, just a decade before.) Nevertheless, courageous doctors like Edward and Henry Smith Williams

continued treating drug addicts by prescribing them clean, controlled, medical-grade doses of the substances they were addicted to. But Anslinger turned against them and got their clinic shut down.

By the time Anslinger died, every country in the world had agreed to treat drug producers, traffickers, and users as criminals. Over the last century, Hari argues, several generations of people have stepped up to fill these pioneers' shoes: the brutal enforcer (Anslinger), the sadistic gangster (Rothstein), the benevolent doctor (the Williams brothers), and the humiliated, persecuted addict (Holiday).

In the next two parts of his book, Hari shows how the drug war continues to fuel extraordinary violence by looking at some of the people who are filling these shoes now. He starts with Chino Hardin, a former Brooklyn crack dealer who explains how his old job relied on "a culture of terror." This is because, in the black market, the only way to win power and respect is by terrifying everyone else into submission. Next, Hari interviews Leigh Maddox, a former Baltimore police officer who quit when she realized that arresting and prosecuting people for drug crimes did far more to deepen racial inequality than to reduce drug trafficking or addiction. Hari also notes how the drug war kills innocent people, like six-year-old Tiffany Smith, who got caught in the middle of a gang shootout. Meanwhile, the drug war's harsh legal system drags addicts deeper into addiction and despair. One of these addicts, Marcia Powell, had quit using drugs and built a stable life for herself, before a years-old warrant for 1.5g of marijuana upturned her life. She relapsed, ended up in the notorious Phoenix sheriff Joe Arpaio's tent city—an outdoor jail in the desert that he proudly calls a "concentration camp" for addicts—and died of extreme heat exposure after the guards ignored her pleas for help.

Just across the border in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, a group of young people led by Juan Manuel Olguín are trying to fight the extreme drug violence by dressing up as angels and staging public protests. Meanwhile, the cartels keep killing with impunity because they have bought out the state government. They hire hitmen like Rosalio Reta, who joined the Zeta Cartel as a teenager and was paid handsomely to kill the cartel's rivals. He's in prison today, but only because he turned himself in to avoid getting murdered. Others aren't so lucky—including the nurse and mother Marisela Escobedo, whose daughter Rubi Fraire mysteriously disappeared with her boyfriend one day in 2008. The Juárez police refused to investigate the case because the boyfriend, Sergio Barraza, belonged to the Zeta Cartel. Even after admitting to killing Fraire, Barraza was acquitted at trial. And then the key witness against him, a young man named Angel, was mysteriously murdered. When Escobedo dropped everything to protest the government's failure and seek justice for her daughter, she was murdered, too—right in front of the state capitol building.

In his next section, Hari examines the science of addiction. He begins with Ronald K. Siegel's work on intoxication in the animal kingdom, which shows that we have all naturally evolved to seek out mind-altering chemicals in response to pain. Vancouver doctor Gabor Maté has found an extreme version of this pattern among addicts: they use drugs to cope with childhood trauma, shame, and social alienation so severe that they cannot bear it sober. Of course, the war on drugs makes all of these factors worse, so Maté argues that it fuels addiction rather than solving it. Bruce Alexander, a psychologist who also works in Vancouver, wholeheartedly agrees. In his famous "Rat Park" experiment, Alexander found that rats choose to take drugs if they're isolated in their cages—but not if they have friends, toys, and food available. He believes that drug addiction is a response to disconnection and dislocation: when people lack meaningful relationships, strong roots in a place, and a sense of purpose in life, they often take refuge in drugs. Of course, the kind of childhood trauma that Maté studies makes the kind of disconnection that Alexander studies much more common. So do modern Western capitalist societies, which have left their members lonelier and more disconnected than ever before. Thus, Maté and Alexander's research explains why a small minority of drug users (around 10 percent) turn into serious addicts. Contrary to the popular "drugs-hijack-brains" theory of addiction, their research suggests, drug abuse is more often a *symptom* of serious emotional problems than a cause.

In the final section of *Chasing the Scream*, Hari surveys the political alternatives to the war on drugs. In Vancouver, the activist Bud Osborn started organizing drug addicts and demanding more progressive policies. Their group, VANDU, got representatives into the city government and even convinced the conservative mayor Philip Owen to help them build the first safe injection site in North America. In England, the doctor John Marks began prescribing safe medical heroin to addicts, and drug-related crime and illness all but disappeared in his area. And in Switzerland, president Ruth Dreifuss applied Marks's idea on a national scale by creating a system of government-run heroin and methadone clinics that achieved the same effects.

Meanwhile, in 2000, Portugal implemented the world's most progressive, wide-reaching drug policy: total decriminalization. Led by the addiction doctor João Goulão, Portugal simply stopped arresting drug users and started offering them resources, treatment, and housing instead. Hari's visit to Portugal is the key turning point in the book: it shows him that there really is a viable solution to the war on drugs. Everything that got worse under drug prohibition—like addiction, overdoses, HIV infections, teen drug use, drug-related crime, and police violence—significantly improved under decriminalization.

But Hari knows that it's possible to take drug policy even further, so he looks at places that have fully legalized marijuana

in recent years. He starts with Uruguay, where president José Mujica worked with drug policy experts Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles to legalize and regulate marijuana (just like tobacco and alcohol). While studies show that legalization *does* increase the number of people who try drugs, Hari notes, it also makes all drug uses significantly less likely. Thus, Hari thinks that Uruguay's policy was clearly worth it, although readers may or may not agree. Finally, in his last chapter, Hari looks at the U.S. states of Colorado and Washington, which were the first in the nation to legalize recreational marijuana in 2012. Colorado activist Mason Tvert's campaign focused on the scientific evidence that alcohol is far more dangerous than marijuana, while Washington activist Tonia Winchester, a former prosecutor, focused on explaining how the drug war ruins young people's lives and entrenches racial inequality. While both campaigns succeeded, Hari suggests that Winchester's offers a more sustainable solution for future efforts to legalize and regulate all illegal drugs.

In his brief conclusion, Hari returns to London, where he learns that his relative is no longer using drugs, but his ex has recently relapsed. Hari remembers what his research has taught him: "the opposite of addiction isn't sobriety. It's connection." Rather than staging an intervention, he offers his ex friendship and a place to visit and detox from his drug binges. Hari ends with a curious anecdote: Harry Anslinger died high on morphine, which he was taking for chest pain. Hari wonders if, in those final moments, Anslinger finally saw the folly in the war on drugs—and whether modern societies are ready to do the same today.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Johann Hari – The author of *Chasing the Scream* is a British journalist whose work has focused primarily on psychology and global politics. He chose to write this book because of several close personal encounters with addiction: his ex-boyfriend and a close relative were both hardcore addicts, and he developed a serious pill habit in the months before starting his research. Over the course of his three-year journey across Europe and the Americas, Hari met people involved in every aspect of the drug war—including law enforcement officials like Leigh Maddox and Joe Arpaio, doctors like Gabor Maté and João Goulão, drug researchers like Bruce Alexander and Ronald K. Siegel, reform activists like Mason Tvert and Tonia Winchester, politicians like Ruth Dreifuss and José Mujica, and numerous anonymous drug addicts. He also learned about how Harry Anslinger, Billie Holiday, and Arnold Rothstein set the stage for the drug war in the early 1900s. By the end of his research, Hari concludes that all drugs should be legalized and regulated through the same system that already exists for alcohol, tobacco, and prescriptions. He also learns that addicts need love, compassion, and community in order to heal. He encourages his readers to both fight for this better future and help the addicts in their lives by providing them with the resources they need.

Bruce Alexander – Bruce Alexander is a professor and addiction researcher who spent decades working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. As a young psychologist, he began offering counseling to drug addicts, and he realized that drug addiction depends more on individual psychology than the chemical effects of drugs themselves. Next, he conducted the famous "Rat Park" experiments: he put some rats in isolated cages and others in "Rat Park," an enriching environment full of toys, food, and other rats. Then, he gave his rats the option to drink ordinary water or water laced with drugs. Far more of the isolated rats chose the drugs than the ones in "Rat Park," which supported Alexander's hypothesis that drug use is largely a response to social circumstances: people (and rats) who lack meaningful connections with others often choose to use drugs as a substitute for those connections. Alexander also argues that modern societies have fostered drug use by cutting people off from the deep sense of purpose and belonging that previous generations often felt. Hari argues that Alexander's experiments provide some of the strongest support for drug legalization and regulation, because they show that drug users require love and connection—not deterrence and punishment—in order to overcome addiction.

Angel – Angel was a young man who got caught up in Ciudad Juárez's drug violence. Sergio Barraza coerced Angel into helping transport Rubi Fraire's body, and then Angel contacted Rubi's mother, Marisela Escobedo, to reveal what had happened. After he testified at Barraza's trial, Angel was mysteriously murdered by the drug cartels—along with his whole family. (Barraza was found innocent, despite confessing to the crime.) Angel's tragic death shows how the drug war has led to senseless violence, corruption, and impunity in places like Juárez.

Harry Anslinger – Harry Anslinger was the commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics from 1930 to 1962 and, according to Hari, the primary architect of the war on drugs. In addition to aggressively prosecuting drug users, Anslinger also used his informal influence to transform the nation's attitude toward addiction and get Congress to pass increasingly harsh antidrug laws. In particular, he stoked white fears about Black people and immigrants to get drugs criminalized—for instance, he blamed a psychotic Mexican American murderer's crimes on marijuana. Similarly, he obsessively pursued the jazz singer Billie Holiday, because he viewed jazz and her activism as threats to white power in the U.S. But in addition to his political leanings, Anslinger's childhood also explained his hatred for drugs. Once, he heard his neighbor's wife **screaming** uncontrollably because she was addicted to drugs, and he resolved to dedicate his life to eradicating drugs. He spent his

whole career "chasing the scream." He also aggressively coerced other countries into copying the U.S.'s drug prohibition laws, and he used every conceivable tool to attack doctors and scientists, like Edward and Henry Smith Williams, who reported the truth about drugs and drug addiction. Yet, while he was publicly persecuting famous Black drug users like Holiday, Anslinger was also privately supporting white celebrities and politicians who were addicted to drugs, such as the actress Judy Garland and the notorious senator Joseph McCarthy. He also took morphine at the very end of his life, and Hari wonders whether he thought seriously about the contradiction between his policies and his actions. In addition to creating the government machinery for the war on drugs, then, Anslinger also spread attitudes about drugs and drug users that became templates for generations of law enforcement officers (like the sheriff Joe Arpaio).

Joe Arpaio – Joe Arpaio was the notorious, controversial sheriff of Arizona's Maricopa County (the Phoenix metropolitan area) from 1993 to 2017. He is well-known for his longstanding pattern of serious police misconduct and his extreme anti-immigration policies. During his research, Hari visits Phoenix's outdoor tent city jail—which Arpaio, its creator, affectionately calls a "concentration camp." At tent city, drug prisoners are denied critical medical treatment, served rotten meat, and forced to work on chain gangs in the sweltering desert heat. Marcia Powell also cooked to death in Arpaio's jail. Hari argues that, rather than deterring prisoners from using drugs, these needlessly cruel conditions only amplify the trauma and isolation that lead people to drug addiction. Hari considers Arpaio one of the modern inheritors of Harry Anslinger's legacy—in fact, Arpaio developed his approach to law enforcement while working for Anslinger in the 1950s and 1960s.

Ruth Dreifuss – Ruth Dreifuss is Switzerland's former president and home affairs minister. Taking inspiration from John Marks's heroin prescription program in the U.K., Dreifuss pioneered Switzerland's innovative, highly effective system of heroin and methadone clinics. These clinics helped resolve the nation's severe HIV epidemic in the 1990s and have practically eliminated many of the harms ordinarily associated with heroin addiction ever since. Moreover, the clinics are extremely popular with the Swiss public, who view them as a highly effective way of eliminating the chaotic, dangerous black market for drugs. Dreifuss demonstrates not only how countries can reverse the harmful consequences of the drug war by embracing progressive drug policies, but also how politicians can persuade their constituents—including moderates and conservatives—to support such policies.

Robert DuPont – DuPont is a prominent psychiatrist and drug war advocate who was the founding director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which is by far the world's major funder of addiction research. Despite his powerful position, DuPont continues to spread dangerous misinformation about drugs, like the idea that marijuana is more dangerous than other drugs and the notion that drugs "hijack your brain and cause chemical slavery." When Hari challenged these metaphors and asked DuPont about the extensive evidence showing that the chemicals in drugs aren't the most significant cause of addiction, DuPont admitted that the metaphors are incorrect and flatly stated that he doesn't care about non-chemical factors that may contribute to addiction. In other words, he has already decided that chemical effects cause drugs, and he believes that any evidence that contradicts his perspective must be false. Hari views DuPont's extreme perspective as evidence that the medical and scientific establishment prefers to align with the war on drugs (which provides their funding) rather than taking seriously their colleagues' research into how addiction actually works.

Marisela Escobedo – Marisela Escobedo was a mother, nurse, businesswoman, and activist from Ciudad Juárez. In 2008, Escobedo's 16-year-old daughter Rubi Fraire was murdered by her boyfriend, the Zeta Cartel member Sergio Barraza. The police refused to search for Fraire's remains or track down Barraza, so Escobedo dedicated her life to doing so. Even after Barraza confessed to the murder, he was acquitted at trial. To protest this impunity, Escobedo marched over 1,000 miles from Juárez to Mexico City, and then began protesting at the Chihuahua state capitol—where she was murdered in 2010. Her saga demonstrates how the war on drugs has spread senseless violence and undermined the rule of law in Mexico by giving drug traffickers even more power and resources than local governments.

Liz Evans – Liz Evans is a nurse from Vancouver who started the Portland Hotel Society, an organization that gives drug addicts free, stable housing and treatment—even if they continue to use drugs. Hari argues that policymakers and treatment providers should adopt Evans's perspective towards drug users: they should focus on creating the safe, comfortable spaces and social connections that can help drug users heal their trauma and reintegrate into society.

João Figueira – Figueira is the policeman who runs Portugal's top drug control agency. During Portugal's era of drug prohibition, Figueira strongly opposed decriminalization: he thought that repression, marginalization, and force were the only ways to reduce drug use and addiction. However, after the government implemented decriminalization, he was shocked to see it dramatically reduce addiction, overdose deaths, new HIV cases, teenage drug use, and especially drug-related crime. Figueira's transformation also shows how it's possible for policymakers and drug war advocates to switch sides once they see clear evidence that decriminalization works.

Rubi Fraire – Rubi Fraire was a young woman from Ciudad Juárez who was murdered by her boyfriend, Zeta Cartel member Sergio Barraza, at the age of 16. Fraire's mother, Maria

Escobedo, dedicated her life to winning justice for her daughter, but was ultimately murdered for her activism. Fraire and Escobedo's deaths demonstrate how the drug war spreads senseless violence and redistributes power from government officials to criminal gangs.

Antonio Gago – Antonio Gago is a Portuguese man who, like Sergio Rodrigues, overcame serious heroin addiction through the nation's pioneering treatment programs. He now performs outreach to help current addicts find resources and treatment. Gago's transformation demonstrates how decriminalization and legalization can spread "a healing ripple" throughout the societies that adopt them.

João Goulão – João Goulão is the doctor who spearheaded Portugal's radical drug decriminalization policy. After participating in the resistance movement that launched Portugal's 1974 democratic revolution, he became a doctor in the southern Algarve region, where tourism was fueling a significant heroin addiction problem. When he saw that criminalizing drug use only made addiction worse, he created an addiction treatment center. Eventually, the Portuguese government selected him to run the nation's drug policy, and he designed a system that dedicates resources to reintegrating drug addicts into society and providing them with services, rather than marginalizing and criminalizing them. He helped design outreach services for street addicts, free treatment centers and "therapeutic communities" for recovering drug users, and effective drug education programs for Portuguese schools. These interventions have dramatically reduced addiction, overdose deaths, teenage drug use, HIV infections, and drug-related crime in Portugal.

Hannah – "Hannah" is the pseudonym that Hari uses for a drug addict and sex worker who lived at Liz Evans's Portland Hotel housing center in Downtown Eastside for many years. Like thousands of other indigenous Canadians, she was taken from her family as a young girl and forced to live with a series of abusive white foster families. One locked her in a room alone for four years. As an adult, Hannah spent all of her time, energy, and money procuring alcohol and heroin to help deal with her pain. She frequently ended up with abusive men who beat her. One night, she came back to the Portland Hotel bleeding profusely after a man raped and attacked her. Liz Evans carried her back to her room, and for the first time, Evans fully understood why people like Hannah often turn to drugs to deal with trauma.

Chino Hardin – Chino Hardin is a transgender drug reform activist and former crack dealer whom Hari repeatedly interviews over the course of his research. Hardin tells Hari about how he learned to earn respect, build a reputation, and protect his territory through violence. This reflects the way that prohibition creates distorted incentives for people involved in the drug trade: because they can't protect their business through legal means, they use violence and terror instead, and whoever is willing to be the most violent gets rewarded with a competitive advantage in the drug market. Eventually, Hardin started smoking crack to deal with the stress and fear that plagued him. Thus, Hari argues that Hardin "drugged himself into psychosis" in order to deal with the level of violence that he had to commit and suffer if he wanted to succeed in the illegal drug trade. And Hardin's upbringing also demonstrates how the drug war's pointless violence can shatter lives and families, creating cycles of trauma that fuel further addiction. Chino's grandmother and mother Deborah were also addicts. Deborah became pregnant with Chino when a police officer raped her during an arrest, and much later, she also died at the hands of the police, who beat her viciously during a *different* arrest. After resolving not to turn into his mother, Hardin eventually quit drugs, started researching the history of U.S. drug laws, and became an anti-drug-war activist. His transformation reinforces Hari's thesis that drug addicts need to connect with a community and broader sense of purpose in order to overcome their addictions.

Deborah Hardin – Deborah was Chino Hardin's troubled, drug-addicted mother. Deborah's mother was *also* an addict, and she abandoned Deborah during her childhood. Instead, Deborah was raised by a more distant relative, Lucille Hardin. After she was kidnapped and raped as a child, Deborah began smoking crack and stealing to support her habit. Lucille struggled to put up with her addiction and eventually kicked her out of the house. One day, a police officer raped Deborah while arresting her. She ended up getting pregnant with Chino. Deborah was highly unstable and mostly absent during Chino's childhood. They often fought and attacked one another. Early in Chino's adolescence, a police officer beat Deborah to death while arresting her. Deborah's life shows how the war on drugs creates a cycle of violence, crime, trauma, and addiction that can be extremely difficult to break.

Hari's Relative – When Hari began researching *Chasing the Scream*, one of his close relatives was addicted to drugs. This was one of his primary motivations for writing the book. By the time Hari finished his research, this relative had managed to quit using drugs and find a job working at a phone help line for fellow drug addicts.

Hari's Ex-Boyfriend – Johann Hari's ex-boyfriend has struggled with cocaine and heroin addiction for many years, and his addiction was one of the main reasons that Hari decided to research the war on drugs for this book. At the end of the book, Hari watches his ex relapse, but applies his research into drug addiction and recovery to try and help him. Through his research, Hari learns that drug addiction is generally the result of trauma and social disconnection, which means that addicts need love, support, and connection with others in order to recover. Therefore, instead of threatening to cut ties with his ex or staging an intervention to make him quit using drugs, Hari decides to give him company and support. He

offers this as a model for readers who want to help drug-addicted people in their own lives.

Carl Hart – Carl Hart is a neuroscientist who studies drug use and addiction at his Columbia University laboratory. He tells Hari that, because the U.S. government controls most funding for drug research, most scientists are afraid to challenge the drug war's dogmas. This is why they ignore the clear evidence showing that addiction stems more from individual psychological trauma than from the effects of drugs themselves, that most drug users don't become addicted, and that alcohol and tobacco are more dangerous than most illegal drugs.

Billie Holiday – Billie Holiday was a world-famous Black jazz singer and activist. She remains widely known for the anti-lynching protest song "Strange Fruit" and classic jazz standards like "All of Me." As a child, she suffered extreme trauma: she was raped, forced into prostitution, and abused at a reform school. As an adult, she turned to heroin for comfort. By the 1930s, her drug use, fame, and antiracist activism made her a perfect target for Harry Anslinger, who wanted to help spread anti-drug sentiment around the country and repress Black and immigrant activists. Anslinger repeatedly had his Bureau of Narcotics agents arrest Holiday for heroin possession, including by planting the drugs on her when he deemed it necessary. He even re-arrested her when she was dying of liver, heart, and respiratory failure in the hospital. Hari uses Holiday's tragic life and death to demonstrate how the harshest consequences of the war on drugs have largely fallen on addicts themselves.

Richard Husman – Richard Husman is a railroad worker and biker who dated Marcia Powell for several years before her death in one of Joe Arpaio's Arizona prisons. Husman blames Arizona's extremely harsh drug laws for Powell's death, since she had fully quit drugs and built a stable life with him—until she was forced to stay in Arizona because of a years-old arrest warrant for a small amount of marijuana and relapsed into serious drug use.

Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles – Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles are the English activists and drug policy experts who founded the Transform Drugs Policy Institute and helped president José Mujica design Uruguay's legal marijuana system. They advocate legalization as "a drama reduction program" to reduce crime and violence, and they propose regulating drugs through the same systems that currently exist for alcohol, tobacco, and prescriptions.

Leigh Maddox – Leigh Maddox is a lawyer and former police captain from Baltimore. After a drug gang murdered her childhood best friend Lisa, Maddox decided to join the police in the hopes of fighting drug crime. However, she soon realized that her highway stops and drug busts made no difference at all: while she ruined the lives of the people she arrested, who were largely young Black men, her aggressive policing did nothing to reduce the flow of drugs or the number of people selling them. Maddox also saw many of her police colleagues, including her beloved mentor, die in violence related to the war on drugs. Eventually, she decided to quit the corrupt, "racist machine" of policing and become a lawyer instead. Now, she defends young people accused of drug crimes and helps them get their lives on track. Maddox's life story shows how the aggressive style of drug policing pioneered by Harry Anslinger is deeply counterproductive: it spreads violence, doesn't truly combat addiction, deepens racial inequalities, and wastes colossal amounts of government resources.

Margaret – Margaret was a Canadian drug addict and one of Bud Osborn's friends in Downtown Eastside. Most of her family was also addicted to drugs. When she told Bud Osborn about her cousin overdosing and her cousin's partner committing suicide in front of their young child, Osborn decided he had to do something about Vancouver's drug problem. He started holding political meetings for addicts, and they eventually grew into the activist group VANDU.

John Marks – John Marks is an English doctor who treated drug addicts by prescribing them heroin for many years, until the U.S. persuaded the U.K. government to shut down his program. Still, Marks saw how the program transformed his patients' lives. It gave them a safe and reliable heroin supply, eliminated their need to commit crimes or do sex work to pay for the drug, and freed up their time for other pursuits like work and education. In short, he learned that heroin addicts can live ordinary, stable lives if they receive heroin through a prescription rather than through the black market. His work is an important model for drug legalization efforts, and it inspired Ruth Dreifuss's decision to create a nationwide system of heroin clinics in Switzerland.

Gabor Maté – Gabor Maté is a prominent addiction doctor who has worked in Downtown Eastside Vancouver for several decades. He was born to a Hungarian Jewish family during the Holocaust, and learning about his family's experiences showed him how people can carry childhood trauma with them throughout their lives. (In fact, Maté developed a peculiar addiction of his own to deal with this trauma: he compulsively buys CDs from music stores.) In Downtown Eastside, Maté found that most of the hardcore drug addicts he treated spent their entire lives running away from this kind of trauma through drugs. He concluded that drug use is a symptom of serious emotional disturbance, not the cause of it. In turn, effectively treating addiction requires helping addicts work through their trauma and make meaningful social connections with the people around them. Of course, the war on drugs does the opposite: it further marginalizes and humiliates drug addicts. Maté's work, along with that of other doctors like Bruce Alexander, John Marks, and João Goulão, is the foundation for Hari's conclusion that drugs should be legalized and regulated, so that society can dedicate its resources to providing addicts

with the services that will actually resolve their addictions.

Louis McKay – Louis McKay was Billie Holiday's abusive husband. A mobster who started out as her pimp when she was only a teenager, McKay eventually pressured her into marrying him. When she left him, he colluded with Harry Anslinger to get her arrested. McKay also frequently beat Holiday, profited off of her fame, and stole her money, leaving her to die penniless and alone.

José Mujica – José Mujica was the president of Uruguay from 2010 to 2015. During the nation's brutal U.S.-backed military dictatorship, he was imprisoned and tortured for twelve years. As president, he insisted on donating his salary to charity and living on his ramshackle farm instead of in the presidential palace. After researching the issue in-depth, he successfully pushed through the legalization of marijuana, which has prevented cartels from taking over the Uruguayan market. This decision turned Uruguay into one of the world's most forward-looking, progressive countries in terms of drug policy.

Bud Osborn – Bud Osborn was an influential Vancouver-based poet and drug activist who founded the organization VANDU and spearheaded the campaign to build North America's first safe injection site in Downtown Eastside. After a severely traumatic childhood, Osborn began using heroin in college. He found that it made him feel at peace for the first time in his life. After learning about how countries like Portugal effectively reduced the harms associated with drug use through decriminalization and public health policy, Osborn started holding political meetings and organizing his fellow drug users to push for similar changes in Vancouver. Eventually, he even persuaded the city's mayor, Philip Owen, to give him a seat on the city's public health board. Osborn's activism helped him form a sense of community and connection he'd never experienced before. Hari uses Osborn's life as an example not only of how activism can help change drug policies, but also how even the most vulnerable and disempowered populations—like drug addicts—can achieve change.

Philip Owen – Philip Owen was the conservative mayor of Vancouver from 1993 to 2002. He originally opposed Bud Osborn and VANDU's proposals to lighten punishments and provide public services for drug addicts. However, after meeting with addicts in Downtown Eastside and learning about their lives, Owen changed his mind. He gave VANDU members a public voice in his administration, became a vocal proponent of drug reform, and eventually even came out in favor of legalizing drugs. Owen's transformation shows how politicians and the public can help create better drug policies if they choose to learn more about drugs and the people who use them.

Marcia Powell – Marcia Powell was a drug addict and sex worker who died of heat exposure in one of Joe Arpaio's Arizona jails after spending several hours in an unprotected outdoor cage in the scorching hot desert. The guards who forced her into the cage spent hours mocking and laughing at her, then refused to call for medical assistance when she collapsed. Several of these guards were fired, but none was charged with a crime. Powell's treatment shows that the drug war incentivizes cruelty and sadism within the government by painting drug users as inhuman criminals. The impunity for the officers who caused her death shows that the drug war has weakened the rule of law in countries that primarily focus on punishing drug sales and use, like the U.S., as well as in countries that focus on fighting drug trafficking, like Mexico. After her death, Powell was nearly forgotten and buried anonymously, which shows how the drug war's policies dehumanize addicts in addition to inflicting terrible, unnecessary death and suffering on them. Moreover, when Hari meets Powell's ex-boyfriend Richard Husman, he learns that Powell had actually quit drugs and built a stable life for herself—until she was dragged back into the legal system because of a years-old warrant for a very small amount of marijuana. Thus, Powell's story *also* shows how harsh drug laws and prison sentences actually drag people back into addiction. Ultimately, the drug war causes the same crimes that it aims to fight.

Rosalio Reta – Rosalio Reta is a former Zeta Cartel hitman whom Hari visits at the Texas prison where he is currently serving a 70-year sentence for several murders. Reta grew up in Laredo, Texas, on the U.S.-Mexico border, and joined the Zetas at just 13 years old, after meeting its second-in-command, Miguel Treviño. For several years, Treviño paid Reta huge sums of money to murder the cartel's rivals. But when Treviño turned against him, Reta escaped across the border and turned himself in to the U.S. authorities. This makes him one of very few people to have made it out of the Zeta Cartel alive. While there are conflicting stories about whether Reta joined the Zetas willingly and why Treviño turned against him, Reta's story demonstrates how the drug war encourages senseless, escalating violence by rewarding the most sadistic criminals with money, wealth, and power.

Sergio Rodrigues – Sergio Rodrigues is a Portuguese man who managed to transform his life due to his country's innovative drug policies. After spending more than a decade living on the streets, addicted to heroin and cocaine, he made contact with government social workers and joined a "therapeutic community" treatment and housing program. Eventually, he managed to overcome addiction, find a job, and raise a family. His success story shows how decriminalization and legalization policies have the power to reverse much of the suffering caused by drug prohibition.

Arnold Rothstein – Arnold Rothstein was a brutal New York mobster who made a fortune through bootlegging, gambling, and sports match fixing during **Prohibition** before taking over the city's lucrative illegal drug trade after Harry Anslinger's Bureau of Narcotics ramped up antidrug enforcement in the

1930s. He eventually became more powerful than the police and city government, who agreed to let him get away with murder and serious corruption. He was murdered in 1928. Hari considers Rothstein one of the drug war's three founding figures, along with Anslinger and Billie Holiday. Rothstein's life shows how drug prohibition encourages violence, crime, and more serious addiction because it moves the drug trade into the hands of dangerous gangsters. In the century since the drug war started, Hari argues, one gangster after another has taken Rothstein's place, dominating the drug trade through extreme violence. This tendency has only worsened over time because, in the drug war, the most daring and sadistic criminals inevitably win more respect from their peers and greater power over the drug trade.

Miguel Treviño – Miguel Treviño was one of the Zeta Cartel's leaders. Until his arrest in 2013, he was extremely powerful and widely feared, particularly because he was known for torturing and massacring innocent people. He recruited Rosalio Reta into the cartel and eventually ordered Reta's murder due to cartel infighting. Treviño's life story shows how the drug war rewards extreme, sadistic violence by handing power and respect to whoever is most willing to use it.

Mason Tvert – Mason Tvert is the Colorado activist who led his state's campaign to legalize marijuana. Whereas Tonia Winchester focused her campaign in Washington on the harms of drug prohibition, Tvert focused his on the scientific evidence showing that marijuana is far safer than alcohol. While Hari sees the value of this argument when it comes to marijuana, he argues that it probably won't persuade the public to legalize *other* drugs or reform the drug war in general.

Henry Smith Williams – Henry Smith Williams was a prominent American doctor, writer, and anti-drug prohibition activist. During his early life, Williams looked down on addicts, much like Harry Anslinger; but he changed his mind after Anslinger arrested his brother, the addiction doctor Edward Williams, and got him convicted for violating the Harrison Act by prescribing heroin to his patients. Henry Williams dedicated himself to freeing his brother, telling the scientific truth about illegal drugs in books like *Drug Addicts are Human Beings* (1938), and resisting Anslinger's drug war. The Williams brothers' work shows how, contrary to popular belief, doctors have always understood and fought against the harms of drug prohibition.

Edward Williams – Edward Williams was a respected American doctor and expert on opiate addiction who defied Harry Anslinger in the 1930s by continuing to prescribe heroin to treat his patients. Anslinger successfully got Williams arrested and convicted for drug dealing, and this set a chilling precedent across the U.S., convincing thousands of other doctors to stop prescribing opiates. Williams's brother Henry Smith dedicated himself to clearing his brother's name and helping fight Anslinger's misinformation about addiction. The Williams brothers' life work shows that honest medical professionals have always known the truth about prohibited drugs and fought to create a better legal system for them.

Tonia Winchester – Tonia Winchester is the former prosecutor who led Washington state's successful marijuana legalization campaign along the fellow lawyer Alison Holcomb. She focused on the harms of drug prohibition, which sustains racial inequality and ruins young people's lives over victimless crimes. Unlike Mason Tvert's arguments in Colorado, Hari believes that Winchester's can also help persuade the public to legalize other drugs besides marijuana.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sergio Barraza – Sergio Barraza is the young Zeta Cartel member who murdered his girlfriend Rubi Fraire, but got away with the crime because of the cartel's power over the local government. He was killed in a police shootout a few years after the murder of Rubi's mother, the activist Maria Escobedo.

Lucille Hardin – Lucille Hardin is the distant relative who raised both Deborah and Chino Hardin in New York.

John Hickenlooper – John Hickenlooper was the governor of Colorado when the state legalized marijuana in 2012. Initially, Hickenlooper opposed the policy—even though he made his own personal fortune brewing and selling beer. Later, he changed his mind and enthusiastically helped implement marijuana legalization.

Judith Lovi – Judith Lovi was Gabor Maté's mother. During the Holocaust, she was forced into the Budapest ghetto, and many of her family members were murdered. However, she managed to escape with Gabor and reunite with her husband before emigrating to Vancouver.

Juan Manuel Olguín – Juan Manuel Olguín is a young man from Ciudad Juárez who, along with several friends from his church, dresses as an angel and publicly protests the city's extreme drug-related violence.

Patricia Osborn – Patricia Osborn was Bud Osborn's mother, who fell into alcoholism, poverty, and mental illness after her husband returned from World War II traumatized and committed suicide.

Ronald K. Siegel – Ronald K. Siegel was a prominent American psychologist who studied drug use in humans and nonhuman animals. Hari's eleventh chapter focuses on Siegel's research on animals, which suggests that virtually all living creatures have evolved to naturally use psychoactive substances.

Tiffany Smith – Tiffany Smith was a six-year-old girl who was killed during a drug-related gang shootout while playing on the street in Baltimore. Her death shows how the war on drugs inflicts senseless violence on innocent people.

Lisa Taylor – Lisa Taylor was Leigh Maddox's childhood best friend, who was raped and murdered by a drug gang in her first year of college. Maddox joined the police force in order to help

avenge Lisa's death.

TERMS

Downtown Eastside – Downtown Eastside is the central Vancouver neighborhood where the city's drug addiction, homelessness, and mental health crises are concentrated. **Gabor Maté**, **Bruce Alexander**, and **Liz Evans** all developed their theories of addiction while working with addicts in Downtown Eastside.

Federal Bureau of Narcotics – The Federal Bureau of Narcotics was the U.S. government's drug enforcement agency from 1930 to 1968. **Harry Anslinger** directed the bureau for nearly this entire period.

Harrison Act – The Harrison Narcotics Tax Act is the 1914 law that first effectively banned cocaine and opiates (including heroin) in the U.S.

Iron Law of Prohibition – The iron law of prohibition is the principle that, when a substance is made illegal, stronger and more dangerous versions of that substance inevitably take over the market. This is because it's far more profitable for traffickers and dealers to sell more concentrated substances, which have a higher value by weight. For instance, during alcohol prohibition, it was always more profitable for traffickers to sell hard liquor than to sell beer. As a result, hard liquor was often the only alcohol available, and many beer-drinkers switched to it. The iron law continues to apply to drug prohibition today, as stronger drugs like fentanyl and crack displace weaker ones like heroin and cocaine—which originally took over from the far weaker coca teas and opiate cough syrups that were widely used and legally available in the early 1900s.

Methadone – Methadone is a relatively weak opiate frequently prescribed to help heroin addicts during recovery.

Opiates – Opiates are a family of addictive drugs derived from opium poppies, including opium, heroin, morphine, methadone, codeine, and fentanyl. Opiates are frequently used for medical pain management, as well as recreationally for their relaxant and euphoric effects.

VANDU – The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, or VANDU for short, is the Downtown Eastside-based nonprofit activist group that **Bud Osborn** founded in 1997.

War on Drugs – The war on drugs is a decades-long, U.S. government-led campaign to combat the illegal drug trade. Its initiatives include laws prohibiting drugs, harsher prison sentences for those caught possessing or selling illegal drugs, and military intervention to reduce international drug trafficking. The term was coined in 1971 after President Richard Nixon deemed drugs "public enemy number one," but **Hari** traces the campaign's roots all the way back to the 1930s. Though the war on drugs originated in the U.S., countries around the world have instituted similar policies over the last century.

Zeta Cartel – The Zeta Cartel is a powerful, notoriously brutal Mexican drug cartel based in the border town of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. It was originally founded by a group of Mexican special forces soldiers who had received elite training in the U.S. **Rosalio Reta** worked as a hitman for the Zetas for many years before **Hari** met him in a Texas prison.

THEMES

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DRUG LEGALIZATION AND U.S. POLICY

In *Chasing the Scream*, journalist Johann Hari travels around the world to understand the war on drugs. He learns about its origins in the 1930s U.S., interviews people affected by it—ranging from drug dealers and cartel hitmen to addicts and the doctors who treat them—and looks at innovative solutions that, unlike the drug war, have successfully reduced drug addiction and drug-related violence. Hari concludes that the war on drugs has profoundly failed. Criminalizing drugs significantly worsens all of the harms associated with them, while decriminalizing or legalizing them does the opposite. Yet while governments and public health professionals around the world know that the war on drugs has failed, the U.S. government continues pressuring them to continue it. To overcome this political pressure and undo the drug war's violence, Hari concludes, activists must build a vibrant popular movement for drug legalization and regulation.

The U.S. started the drug war for political reasons largely unrelated to the actual dangers of drug addiction. Hari traces the drug war back to Harry Anslinger, the longtime commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. In the 1930s, Anslinger ramped up the enforcement of U.S. drug laws for three reasons: he wanted more funding for his fledgling department, he hated drug users because of a harrowing experience in his youth, and he saw harsh drug laws as a way for the government to crack down on racial minorities. He convinced the U.S. public and political establishment to support his drug war by turning drugs into the ultimate scapegoat: he blamed drugs for murder, madness, and political unrest. For instance, rather than taking Black activists and artists like Billie Holiday seriously when they protested racial segregation, Anslinger dismissed them as irrational addicts and arrested them for drug possession. After starting the war on drugs,

Anslinger next spread it around the world. At a U.N assembly in the 1950s, he coerced virtually every other country into criminalizing drugs by threatening to withhold U.S. foreign aid. Thus, he turned a personal vendetta against drugs into a global political consensus. And while Anslinger is long gone, the drug war has never ceased to be official U.S. policy—either domestically or abroad. Hari notes that generations of law enforcement officers have taken up Anslinger's crusade, while the U.S. continues to threaten governments and researchers who challenge its drug policies with sanctions and funding cuts. Thus, the drug war started with Anslinger's politically motivated crusade, and today, it still primarily serves the U.S.'s political goals.

Yet a century of scientific evidence shows that the war on drugs has worsened the problems it claims to solve. First, it has consistently failed to meet its implausible stated goal of eradicating all drug use. In fact, prohibition actually makes addicts *more* likely to use drugs because punitive policies amplify the pain that drives them to addiction in the first place. For instance, when the recovered addict Marcia Powell is arrested on a years-old warrant for a small amount of marijuana, she becomes depressed and relapses into hard drug use. Harsh drug laws actually promote addiction rather than fight it. Next, prohibition makes drugs more dangerous over time because of the so-called iron law of prohibition. Drug prohibition encourages drug suppliers to transport the strongest drugs they can find, while cutting them with potentially dangerous adulterants. As a result, drug users often underestimate the strength of their drugs and overdose, or develop serious health problems like infections because of the additives. Thus, prohibition actually makes drugs far *more* likely to kill. Moreover, the war on drugs also causes most of the violence associated with the drug trade. In addition to handing the lucrative drug market to criminal gangs, it also leads drug users to commit crime in order to pay the elevated prices for drugs. Finally, the war on drugs is a colossal waste of public resources—despite spending billions of dollars on prisons, policing, and foreign military assistance, the U.S. hasn't reduced drug dealing, use, or addiction at all. In fact, all three are now *increasing*.

After seeing decriminalization and legalization succeed around the world, Hari concludes that the drug war must end—instead, all drugs should be legalized and regulated. First, Portugal's pioneering decriminalization policies (which allow people to possess and use drugs, while the drug trade remains illegal) show how compassionate, health-centered policies can reverse all the harms associated with drugs. Led by addiction doctor João Goulão, Portugal redirected all the funds it used to spend fighting drug use through the police and legal system towards services like street outreach to addicts, therapeutic communities, job training, and safe injection sites, which actually help problem drug users overcome addiction and reintegrate into society. Since decriminalizing drugs, Portugal has seen sharp reductions in drug addiction, overdose deaths, and HIV infections. Drug-related crime has fallen practically to zero. In other words, it achieved all the drug war's goals by using the opposite of the drug war's tactics. But Hari advocates taking Portugal's approach even further by *legalizing* and *regulating* drugs (like Colorado, Washington, and Uruguay have done with marijuana). Unlike decriminalization, legalization also regulates the *supply* of drugs. This means that it has added benefits, like disempowering drug trafficking gangs, raising tax revenue for public services, and ensuring that users receive controllable doses of purer drugs. In short, legalization would bring all drugs into the well-regulated system that already exists for alcohol, tobacco, and prescription medications. Yet Hari also admits that legalization is challenging because most governments—especially the U.S.—have a vested interest in the drug war. This is why he argues that legalization requires building a committed, long-term activist movement from the bottom up.

Of course, Hari's proposed activist movement won't be fighting for a worldwide drug revolution—it will merely fight to turn drugs from a divisive culture war into an ordinary policy issue. This is why Hari is ecstatic to learn that Colorado's marijuana legalization process is full of tedious bureaucracy: he believes that boring regulation is the future of good drug policy.

ADDICTION AND HUMAN CONNECTION

The public tends to think of all drug users as addicts, Johann Hari notes in *Chasing the Scream*, but in reality, just 10 percent are. The other 90 percent are recreational users who don't get addicted—and who arguably gain more from drugs than they lose. The public's misconception stems from the common but disproven assumption that drugs themselves are the primary cause of drug addiction. While drugs are certainly addictive, leading researchers have shown that individual psychological issues like trauma, dislocation, and loneliness play an even greater role in causing addiction. These researchers have also found that, with the proper treatment, *any* addict can stop using drugs and live a healthy, productive life. (Sometimes, they can even be healthy and productive *without* quitting drugs.) Anyone who takes the scientific and public health evidence about addiction seriously, Hari argues, will conclude that the best solutions to addiction are empathy, support, and love—not violence and stigma.

Scientific evidence disproves the conventional "drugs-hijack-brains" story about addiction. This story is repeated everywhere, from schools and television to the scientific community, where a majority of drug researchers study drugs' physical effects on the brain—but only a minority study how these chemical effects actually contribute to addiction. Among this minority, the evidence is clear and consistent: while drugs

have powerful, addictive biochemical effects, nobody becomes a drug addict because of these effects alone. For instance, when researchers gave cigarette smokers nicotine patches, only 17 percent quit smoking. This shows that the core of smokers' addiction isn't their chemical dependence on nicotine, but rather their psychological dependence on the habit of smoking. Since nicotine is among the most addictive drugs known to humankind, this experiment suggests that addictive chemicals aren't the main cause of drug addiction.

Instead, addiction is really a response to psychological pain—particularly to childhood trauma, social isolation, and dislocation (or feeling that one's life is meaningless). First, animal studies strongly suggest that drug use has evolved as a response to pain. Psychologist Ronald K. Siegel has found that virtually all animals willingly consume psychoactive plants when they're in pain. Similarly, Bruce Alexander has found that stress determines whether rats choose drugs: isolated rats with nothing to do drink large quantities of morphine, while rats with an enriching environment full of food, games, and friends choose *not* to drink it. This suggests that drug use is largely a reaction to one's environment. The doctor Gabor Maté has found that the same applies to humans: they turn to drugs when their environments aren't enriching. He tells Hari that *all* of his patients are coping with deep psychological pain, often because severe childhood trauma has left them unable to bond with other people. (They bond with drugs instead.) Thus, addicts generally use drugs to deal with their isolated, painful lives, which lack the kind of deep human connections and life goals that make most people's lives meaningful. In fact, Bruce Alexander even argues that modern society has worsened drug use by uprooting people and disconnecting them from others. Often, drugs make this even worse—especially under prohibition, which makes procuring and using drugs incredibly dangerous. This can create a vicious cycle: drugs cause serious problems in addicts' lives, but drugs are also their only tool for coping with these problems. For instance, crack dealer Chino Hardin only started smoking crack to cope with his fear of being killed in a gang shootout, his shame about hurting others, and his violent, broken relationship with his crack-addicted mother Deborah. This shows how, once people choose to cope with their problems through drugs, they often spiral downward into even worse problems.

Viewing addiction as a lack of human connection, rather than a brain disease, leads to solutions very different from the drug war (which criminalizes drug users). First, on a society-wide level, this view of addiction encourages approaches like Portugal's—which focuses on integrating drug users into society by helping them form relationships, join communities, and develop practical and emotional skills. Whereas the drug war's approach often worsens addicts' pain by severing the few human connections they still have, Portugal's helps them overcome addiction by giving them the resources to *form new connections*. Similarly, on a smaller scale, Gabor Maté and Liz Evans's Portland Hotel Society shows how organizations can address addiction by building human connections. Whereas drug war programs ordinarily require addicts to quit drugs *before* they can get benefits, the Portland Hotel Society gives Vancouver addicts no-strings-attached housing and psychological support. In the long term, this makes it possible for them to quit drugs—or at least live more dignified lives. But people don't need to dedicate their lives to medicine or public health to make a difference—Hari also shows how *individuals* can help the addicts in their lives by applying addiction research. When Hari learns that his ex-boyfriend has relapsed on heroin and crack, he remembers that addiction is a response to disconnection, so he resists his urge to stage a punitive intervention for his ex. Instead, Hari patiently sits with him, offering him company and support, in order to strengthen their connection. In fact, Hari also applies the theory to help himself: after his research, he overcomes his own pill addiction by learning to seek out loved ones whenever he feels the urge to take drugs. These examples all show that regardless of how much power a person has, they can use human connection as a tool to heal addiction.

Hari argues that many people are fighting a version of the war on drugs in their heads: they struggle to choose between the instinct to punish addicts and the instinct to embrace and support them. The right answer, he concludes, is support. Punishment and marginalization cannot stop addiction or violence—only consciously reintegrating drug users into society can. Thus, the best weapon against drugs is not force but *love*. Even on the smallest of scales, it can make a vast difference.

PROHIBITION AND THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The drug war's greatest tragedy is no doubt the deaths of innocent people who get accidentally caught up in violence, like six-year-old Tiffany Smith (who was killed in a drug-related gang shooting) and sixteen-year-old Rubi Fraire (who was murdered by her boyfriend, a drug cartel member). But in *Chasing the Scream*, Johann Hari also argues that many of the drug war's seemingly less innocent victims—like addicts who die of overdoses and drug dealers who murder one another—would have survived and perhaps even lived ordinary, productive lives if it weren't for drug prohibition. This is because prohibition causes far more violence than drugs themselves: it relegates formerly legal activities to the black market, where "the most insane and sadistic violence" gets rewarded with money, power, and status. Thus, Hari concludes that prohibition is the root cause of drug-related violence, which will inevitably become more destructive over time if drugs remain illegal.

The drug war has forced the drug trade into the black market,

which naturally fosters violence because it's outside the government's reach. In the early 1900s, before drugs like heroin and cocaine were criminalized, Americans and Europeans could buy them legally in pharmacies. But when the government outlawed them, it pushed drugs into the illegal market, where gangsters like Arnold Rothstein ruled through violence. In fact, violence is the only way for buyers and sellers to control a black market. In a well-regulated market, the law enables people to fairly trade goods and services, and people can resolve any disputes through the courts. But in a black market, where buyers and sellers trade illegal goods, they can't rely on the government to recognize their property rights or settle disputes. Thus, they turn to violence instead. For instance, if a thief steals drugs from a gang, the gang can't sue the thief—it can only get retribution by violently retaliating against the thief. As a result, black markets replace legal regulation with illegal violence. Similarly, violence is also the only way to gain and hold market power in a black market. In the legal market, companies can grow through fair competition, like offering better products or lower prices. For instance, if a lemonade stand on one block wants to take customers from their competitor on the next block, it can simply start offering better lemonade. But if a drug dealer wants to do the same, they will likely have to eliminate their competition through violence. As a result, the black market strongly incentivizes gangs to expand through violence.

The illegal drug trade doesn't just *depend* on violence: it also creates a cycle of *escalating* violence over time. First, black markets create cycles of violence because the most ruthless criminals outcompete everyone else. For instance, Arnold Rothstein was the most feared mobster in New York—until someone killed him and took over. This cycle repeats: someone killed the new boss, and then the new one, and so on, until the present day. Each new kingpin takes over specifically because they're willing to use more violence than whomever came before. Similarly, violence actually *increases* when the police capture gang leaders, because other gang members fight to take over their vacant spot. Thus, while the drug trade remains illegal, groups who seek power in it become more and more violent over time. Extreme violence also gives gangs an edge by creating a "culture of terror," which deters their rivals from challenging them. For instance, the ex-Zeta Cartel hitman Rosalio Reta tells Hari that the cartel deliberately uses extreme tactics, like murdering their rivals' pregnant family members, in order to signal that nobody should cross them. Whichever gang uses the most extreme violence becomes the most feared and respected, so gangs try to outdo one another—which further contributes to the drug war's escalating cycle of violence.

Finally, the illegal drug trade's violence doesn't stay in the black market: it also corrupts the government itself. First, dominance in the black market gives some criminals enough power to buy off the government and undermine the rule of law. For instance, in Ciudad Juárez, only two percent of murderers get convicted because the Zeta Cartel controls the state government through bribes and threats. Even when Zeta member Sergio Barraza admitted in court to murdering his girlfriend, Rubi Fraire, the judges acquitted him. This shows that when the drug trade is large enough, it can prevent the legal system from functioning effectively. Second, extreme drug violence sometimes justifies equally extreme responses from the government. For instance, Phoenix sheriff Joe Arpaio used the drug war's extreme violence as an excuse for imprisoning drug addicts in inhumane conditions (like 140°F tents in the desert). Similarly, the U.S. now incarcerates more of its population than any other society in history—and the government uses the war on drugs as a justification. Thus, the drug war draws the government into its escalating cycle of violence, too.

The public often assumes that *drugs* cause violence, but Hari argues that they're wrong: drug *prohibition* causes violence. Worse, some people even paint the deaths of drug users and dealers as evidence that the drug war is succeeding. But the truth is just the opposite: virtually all of these deaths are preventable, and they don't signal that the forces of law and order are any closer to winning the war on drugs. Rather, the drug war is far more likely to achieve nothing at all—besides even greater levels of violence and suffering. On the drug war's front lines, this effect is obvious. The U.S.'s greatest ever spikes in crime came during **alcohol prohibition** in the 1920s and the drug crackdown of the 1970s and 1980s, while in Ciudad Juárez, residents are so used to seeing dead bodies on the street that they scarcely even notice them anymore. Unfortunately, Hari concludes, the situation will only get worse until governments are willing to admit that the war on drugs has failed and replace the black market for drugs with a well-regulated, legal market.

STORIES AND HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

While *Chasing the Scream* focuses primarily on global drug policies and their worldwide effects, Johann Hari also tries to show how these policies operate on an individual level. Not only can drug use and drug policy make or break individual lives, but they're also fundamentally driven by individual, often imperfect decisions. For instance, addicts take drugs that they know will harm them in the long term, and governments continue to arrest and incarcerate drug users, despite knowing that this doesn't reduce drug use or drug-related violence. Throughout his book, Hari asks why powerful people keep making such counterintuitive drug policy decisions. He concludes that it's because, for the most part, people really think in terms of stories and not logic. Instead of analyzing the evidence to find the truth, they choose the story that feels truest to them. This informs Hari's strategy as a writer: in each chapter, he

addresses one dimension of the drug war through one person's life story. Because humans think in terms of stories, Hari concludes, journalists and drug reformers must replace misleading stories about drugs and the people who use them with more compelling and accurate alternatives.

The war on drugs shows that politicians, the public, and even scientists don't make major decisions based on rational analysis—rather, they decide according to stories. The "drugs-hijack-brains" story has completely dominated the public debate about drug policy. Hari opens his first chapter with the story at the heart of the drug war: as a child, Harry Anslinger heard his neighbor's wife **screaming** because she needed drugs. He quickly decided that drugs make many people "emotional, hysterical, degenerate, mentally deficient and vicious." Even when doctors, scientists, and fellow government officials showed Anslinger that this story was wrong, he stuck to it. He even famously told UN diplomats, "I've made up my mind [about drugs]—don't confuse me with the facts." This is the clearest possible illustration of how individuals and their biases—not research and facts—have driven consequential drug policy. In fact, Anslinger's story—that drugs must be stopped because the powerful chemicals in them make people irreversibly violent, stupid, and antisocial—has become the basis for U.S. drug policy as a whole. It has even become the public's standard explanation for drug addiction and justification for the drug war (Hari admits that he, too, believed it when he started his research).

While the scientific evidence shows that drugs don't harm the vast majority of people who use them, the idea that they inevitably harm *everyone* has become powerful common sense. Thus, in drug policy, fiction came to trump fact. Perhaps most strikingly, Anslinger's story became common sense among most drug *researchers*, too—even though the best scientific evidence actually contradicts it. Specifically, most of these researchers study drugs' neurochemical effects, then simply assume that these effects are the sole cause of addiction. However, when researchers like Bruce Alexander have compared multiple possible causes for addiction, they have found that chemicals are much less significant than individual psychological factors like a history of trauma. Thus, while their own work suggests that drugs are merely the symptom of a deeper, underlying problem, most drug researchers continue with the story they're used to: that drugs themselves are the problem.

Because stories structure the way people think about drug policy, Hari argues that we need *better* stories about drugs, drug users, and the drug war—ones that are both truer and more compelling than "drugs-hijack-brains." Hari notes that everyone involved in the war on drugs—with the exception of drug traffickers—has the same goals: they want to reduce deaths, fight addiction, and protect young people from harm. In other words, the "drug warriors" who hope to crush the drug trade through force ultimately want the same thing as the reformers who propose de-escalating the drug war, defunding law enforcement, and decriminalizing drug use. The only difference between these groups is which stories they believe about drugs. The "drug warriors" believe that drugs hijack brains, so they propose eradicating drugs. In contrast, the reformers believe that drug use is a symptom of a deeper problem, so social policy should address the root causes of drug use, not drug use itself. Clearly, then, turning "drug warriors" into reformers requires getting them to switch stories. Hari uses Portugal's top drug cop, João Figueira, as an example of how this can work. Figueira strongly opposed Portugal's plans to decriminalize drugs, but when they went into effect, he saw overdoses, HIV infections, and drug-related crime all fall dramatically. He realized that he was wrong and became a decriminalization advocate. Thus, Hari suggests that drug reformers should strive to help "drug warriors" make the same change as Figueira by offering them persuasive, true stories about the drug war's failures and the potential of decriminalization and legalization.

Of course, Hari aims to give readers precisely these stories in his book. This is why he humanizes the drug war by focusing on individuals' experiences of it. He interviewed 16 law enforcement agents, but he writes about just one: Leigh Maddox. Similarly, he profiles just one drug dealer (Chino Hardin), one case of tragic cartel violence (Rubi Fraire and her mother Maria Escobedo), and one successful drug activist (Bud Osborn). Perhaps most importantly, to capture the great potential of decriminalizing and legalizing drugs, he tells the story of just two Portuguese addicts, Antonio Gago and Sergio Rodrigues, who overcame addiction and started performing outreach work to other addicts. These stories don't provide a comprehensive, holistic picture of the war on drugs, but they do give readers clear, memorable examples of where the drug war has gone wrong. Ultimately, researchers, policymakers, and activists can choose which story they want to tell about the drug war. Many will still choose "drugs-hijack-brains," but Hari offers a compelling alternative—one that better fits the available scientific evidence and offers a far brighter future for addicts and the victims of the war on drugs.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ALCOHOL PROHIBITION

Alcohol Prohibition in the U.S., which lasted from 1920 to 1933, shows that the drug war's harmful effects were foreseeable and that the real motive behind it has more often been powerful people's political self-interest than a genuine interest in reducing the harms of drug addiction.

During Prohibition, organized gangs took over the alcohol trade from legitimate companies. Violent crime dramatically increased, and Americans started consuming more dangerous drinks because smuggling stronger liquor was more profitable for the gangs. This all follows from a simple economic principle: when any good or service becomes illegal, trade in it moves from the legal market—where the legal system can fairly regulate it—to the black market, where the only form of regulation is violence.

Prohibition was widely seen as a failure by the time it ended. And yet, just a few years later, politicians and law enforcement officers—most of all Harry Anslinger—launched the war on drugs anyway. While it's tempting to assume that early drug warriors like Anslinger simply didn't expect drug prohibition to cause so much harm, in reality, they absolutely knew what they were getting into: they had just seen Prohibition fail to achieve its goals. While Anslinger certainly believed that drugs were harmful, his primary motivations for launching the drug war were his desire for personal power and his extreme racist beliefs. (The war on drugs drew unprecedented funding to his Bureau of Narcotics, and it gave him an excuse to persecute racial minority groups and activists.) Over the last century, politicians and law enforcement agents have continued to follow Anslinger's playbook, using the war on drugs to their personal political advantage while suppressing the research that proves what they've already known since Prohibition: criminalizing drugs causes much more violence, suffering, and addiction than it heals.

SCREAMING

Screams represent the drug war's pointless strategy of fighting trauma by creating even more trauma. Through this misguided strategy, the drug war exacerbates the problems it claims to be solving.

The scream from the book's title is one that Harry Anslinger heard as a young child. When his neighbor ran out of drugs, she began frantically screaming, and Anslinger had to rush to town to get her more. The woman's scream—which represents her pain—left a lasting mark on Anslinger. Hari and the addiction doctors he interviews would likely view the woman's drug use as her strategy for *coping* with her pain. But Anslinger viewed it as the *cause* of her pain. He tried to fight this pain by crushing it—or cracking down on drugs. Just as drug addicts use substances to heal their pain, Hari suggests, Anslinger and his supporters viewed the drug war as an easy solution to their *own* sense of pain and dislocation.

But the stories of extraordinary violence spread throughout *Chasing the Scream* show that Anslinger's strategy has generated far more pain than it has healed. It creates a culture of violence that causes unspeakable suffering for people like Chino Hardin. It fuels the cruel government policies that ruin the lives of people like Marcia Powell and the young Black men that Leigh Maddox once arrested and now defends. It has made drugs more dangerous. And worst of all, it has further humiliated and marginalized addicts, who turned to drugs largely because they *already* felt humiliated and marginalized (at least, according to the research of doctors like Bruce Alexander and Gabor Maté). Thus, Hari suggests that the drug war's error is fighting screams by piling on more screams—instead of by offering the support and connection that can actually silence them.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury edition of *Chasing the Scream* published in 2016.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Anslinger had his story now. He announced on a famous radio address: "Parents beware! Your children…are being introduced to a new danger in the form of a drugged cigarette, marijuana. Young [people] are slaves to this narcotic, continuing addiction until they deteriorate mentally, become insane, [and] turn to violent crime and murder."

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Harry Anslinger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of *Chasing the Scream*, Hari explains how the drug war truly began. While many readers probably associate the drug war with the 1970s and 1980s, Hari instead traces it back to the 1930s, when the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Harry Anslinger, began scaremongering about drugs and strongly enforcing previously ignored drug laws. In this passage, Hari quotes Anslinger's dire warnings about the dangers of marijuana.

Most modern readers will understand that Anslinger's rhetoric seriously distorts the evidence—after all, scientists now agree that marijuana is generally far safer than alcohol. While Anslinger did truly believe that drugs like marijuana turn young people into chemical slaves, he also used scaremongering tactics for other reasons. First, he raised a public outcry about drugs, which turned the drug war into a public priority and convinced the government to funnel far more resources to his Bureau. And second, by specifically

associating drugs with communities of color—especially Black and Mexican Americans—Anslinger portrayed the drug war as a legitimate justification for the police to target those communities. Of course, his real motives for doing so were different: he was a virulent racist and he worried about civil rights activists challenging white people's dominance in the U.S.

Anslinger's campaign is remarkable not only because it reveals the corrupt motives at the heart of the drug war, but also because it demonstrates how little has changed about the rhetoric and tactics used to fight it. While the majority of Americans no longer believe Anslinger's claims about marijuana, many continue to feel the same way about other drugs (from meth to psychedelics) that scientists have actually found to be less harmful than alcohol. Of course, these drugs certainly *can* be harmful, but the war on drugs continues to choose exaggerated fearmongering over accurate education about how drugs' effects. The drug war thus continues to serve many of the same goals today, ranging from inflating law enforcement budgets to enabling the government to repress communities of color.

❝ Billie didn't blame Anslinger's agents as individuals; she blamed the drug war itself—because it forced the police to treat ill people like criminals. "Imagine if the government chased sick people with diabetes, put a tax on insulin and drove it into the black market, told doctors they couldn't treat them," she wrote in her memoir, "then sent them to jail. If we did that, everyone would know we were crazy. Yet we do practically the same thing every day in the week to sick people hooked on drugs."

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Billie Holiday (speaker), Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

From the start, Anslinger's war on drugs was deliberately futile: by treating drug addicts as criminals, he ensured that he and his followers would always have an endless supply of enemies to persecute. He focused on famous drug users like Billie Holiday in the hopes of changing public opinion and winning support for his drug war, and although Holiday fully understood what he was doing, she had little power to stop it. She died chained to her hospital bed, after Anslinger's agents planted heroin on her and used it as a justification for arresting her.

Holiday captured the futility of Anslinger's war by comparing it to a hypothetical war on diabetics. Specifically, she noted how the government turns drug addicts *into* criminals by prohibiting drugs. If forced to commit crime and live on the margins of society in order to obtain drugs, addicts will do so—just like people with less stigmatized medical conditions would if it were necessary to get the medications they need to survive. Thus, if Anslinger originally wanted to turn Billie Holiday into a model of drug addiction and depravity, today, her story has come to represent the futile violence used to enforce the war on drugs.

❝ It is easy to judge Harry Anslinger. But if we are honest, I suspect that everybody who has ever loved an addict—everybody who has ever been an addict—has this impulse in them somewhere. Destroy the addiction. Kill the addiction. Throttle it with violence. Harry Anslinger is our own darkest impulses, given a government department and a license to kill.

As I researched this book, I traveled a long way from the farm fields of Pennsylvania—but at every step, I began to feel I was chasing the scream that terrified little Harry Anslinger all those years ago, as it echoed out across the world.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of his first chapter, Hari offers a psychological explanation of why he thinks Harry Anslinger launched and expanded the drug war. As a child, Anslinger heard his neighbor screaming hysterically because she needed drugs, and for the rest of his life, this experience was seared into his mind. Whenever he thought of drugs, he pictured his neighbor; he saw her as the typical addict and feared that if he didn't destroy drugs everywhere, everyone in the world would eventually become like her. Anslinger's drug war was really a way of "chasing the scream"—or trying to cope with his irrational fear of drug use by destroying everything that reminded him of it. While the drug war's effects were tragic and unnecessary, then, it was also perfectly understandable.

In fact, Hari uses Anslinger's fanaticism to explain the broader framework through which he understands the drug war. For Hari, there is a conflict between two forces—the impulse to destroy and the impulse to love, or violence and compassion—in every individual, organization, and society dealing with addiction. This includes addicts themselves, their friends and families, treatment providers, activists, law enforcement agents, politicians, and the public at large. In some societies—like the U.S.—violence wins out. Cruel, counterproductive policies like the drug war become the only way to deal with addiction. In others, like Portugal, compassion wins out, and the evidence shows that this works far better. Yet, since humans naturally try to crush the things we hate and fear, it's easy to understand why most societies choose brutality instead.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ In the pharmacies, morphine had cost two or three cents a grain; the criminal gangs charged a dollar. The addicts paid whatever they were told to pay.
The world we recognize now—where addicts are often forced to become criminals, in a desperate scramble to feed their habit from gangsters—was being created, for the first time. The Williams brothers had watched as Anslinger's department created two crime waves. First, it created an army of gangsters to smuggle drugs into the country and sell them to addicts. In other words: while Harry Anslinger claimed to be fighting the Mafia, he was in fact transferring a massive and highly profitable industry into their exclusive control.

Second, by driving up the cost of drugs by more than a thousand percent, the new policies meant addicts were forced to commit crime to get their next fix.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger , Henry Smith Williams , Edward Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

Most people assume that drugs are responsible for the link between addiction, crime, and violence: they think that the chemicals in drugs hook people and drive them to crazed, antisocial behavior. But in reality, these chemicals aren't responsible for the vast majority of drug crime—instead, the drug *trade* is.

When the government prohibits products like drugs, which consumers continue to demand irrespective of their supply, the market for those products doesn't disappear—instead, it just passes into the hands of organized criminal gangs. Unlike the doctors and pharmacists who once dispensed drugs, these gangs are willing to sell products of dubious quality, commit violence to control the market, and charge high prices that most users cannot ordinarily afford.

Thus, the link between drugs, crime, and violence is a product of prohibition itself. This was clear to Henry and Edward Williams as soon as Harry Anslinger launched the drug war, and experts like them have consistently made this point ever since (even if their conclusions have only spread widely in recent years).

❝ Henry Smith Williams assumed that Anslinger—and prohibition—were rational, like him. They were not. They are responses to fear, and panic. And nobody, when they are panicking, can see the logical flaws in their thought.
Harry worked very hard to keep the country in a state of panic on the subject of drugs so that nobody would ever again see these logical contradictions. Whenever people did point them out, he had them silenced. He had to make sure there was no room for doubt—in his own head, or in the country—and no alternative for Americans to turn to.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Henry Smith Williams , Harry Anslinger , Edward Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In 1931, Harry Anslinger arrested and imprisoned the doctor Edward Williams for prescribing heroin to addicts—even though this was legal under the relevant drug laws. Williams's brother Henry, who was also a respected physician, dedicated the rest of his career to fighting against Anslinger's drug war. In particular, he was obsessed with uncovering and exposing Anslinger's true motives. Whereas Edward Williams's heroin prescription program helped addicts live ordinary lives, support their families, and work stable jobs, drug prohibition ruined addicts' lives by handing over the drug trade to criminal organizations like the mafia. Prohibition sharply increased drug prices, prevented addicts from accessing safe medical-grade drugs, and created a huge crime wave.

Because the Bureau of Narcotics and organized criminals were the only true beneficiaries of the war on drugs, Henry

Williams concluded that they must have been working together. He publicly accused Harry Anslinger of collaborating with the mafia. While some of Anslinger's agents certainly did, there's still no evidence that Anslinger was involved. Judging by Anslinger's lifelong hatred for the mafia, Hari concludes, he probably didn't orchestrate the war on drugs through backroom deals with them.

Henry Williams's misstep highlights one of the most important truths about the drug war: it's driven not by logic and facts, but by the fears, hopes, and assumptions of the people with power to shape it. Williams assumed that Anslinger colluded with the mafia simply because he did not understand why else someone who claimed to hate drugs and crime would make decisions that increased drug crime and addiction more than any other policy in history. He thought that Anslinger would give up on policies that didn't work and embrace the ones that did. But none of this accurately describes how Anslinger made his decisions. Instead, Anslinger followed his own mental model of drugs, addiction, and crime—and because he had so much power, he managed to impose this model on everyone else, including people who knew the truth.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Whenever any representative of another country tried to explain to him why these policies weren't right for them, Anslinger snapped: "I've made up my mind—don't confuse me with the facts."

And so Thailand caved. Britain caved. Everyone—under threat—caved in the end. The United States was now the most powerful country in the world, and nobody dared defy them for long. Some were more willing than others. Pretty much every country has its own minority group, like African Americans, whom it wants to keep down. For many, it was a good excuse. And pretty much every country had this latent desire to punish addicts. "The world belongs to the strong," Harry believed. "It always has and it always will." The result is that we are all still stuck at the end of the barrel of Harry Anslinger's gun.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Harry Anslinger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Harry Anslinger didn't just start the drug war in the U.S.—he also used the U.S.'s unparalleled diplomatic power to spread it around the world. He threatened other countries into accepting his terms by making it clear that their only alternative would be to lose support from the U.S. During the Cold War, this not only meant that the U.S. could withdraw aid money to other countries, but also that it could overthrow their governments.

As Anslinger's quote shows, he had no interest in "the facts"—he didn't want other countries to adopt his policies because he had any convincing evidence that they would work. Instead, he merely wanted power and control, and the U.S. government allowed him to use every available means to achieve his goals. He managed to convince other countries in part by showing them how they could use the drug war to violently repress minority groups and political opponents.

Thus, other countries adopted drug war policies against their better judgment, simply because they were "stuck at the end of the barrel of Harry Anslinger's gun." This systematic blackmail wasn't just the *source* of the global war on drugs—it's also the form it continues to take today, as the U.S. continues to use its outsized economic, diplomatic, and military force to make other countries adopt drug policies that cause more harm than benefit.

❝ It is a natural human instinct to turn our fears into symbols, and destroy the symbols, in the hope that it will destroy the fear. It is a logic that keeps recurring throughout human history, from the Crusades to the witch hunts to the present day. It's hard to sit with a complex problem, such as the human urge to get intoxicated, and accept that it will always be with us, and will always cause some problems (as well as some pleasures). It is much more appealing to be told a different message—that it can be ended. That all these problems can be over, if only we listen, and follow.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

During his initial research into the drug war, Hari found it baffling that nobody stopped Harry Anslinger. Even though Anslinger's policies caused far more crime and violence than they stopped, other government officials and the public continued to support him. Eventually, Hari concludes that

they were duped—not because they were unusually stupid or gullible, but merely because, just like everyone else, they wanted a silver bullet solution to their problems.

Anslinger turned drugs into an almost universal scapegoat. Segregationists, anti-communists, diplomats, law enforcement officials, civil rights leaders, and ordinary people concerned about crime all projected their own personal fears onto drugs. Anslinger appealed to all these groups by promising that the drug war would eliminate all of the things they feared. And when it didn't, instead of admitting failure, he simply pushed harder. He claimed that if he could just keep fighting, he would eventually give everyone what they wanted.

Hari concludes that Anslinger's complicated charade is really no different from the way most people think: they prefer to neatly divide the world into good and evil, rather than admitting that most people, things, and actions involve a mix of both. People tend to imagine the perfect enemy and then righteously pursue it, without recognizing that their own actions might be just as corrupt as the ones they decry. Thus, Anslinger was just taking advantage of the natural human tendency to try to solve complex problems by simplifying them.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ There would be many more bullets, but I was going to learn on my journey that Arnold Rothstein has not yet died. Every time he is killed, a harder and more vicious version of him emerges to fill the space provided by prohibition for a global criminal industry. Arnold Rothstein is the start of a lineup of criminals that runs through the Crips and the Bloods and Pablo Escobar to Chapo Guzman—each more vicious because he was strong enough to kill the last.

[…]

And I was going to see that, like Rothstein, Harry Anslinger is reincarnated in ever-tougher forms, too. Before this war is over, his successors were going to be deploying gunships along the coasts of America, imprisoning more people than any other society in human history, and spraying poisons from the air across foreign countries thousands of miles away from home to kill their drug crops.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Arnold Rothstein , Harry Anslinger , Billie Holiday , Edward Williams , Henry Smith Williams

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 57-58

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the first section of his book, Hari explains how the characters he has introduced so far—particularly Harry Anslinger and Arnold Rothstein, but also, to a lesser extent, Billie Holiday and the Williams brothers—became archetypes for the war on drugs. Over time, others have taken over their roles and repeated the patterns of conflict between them: new gangsters have taken over for Rothstein, new cops for Anslinger, new addicts for Holiday, and new doctors and activists for the Williams brothers. The gangsters have fought the cops, both have trampled on the addicts, and the doctors' expertise has fallen on deaf ears. And over time, these newcomers take their predecessors' tendencies even further.

This means that the war on drugs has become far more extreme and aggressive, especially when it comes to the conflict between criminals and gangsters. In this passage, Hari explains why: the drug war rewards violence and cruelty because it's ruled by brute force, not by law or agreement. Violence is the best way to gain a share of the drug market—so the most violent criminals gain the most power in it. Each criminal who has taken over from Rothstein has done so by raising the stakes, and each drug warrior who has taken over from Anslinger has responded by doing the same. The war on drugs continues to escalate, and every year it gets closer and closer to spiraling entirely out of control.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ For Chino, the war on drugs was not a metaphor. It was a battlefield onto which he woke and on which he slept.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Chino Hardin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

The war on drugs isn't an immediate, tangible reality for the majority of people in the world today—including most of Hari's readers. Readers may even see the "war" part of the "war on drugs" as a metaphor—they might think that current policies, norms, and assumptions are

counterproductive because they treat drugs as an enemy to be eradicated. But in reality, the drug war is a true armed conflict led by the U.S. government, just as much as the U.S.'s wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It's true that, unlike those other wars, the drug war is spread around across the globe. It destroys plenty of lives and livelihoods but few cities and governments. It's motivated by profit and power, rather than ideology, and neither side stands to win if it ends (because anti-drug law enforcement will no longer have a reason to exist, and drug gangs will lose their primary source of revenue). Still, it is a war in the most literal sense of the word—and for many years, it has been a particularly deadly conflict in Mexico.

This is why Hari emphasizes that, for people like Chino Hardin, "the war on drugs was not a metaphor." The neighborhood where Chino lived and worked resembled a warzone for most of his life, and Chino lived like a soldier. He carried weapons, defended his territory, and always knew that he could kill or be killed at any moment. He had to constantly use the maximum possible violence to prevent people from crossing him, and this level of violence escalated every time someone else dared to outdo him. This way of life is the consequence of the U.S.'s drug policies, which have turned much of the country—and numerous other countries around the world—into literal war zones.

> "That one act of human compassion…I went into her cell and started talking to her. And all my shit stopped."

Related Characters: Chino Hardin (speaker), Deborah Hardin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Chino Hardin's life changed forever in prison. Although he had a girlfriend on the outside, he met a woman named Nicole on the inside and immediately fell in love with her. (At the time, Hardin was in a women's prison, since he didn't yet legally identify as a man.) But Hardin grew up on the drug war's front lines, in a neighborhood where showing weakness could be a death sentence. Thus, he only knew how to deal with his emotions one way: through aggression. So, he taunted and threatened Nicole.

Then, Hardin learned that his girlfriend had been attacked. He was overwhelmed, but he didn't know how to deal with those emotions, either. Fortunately, Nicole approached him with compassion and empathy. It was the first time in Chino's life that someone treated him that way. When he says that everything "stopped," he means that he learned to cope with his emotions in new ways. He came to understand how trauma had driven him to aggression and violence, and he eventually gave up the drug trade to become a policy reform activist instead.

In other words, Nicole's compassion was infectious: it taught Chino that he could deal with his own emotions (and his relationships) through compassion, which showed him how society as a whole could use compassion to heal the scars caused by the drug trade. Therefore, this anecdote captures how the drug war's culture of cruelty deeply shapes the lives of the people who live through it, but also how they can overcome that cruelty by making sincere, compassionate connections with the people around them.

> There will always be some people who are violent and disturbed and sadistic—but human beings respond to incentives. In Chino's neighborhood, the financial incentives for a kid like him were to step up the violence and the sadism—because if he did, he would have a piece of one of the biggest and most profitable industries in America, and if he didn't, he would be shut out and left in poverty.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Chino Hardin , Arnold Rothstein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80-82

Explanation and Analysis

Through his interviews with Chino Hardin, Hari learns how prohibition fuels violence at every level of the drug trade. When drugs can be bought, sold, and used legally, the companies who supply them get to compete in a free market—each can sell according to the same regulations, and the one who provides the best product at the best price gets rewarded with the most customers. But when drugs are prohibited, the market regulates itself with violence—gangs replace corporations, and they use coercion and violence to capture their share of the market. As a result, these gangs tend to make more money the more violence they're willing to use, so the people who join them—like Chino Hardin—have a strong incentive to become as cruel and ruthless as they possibly can.

For people like Arnold Rothstein, Hari notes, coldhearted

sadism might be second nature. But for most people, it's not—instead, they have to learn it. Thus, the drug war drives young people toward violence and transforms the culture of entire social circles, neighborhoods, and even cities. Indeed, this same dynamic played out with alcohol prohibition a century ago, and all the evidence suggests that it will continue indefinitely, until governments finally admit that the drug war has failed and agree to legalize and regulate drugs instead.

Chapter 6 Quotes

More than 50 percent of Americans have breached the drug laws. Where a law is that widely broken, you can't possibly enforce it against every lawbreaker. The legal system would collapse under the weight of it. So you go after the people who are least able to resist, to argue back, to appeal—the poorest and most disliked groups. In the United States, they are black and Hispanic people, with a smattering of poor whites. You have pressure on you from above to get results. There has to be a certain number of busts, day after day, week after week. So you go after the weak. It's not like you are framing them—they are, in fact, breaking the law. You keep targeting the weak. And you try not to see the wider picture.

But then, for some people, it becomes inescapable.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Leigh Maddox , Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

When Hari interviews the former police chief Leigh Maddox, he learns why U.S. law enforcement almost exclusively targets Black and Latinx communities when enforcing drug laws—even though Americans of all groups use drugs at roughly similar rates. In short, the police know that these communities have the fewest resources, so their drug users are the lowest-hanging fruit. Arresting and incarcerating these people does virtually nothing to reduce drug use overall, but it's hugely profitable for police departments, who gain more prestige and resources the more people they arrest. Often, they have to fill arrest quotas. And in many states, they can even seize the property of anyone they arrest and sell it to fund the police budget. For instance, if the police find drugs in a car, they can sell the car and use the proceeds to pad their own paychecks. Thus, the police benefit from arresting as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, for the most minor offenses possible.

Just like the drug market's distorted incentives encourage the greatest possible violence, the police force's distorted incentives encourage predatory behavior targeting the most vulnerable members of society. In many places throughout the U.S., the police force effectively functions like an opportunistic gang that profits by systematically shaking down poor communities, using drugs as an excuse. Of course, this was precisely the segregated system that Harry Anslinger first designed. As a result of this system, poor and minority Americans are disproportionately punished for breaking drug laws.

But on I-95, Leigh began to see the act of pulling over a car to search it in a new way. Once, she saw this scene as a soldier in a just war approaching the enemy. Now she sees it as a meeting of people who are surrounded by ghosts. As he approaches the car, the police officer has ranged behind him the ghosts of all the cops he has known, "all the funerals he's been to, all the people who've been killed in traffic stops—because it's a lot," she says. And then "there's also this poor black kid" in the car. Sitting in the passenger seats behind him are his ghosts—all of his relatives and friends who have been killed in police raids or vanished into the American prison system.

Neither can see the other side's ghosts. They can only hate.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Leigh Maddox (speaker), Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

During her time on the Baltimore police force, Leigh Maddox gradually realized that her job really consisted of arresting young, impoverished Black men for the same actions that virtually everyone else could get away with—like buying and selling drugs. Once she learned this disturbing truth, she couldn't unsee it, and she began to understand that her actions were part of a broader social conflict: Harry Anslinger's futile, racist war on drugs. Her traffic stops were no longer about enforcing the law or achieving justice. The "ghosts" she began to see on these traffic stops, the people who have died needlessly on both sides because of the drug war, showed her that she was just making the latest move in a longstanding standoff between the Baltimore police and the mostly poor, mostly Black

communities that they spend nearly all their time and energy fighting. Neither side will ever win the game; the only solution is to abandon it altogether.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Harry Anslinger employed Joe Arpaio in 1957 to be an agent in the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, and he rose through the bureau over decades. Since 1993, he has been the elected sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona. He was eighty when I met him, and about to be elected to his sixth consecutive term. His Stetson, his shining yellow lawmaker's badge, and his sneer have become national symbols of a particular kind of funhouse-mirror Americana, and his hefty chunk of Arizona, home to nearly four million people, is now Harry Anslinger's last great laboratory. Sheriff Joe has built a jail that he refers to publicly as his "concentration camp," and presidential candidates flock here during election campaigns, emerging full of praise. Anslinger said addicts were "lepers" who needed to be "quarantined," and so Arpaio has built a leper colony for them in the desert.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Joe Arpaio (speaker), Harry Anslinger , Rosalio Reta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

After exploring how the drug war creates perverse incentives that push well-meaning people like Chino Hardin and Leigh Maddox onto deadly battlefields, Hari looks at the most dedicated drug warriors of all. These are people who do not pretend to mean well, like the cartel killer Rosalio Reta and the notorious Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio. In this passage, Hari describes his first meeting with Arpaio, who learned Harry Anslinger's extreme methods directly from the source. For Arpaio, there's only one way to deal with drug addicts: by punishing them as harshly as possible.

Arpaio's goal isn't to deter addicts from continuing to use drugs (or potential addicts from trying them) through punishment. Rather, it's merely to give them what he believes they deserve. Thus, he's less like a well-intentioned friend who stages an intervention to try and help their addicted friend through tough love, and more like a judge who believes that his job is to separate out the virtuous from the unworthy, then punish the sinners with hell on Earth. He views addicts as subhuman creatures who don't deserve basic rights or dignity, and the majority of his constituents seem to agree with him. While a humane drug policy would help addicts quit drugs and improve their lives, Arpaio's focuses on harming them as much as possible. He proudly compares himself to the Nazis, with the implication that addicts *deserve* to be exterminated. As Hari points out, Arpaio's policies represent the drug war's extreme, sadistic tendency to present addiction as a moral failure and the law's job as destroying immoral people through force. Overcoming the drug war will require replacing this simple, black-and-white story about addiction with the far more complicated truth.

"[Marcia] was an addict…Addiction can be overcome with proper help. It ain't a jail thing." He believes the solution was to get her into "a mental hospital—that's probably what would have helped her. Get her whatever she needs—Xanax, morphine, to get her chemical imbalance right…Get her on the right meds. Show her some respect. Give her some working skills. Get her a GED so when she comes out she has a place, like a woman's shelter, [can] get a job…Give her respect, that's how it's supposed to be." [...] "If you're calm and cool and know you've got a life ahead of you that's going up the steps…if you know you're going up in the world, you're going to stay going up in the world."

Related Characters: Richard Husman (speaker), Marcia Powell , Joe Arpaio , Johann Hari

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Hari learns that a woman named Marcia Powell was literally cooked to death in one of Joe Arpaio's prisons (she was locked in a cage under the blazing Arizona sun), then nearly buried in an anonymous grave because the prison officials couldn't bother to track down her identity or contact her family. To try and understand how the U.S. policing and prison system reached such an extreme level of cruelty, Hari meets Powell's ex-boyfriend Richard Husman in Missouri. Husman tells Hari about Powell's tragic, traumatic life: she spent her teenage years as a homeless sex worker in Los Angeles, lost a boyfriend to suicide, and then had her first child taken away by Arizona social services. To cope with this pain, she started using drugs, but eventually, she met Husman and quit. Then, she was arrested on an old drug charge for possession of a very small amount of marijuana, and her life spiraled back downwards. She became addicted to meth and ended up living on the streets. Finally, she was

thrown into Arpaio's jail, where she died.

Husman blames the U.S. government—and particularly its punitive approach to drugs—for Powell's death. His experience with her proved that people can overcome drug addiction by finding love and connection with others. Thus, he argues that Powell would have never relapsed into addiction if Arizona's legal system had offered her resources and compassion instead of cruelty and indifference. Indeed, the case studies that Hari explores in the final section of his book suggest that Husman is right.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ At first, when the murders began, people would run in panic from the death scenes. Then it changed. They started to stop and stare. Then it changed again. They would just walk on by. As if it was normal. As if it was nothing. Because in Juárez, it was. People were training themselves not to see, to dismember the part of them that sees the dismembering.

But Juan and his teenage friends refused to live in a city where murder was ignored.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Juan Manuel Olguín

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Ciudad Juárez, which is located in the Mexican state of Chihuahua right on the border with the U.S., is arguably the city worst affected by drug violence in the entire world. Cartels use the city as a center of operations to traffic drugs over the border into the U.S. This extremely profitable business, coupled with the extreme violence used to manage it, has given the cartels enough power to buy out the state government. The majority of the city's legal economy operates on laundered drug money, murder is commonplace, and the government is powerless to stop it.

Hari points out that Juárez residents are all but used to seeing bodies in the street, and he explains how a young man named Juan Manuel Olguín is leading a movement to protest the city's lawlessness and violence. Juárez represents how deeply the drug war can transform its battlefields—it has irreversibly transformed the city's culture and left much of its population living in constant terror. But Juárez's people haven't chosen this—in fact, neither has its government. Instead, the U.S. government has imposed the drug war on Mexico, and only the U.S. can stop it by finally legalizing drugs and cutting off the cartels' economic livelihood.

❝ If you are the first to kill your rivals' relatives, including their pregnant women, you get a brief competitive advantage: people are more scared of your cartel and they will cede more of the drug market to you. Then every cartel does it: it becomes part of standard practice. If you are the first to behead people, you get a brief competitive advantage. Then every cartel does it. If you are the first to behead people on camera and post it on YouTube, you get a brief competitive advantage. Then every cartel does it. If you are the first to mount people's heads on pikes and display them in public, you gain a brief competitive advantage. Then every cartel does it. If you are the first to behead a person, cut off his face, and sew it onto a soccer ball, you get a brief competitive advantage. And on it goes.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger , Arnold Rothstein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Over the course of Hari's research, the drug war in Mexico was only getting more and more violent. Its extraordinary cruelty far exceeded that of the drug war's early years in the U.S.—including that of notoriously sadistic figures like Harry Anslinger and Arnold Rothstein. This is doubly true in Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez, where drug cartels essentially run the government

Hari explains this escalating cycle of violence by returning to the basic principles of the black market: when there's no law to regulate competition, suppliers fight for power through violence. As he explains here, whoever uses the most violence gains the greatest competitive advantage. Thus, the drug war gives cartels a strong incentive not only to *use* violence but, more specifically, to constantly *escalate* the level of violence. This simple but troubling pattern explains why the black market drug trade continues to get worse and worse—and why the only solution is to end it entirely by bringing drugs into the legal, regulated market.

Chapter 10 Quotes

That is when Marisela heard rumors that started to make it possible to make sense of this whole story. Sergio, she was told, is a Zeta. That is why the police would not touch him. That is why he kept escaping. When Marisela got her final lead on where Sergio was, the police were finally honest with her. "If he's with the Zetas, we're not going to be able to do anything, because they run the state," they told her. "If we do a bust, it's because they allow us to do it. We don't bust people just like that." They were apologetic, but they explained that the Zetas give them money if they serve them and death if they don't.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Marisela Escobedo , Rubi Fraire , Sergio Barraza , Harry Anslinger , Billie Holiday , Henry Smith Williams , Edward Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Even after Marisela Escobedo proved that Sergio Barraza had killed her daughter, Rubi Fraire, she still couldn't get justice. The court acquitted Barraza, even though he confessed to the crime, and Marisela eventually learned why: Barraza belonged to the Zeta Cartel, which was so powerful that it had bought out the state and city governments. Therefore, state government officials—like the police and the judges on Barraza's case—had to choose between taking the cartel's money and becoming its newest targets. Needless to say, most chose the money.

Marisela Escobedo's case—and eventual murder—shows how cartels effectively run Juárez through extortion. Hari suggests that this is the drug war's fault: it hands the multibillion-dollar drug market to whichever organized criminal group manages to be the most violent, which inevitably enables them to undermine the rule of law. In fact, this kind of extortion isn't an exclusively Mexican phenomenon—rather, it's specific to the U.S.'s drug war. For instance, it's the way Harry Anslinger treated drug users like Billie Holiday, medical experts like the Williams brothers, and the leaders of other countries at the UN. On all sides, the drug war fuels serious corruption and violence, whether by the state or against it.

Chapter 11 Quotes

The United Nations says the war's rationale is to build "a drug-free world—we can do it!" U.S. government officials agree, stressing that "there is no such thing as recreational drug use." So this isn't a war to stop addiction, like that in my family, or teenage drug use. It is a war to stop drug use among all humans, everywhere. All these prohibited chemicals need to be rounded up and removed from the earth. That is what we are fighting for.

I began to see this goal differently after I learned the story of the drunk elephants, the stoned water buffalo, and the grieving mongoose. They were all taught to me by a remarkable scientist in Los Angeles named Professor Ronald K. Siegel.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Ronald K. Siegel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

The psychologist Ronald K. Siegel's research on drug use in the animal kingdom helps Hari understand how disconnected from reality the drug war's goals truly are. These goals aren't just unrealistic: they're impossible. The drug war has made zero progress toward its goals, and it has adopted some of the most counterproductive tactics imaginable to fight drug use.

But even if the drug war took all the right steps to truly fight drug use—like by providing high-quality treatment to everyone who needed it—it would never completely succeed. This is because, as Siegel's research suggests, drug use is a natural and inevitable part of human nature. Virtually all animals deliberately take intoxicating substances to deal with pain, and the historical record shows that humans have done the same for thousands of years. Putting aside the question of whether it even makes sense to eradicate all drugs, doing so would require fundamentally altering human nature. If drug war enforcers can't even decrease the amount of drugs circulating on the street, it's foolish, at best, to think that they can make people stop using drugs altogether.

All we see in the public sphere are the casualties. The unharmed 90 percent use in private, and we rarely hear about it or see it. The damaged 10 percent, by contrast, are the only people we ever see using drugs out on the streets. The result is that the harmed 10 percent make up 100 percent of the official picture. It is as if our only picture of drinkers were a homeless person lying in a gutter necking neat gin.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of his section on the science of drug use and addiction, Hari addresses the indisputable but counterintuitive fact that only 10 percent of drug users are addicted. As he explains here, most harmless drug use happens in private, whereas almost all publicly visible drug use is harmful addiction. Just like it would be understandable (but incorrect) for someone who never met a casual drinker to conclude that most drinkers are alcoholics, it's understandable (but incorrect) that most people associate drugs like meth, heroin, and crack with serious addiction rather than relatively harmless recreational use. And just like most people have tried alcohol in countries like the U.S. and U.K., but only a small minority are addicted, many more people have tried illegal drugs than are actually addicted to them.

Unfortunately, governments and other powerful institutions—most notably the U.S. government and the National Institute on Drug Abuse—deliberately push the myth that most drug users are addicted. But, to develop a more effective drug policy, Hari argues that the public must shed such myths and start believing in the true scientific evidence instead. He hopes that, by doing so, people can learn to focus on fighting the harms of *addiction* instead of continuing to wage a futile war on all drugs.

Chapter 12 Quotes

I knew what caused addiction before I even left London. We all do. As a culture, we have a story about how addiction works, and it's a good one. It says that some substances are so chemically powerful that if you use them enough, they will hijack your brain. They will change your neurochemistry. They will give you a brain disease. After that, you will need the drug physically. So if you or I or the next ten people you pass on the street were to use an addictive drug every day for the next month, on day thirty, we'd all be addicts. Addiction, then, is the result of repeated exposure to certain very powerful chemicals.

When I looked at the people I love who have become addicts, that is what I believed had happened to them.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger , Henry Smith Williams , Gabor Maté , Ronald K. Siegel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Hari explains why the pharmaceutical theory of addiction (the idea that drugs naturally hook people because the chemicals in them are so strong that the brain simply needs them to function normally) is clearly wrong. However, he notes that most people—and even most scientists—continue to push this narrative.

To be clear, these scientists favor the pharmaceutical theory of addiction because they study the *pharmaceutical* side of drugs, and not the *addiction* side. For instance, a scientist might study cocaine's effect on the brain, see that it has addictive chemical properties, and then conclude that these chemical properties are the *only* reason people become addicted to cocaine, without doing any empirical research on actual drug addicts. But sugar, gambling, and shopping also have addictive properties—and most people who try those things don't become addicts. This is because, as the scientists who actually study addiction have found, people's individual psychological needs determine whether they form addictions far more than drugs themselves do.

One night, Hannah came back to the Portland shaking, with blood seeping from a blow to her head. "I remember picking her up and holding her in my arms like a little child" and carrying her to her room, Liz told me. Hannah stammered that she had been beaten and raped. "And I remember just listening to her say to me, over and over again, 'It's my fault. I deserve this. It's my fault. I'm a bad person.'" And on the little table beside Hannah, there was her alcohol, and her heroin, and a needle. And Liz—who has never wanted to use drugs—looked at them and looked at Hannah and thought:

"Which of these things on your bedside table can I give you to take your pain away?"

"And that was the moment I understood what addiction did for people," she tells me.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Liz Evans (speaker), Hannah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Liz Evans, the nurse who founded Vancouver's innovative Portland Hotel Society housing program for drug addicts, tells Hari about a haunting encounter with one of her residents, a severely traumatized addict named Hannah. After helping Hannah back to her room and empathizing with her severe pain, Evans clearly understood for the first time why trauma drives people to drugs. Hannah could stay sober and confront the unbearable pain of what she had just experienced—plus the endless pain of all of her similar experiences in the past. But simply contemplating the pain wouldn't make it go away. Drugs, on the other hand, would.

Following the scientific evidence and taking addicts' trauma seriously forces us to reconsider the meaning of addiction. Where addiction is generally viewed as an irrational loss of control, in reality, it's a rational response to pain, and it's one of an addict's only ways to feel *in* control. Similarly, removing drugs won't necessarily make an addict's life better if they're using those drugs to fulfill a specific need—and especially if that need is the need to feel relief from trauma. Thus, solving addiction isn't as simple as just taking away drugs. Instead, it requires teaching addicts highly effective alternate strategies for managing their pain and confronting their trauma.

Chapter 13 Quotes

If your environment is like Rat Park—a safe, happy community with lots of healthy bonds and pleasurable things to do—you will not be especially vulnerable to addiction. If your environment is like the rat cages—where you feel alone, powerless and purposeless—you will be.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Bruce Alexander , Gabor Maté

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

In Vancouver, Hari learns about the psychologist Bruce Alexander's research, which corroborates physician Gabor Maté's findings about addiction and individual psychology. Just as Maté found that addiction is generally a rational response to trauma and suffering, Alexander concluded that addiction is the product of an unhealthy, isolating *environment*. Of course, trauma and unenriching environments tend to go hand-in-hand: people who grow up in adverse circumstances may struggle to form bonds and find meaningful projects later on in life. At the same time, enriching environments can help people overcome early trauma, while extended isolation can have effects similar to trauma.

Alexander reached his conclusion about the environmental influences on addiction through a famous study called "Rat Park." When he learned about studies showing that lab rats will self-administer cocaine until they kill themselves, Alexander began to wonder whether the cocaine itself was truly responsible for their addiction. He hypothesized that *isolation* might be the rats' true problem, and so he devised an experiment. For a control group of rats, he repeated the original rat experiment. Then, he put an experimental group of rats in a highly enriching environment called "Rat Park." Sure enough, the caged rats used and became addicted to drugs at far higher rates than the rats who were in "Rat Park." This supported his theory that addiction isn't just a response to the chemical triggers in drugs, but rather an adaptation to an insufficiently interesting, meaningful, and enriching environment.

Professor Peter Cohen, a friend of Bruce's, writes that we should stop using the word "addiction" altogether and shift to a new word: "bonding." Human beings need to bond. It is one of our most primal urges. So if we can't bond with other people, we will find a behavior to bond with, whether it's watching pornography or smoking crack or gambling. If the only bond you can find that gives you relief or meaning is with splayed women on a computer screen or bags of crystal or a roulette wheel, you will return to that bond obsessively.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Bruce Alexander

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

When Hari interviews Bruce Alexander in Vancouver, he learns about Peter Cohen's striking theory of addiction. Just like all other sorts of human behavior, Cohen argues, addiction is a form of *bonding*. Whereas most people bond with other human beings, the specific places and communities where they live, and/or the work that they do, addicts bond with a compulsive behavior instead.

Cohen's idea is particularly significant because it shows that there's no revolutionary difference between addiction and other human behaviors, whether obsessive (like compulsive gambling or exercise) or totally ordinary (like devotion to one's family and work). All of these behaviors are strategies for forming attachments, and while some are more socially accepted than others, they all achieve the same fundamental purpose: they give people's lives meaning and direction.

Moreover, Cohen's idea also has telling implications for how people can *overcome* addiction. If addiction is really just an unhealthy kind of bond, but other kinds of bonds can fulfill the same purpose, then the solution to addiction is to form healthier, constructive bonds with people or projects. Bonding with drugs tends to be harmful and destructive in the long term—unlike other people, drugs don't love anyone back.

Almost all the funding for research into illegal drugs is provided by governments waging the drug war—and they only commission research that reinforces the ideas we already have about drugs. All these different theories, with their radical implications—why would governments want to fund those? […] [Eric Sterling] told me that if any government-funded scientist ever produced research suggesting anything beyond the conventional drugs-hijack-brains theory, […] the head of NIDA would be called before a congressional committee and asked if she had gone mad. She might be fired. She would certainly be stopped. All the people conducting the science for NIDA—and remember, that's 90 percent of research on the globe into illegal drugs—know this.

So they steer away from all this evidence and look only at the chemical effects of the drugs themselves. That's not fake—but it's only a small part of the picture.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Carl Hart (speaker), Bruce Alexander , Robert DuPont , Gabor Maté , Harry Anslinger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

Hari notes that the researchers he has interviewed, like Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander, have relatively little influence on the scientific community as a whole or its view of addiction. Yet they are some of the only scientists who actually study real-life addiction. In contrast, most of the mainstream scientists who overlook or reject their work in favor of the "drugs-hijack-brains" theory of addiction study the chemical effects of drugs in isolated laboratory settings, rather than the more complex forces that lead to addiction itself. For instance, while Bruce Alexander's "Rat Park" experiments definitively showed that environment predicts addiction more than the addictive effects of drugs themselves do, mainstream drug researchers largely ignored his results and continued peddling the theories he disproved.

To understand why the best research on addiction keeps getting marginalized, Hari turns to the world-renowned neuroscientist Carl Hart and the drug policy expert Eric Sterling, who wrote U.S. federal drug laws throughout the 1980s. Both blame the problem on drug research's politicized funding mechanisms and the distorted incentives the create for scientists. The vast majority of drug research money comes from the U.S. government and its National Institute on Drug Abuse, which is strongly committed to the drug war. Drug researchers who challenge the "drugs-hijack-brains theory" would face severe political

consequences, so most choose to steer clear and focus on research that doesn't actually challenge this inaccurate conventional wisdom about addiction. As a result, the U.S. government continues to distort the scientific conversation about addiction in order to fuel the counterproductive drug war—just as it has done ever since Harry Anslinger launched that drug war in the first place.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"To see people's faces and how they changed—they saw, I have worth, I have value. I'm able to help somebody else. I'm no longer just what they call me in the newspapers. […] If we're off demonstrating, we're having board meetings deciding what to do, and thinking about what our next actions could be, how is so and so doing, how can we help so and so because he got busted again—all that's taking you away from just being totally fixed on 'I got to get a drug, I got to get a drug, drug drug drug.'"

Related Characters: Bud Osborn (speaker), Bruce Alexander

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

Bud Osborn, the Vancouver activist who founded VANDU, noticed that political organizing didn't just help his fellow addicts win more political rights and recognition—it also changed the way they viewed themselves and their role in society. Before organizing, when they essentially lived on the street, these addicts felt isolated from the others around them, completely marginalized by mainstream society, and powerless to change their circumstances. But VANDU connected them with one another and gave them important work to do, which helped them develop a sense of purpose and find alternatives to using drugs.

Notably, scientists like Bruce Alexander argue that addiction is fundamentally a disease of disconnection, powerlessness, and loneliness. VANDU transformed addicts' lives by helping solve all these problems: it brought them community, connection, power, and meaningful work. In other words, working for political change was actually the best way for addicts to overcome the problems that trapped them in the cycle of addiction and despair. In addition to giving them the power to improve their own living conditions through policy, this activism also helped improve those conditions directly by giving addicts something to bond to and live for besides their addictions.

Chapter 15 Quotes

Suddenly, the slightly depressing debate at the start of the drug war between Harry Anslinger and Henry Smith Williams—prohibition forever versus prescription forever—seems bogus. But in this clinic, they have discovered that that isn't the real choice. If you give hard-core addicts the option of a safe legal prescription and allow them to control the dose, the vast majority will stabilize and then slowly reduce their drug consumption over time. Prescription isn't an alternative to stopping your drug use. It is—for many people—a path to it.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger , Henry Smith Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

When Hari visits Liverpool and Switzerland, he learns how an unusual approach to drug treatment—simply prescribing heroin to addicts—has enabled heroin addicts to live long, healthy, productive lives. It turns out that drug *prohibition* is what makes street heroin so dangerous, the heroin trade so violent, and heroin addiction so time-consuming and expensive. But when addicts can get clean, safe, inexpensive heroin through the medical system, these problems vanish. People can take this safe heroin for decades while holding ordinary jobs, raising families, and fulfilling all their responsibilities. But most don't stick with the program for decades, because they manage to quit heroin in the process.

This result transforms Hari's thinking and shows him that he has been thinking about the drug war all wrong. Decriminalizing or legalizing drugs would not necessarily encourage addicts to just keep using drugs forever—instead, it would actually give them the safety and resources that they need to quit. Thus, drug warriors who think that decriminalization or legalization would encourage drug use fundamentally misunderstand what actually drives (and puts an end to) addiction. When the real science is taken into account, it becomes clear that the best way to wage a war on drug use and addiction is actually by legalizing and regulating drugs, so that addicts can learn to stop using them.

Just as when all legal routes to alcohol were cut off, beer disappeared and whisky won, when all legal routes to opiates are cut off, Oxy disappears, and heroin prevails. This isn't a law of nature, and it isn't caused by the drug—it is caused by the drug policy we have chosen. After the end of alcohol prohibition, White Lightning vanished—who's even heard of it now?—and beer went back to being America's favorite alcoholic drink. There are heroin addicts all across the United States today who would have stayed happily on Oxy if there had been a legal route to it.

This is worth repeating, because it is so striking, and we hear it so rarely, despite all the evidence. The war on drugs makes it almost impossible for drug users to get milder forms of their drug—and it pushes them inexorably toward harder drugs.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

Hari argues that one important reason why drug addiction and overdose deaths continue to increase in countries like the U.S. is because of "the iron law of prohibition." This principle states that when a substance is prohibited, stronger and more dangerous versions of that substance will gradually come to dominate the market. This happens because drug suppliers inevitably benefit from trafficking more concentrated substances: just like a liter of liquor fetched a far higher price than a liter of beer during the era of alcohol prohibition, today, crack and heroin are more profitable to manufacture, transport, and sell than their tamer counterparts, like powder cocaine and morphine.

This process repeats over time. Whenever drug criminals find a new, stronger option, they quickly take over the market—until all their rivals are doing the same. Thus, to gain a competitive advantage in the drug market, organized criminals always need to try and stay a step ahead, so they are constantly pushing stronger medicines into the market.

Hari cites the iron law primarily to explain why the U.S.'s opiate epidemic continues to worsen: when addicts lose their legal access to opiates like Oxycontin, they switch to street drugs—and often, the only thing available is heroin. But he also cites the iron law in order to illustrate the problems with criminalizing drugs in general—which often achieves the opposite of its intended effect of reducing drug-related crime, serious addiction, and overdoses.

Chapter 16 Quotes

In his office, Goulão told me there were two dimensions to Portugal's drug revolution. The panel didn't simply lift the legal penalties and leave people to it. They took the big, lumbering machinery of the drug war and turned it into an equally big, active machine to establish a drug peace. "The big effect of decriminalization," he said, "was to make it possible to develop all the other policies." In the United States, 90 percent of the money spent on drug policy goes to policing and punishment, with 10 percent going to treatment and prevention. In Portugal, the ratio is the exact opposite.

Related Characters: Johann Hari , João Goulão (speaker), Chino Hardin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

After learning about Portugal's revolutionary model of drug criminalization firsthand, Hari concludes that it is the best alternative to the war on drugs. While Portugal hasn't *legalized* drugs (meaning that selling them is still illegal), it has *decriminalized* drugs (meaning that possessing them isn't illegal).

While Hari eventually goes on to argue for legalization and regulation above decriminalization, but he doesn't think that any of the places that have legalized marijuana so far have built systems anywhere near as effective as Portugal's. As he explains in this chapter, the key to Portugal's system isn't that it chooses not to prosecute drug users as criminals, but rather to provide them with the medical, psychological, and social care they desperately need instead. Decriminalization is a necessary but insufficient first step toward shifting focus to "treatment and prevention" instead of "policing and punishment." Yet Portugal has managed to do both, which explains why Hari believes it has set the global bar for effective drug policy.

> We all—the vast majority of drug warriors, and the vast majority of legalizers—have a set of shared values. We all want to protect children from drugs. We all want to keep people from dying as a result of drug use. We all want to reduce addiction. […] When we move beyond the drug war, we will be able to achieve those shared goals with much greater success.
>
> At the start of my journey, I set out to find an answer to a contradiction within myself, and within our culture—between the impulse to be compassionate to addicts, and the impulse to crush and destroy our addictive impulses. Now, at last, I see—and really feel—that it is not a contradiction at all. A compassionate approach *leads* to less addiction. […] This isn't a debate about values. It's a debate about how to achieve those values.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Harry Anslinger , João Figueira

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

When Hari meets the high-ranking Portuguese policeman João Figueira, he is surprised to realize that most law enforcement agents have the same basic goals as the activists who fight the drug war. They agree that it's crucial to reduce addiction, suffering, and death, but they disagree about how to do so. For instance, Figueira opposed Portugal's decriminalization law because he thought it would increase the harms associated with drug use, but it actually did the opposite. Tellingly, Figueira changed his mind and began supporting decriminalization once he truly understood its effects. And others will certainly do the same, Hari thinks, if they're able to see the overwhelming evidence that decriminalization works and the drug war doesn't. Thus, Hari concludes that the conflict between the prohibitionists and the reformers is really not a conflict at all—instead, it's a misunderstanding, in which the prohibitionists falsely believe that cruelty and violence will reduce addiction (when, in reality, these methods *increase* addiction).

Chapter 17 Quotes

> This isn't a vision in which we lose control of drugs, Danny and Steve argue—it's a vision in which we gain control, at last. Legalization is the only way of introducing regulation to the drug market. If this were done, the people selling drugs wouldn't be shooting each other, any more than your local neighborhood barkeeps send hit men to slaughter each other. The users would know what they were taking. And through taxation, we would have a huge new revenue stream to educate kids and invest in reducing the real causes of addiction.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

Readers may picture drug legalization as a free-for-all, in which people could obtain and use any drugs with virtually no obstacles or oversight. But this couldn't be further from the truth—instead, Hari suggests that it would actually be closer to how things look now, under prohibition. As drug policy experts Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles explain, legalization is the only way to truly regulate drugs. When drugs remain illegal, they're far more expensive, dangerous, and unreliable. In the black market, there are no legal rules, so people enforce their power and claim rights over others through violence. But drug legalization gives the government the power to regulate drug markets, end this violence, and deliver consumers better, safer products.

Thus, rather than thinking about legalization as merely opening up the metaphorical floodgates and surrendering society to drugs, Kushlick and Rolles suggest that readers should picture it as a way to add regulations and quality control standards to the existing drug market. As Hari explains here, the consequences of such a shift would be profound. It may even make the drug trade safe and socially beneficial for the first time ever.

Chapter 18 Quotes

With legalization, the fevered poetry of the drug war has turned into the flat prose of the drug peace. Drugs have been turned into a topic as banal as selling fish, or tires, or lightbulbs.

As Barbara speaks, all the killing—from Arnold Rothstein to Chino's gang to the Zetas—is being replaced by contracts. All the guns are being replaced by subordinate clauses. All the grief is being replaced by regulators and taxes and bureaucrats with clipboards.

[…]

I am bored at last, and I realize a tear of relief is running down my cheek.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Arnold Rothstein , Chino Hardin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of his book, Hari interviews one of the Colorado bureaucrats who is responsible for implementing the state's new legal marijuana law. After three years learning about harrowing stories of death, addiction, and trauma in the drug war, Hari finds himself learning about the boring details of Colorado's new policies. While he may not love the boredom itself, he's relieved to recognize what it means: the drug war will end as drugs become just another ordinary regulatory issue for politicians and bureaucrats to debate.

When drugs are legalized and regulated, drug policy may still have life-and-death consequences, but it won't be able to ruin and end thousands of innocent lives every year, like it does now. Reformers and drug warriors might still debate how to run the legalized drug market, but they will no longer be killing addicts who use drugs to cope with pain or funneling billions of dollars in drug money to criminal gangs. Thus, the fact that drug policy can become boring means that the drug war's harms can be stopped, and future generations can be spared from its wrath and cruelty.

Conclusion Quotes

I didn't threaten to sever the connection: I promised to deepen it.
As I write this, he is passed out on my spare bed. […] I looked him just now, lying there, his face pallid again, and as I stroked his hair, I think I understood something for the first time. The opposite of addiction isn't sobriety. It's connection. It's all I can offer. It's all that will help him in the end. If you are alone, you cannot escape addiction. If you are loved, you have a chance. For a hundred years we have been singing war songs about addicts. All along, we should have been singing love songs to them.

Related Characters: Johann Hari (speaker), Hari's Ex-Boyfriend , Hari's Relative

Related Themes:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

In his conclusion, Hari explains how he uses his newfound knowledge about drugs and addiction to help the addicts in his life: his relative, who quits using drugs; his ex-boyfriend, who repeatedly relapses; and himself. But he's most concerned about his ex. Having learned that love and connection are the only ways to truly overcome addiction, Hari decides that he will show his ex a pathway out of addiction by offering him support. If he simply staged an intervention—like so many people do for their addicted friends and family members—he would risk further isolating his ex, depriving him of the human connections that are actually his greatest lifeline. This is how the drug war has tried to fight addiction for a century, and it has failed. Hari's actions show that even individuals can fight addiction by refusing to follow the drug war's prescriptions and loving addicts despite their addiction, not abandoning them because of it.

I try now to picture Harry as the first dose of opiates washes through his system and it makes him still and calm. What does he think in that moment? Does he think of Henry Smith Williams and Billie Holiday and his order to his agents to "shoot first" when they saw drugs? Does he think of the scream he heard all those years before as a little boy in a farmhouse in Altoona, and of all the people he had made scream since in an attempt to scrub this sensation from the human condition—or does he, for a moment, with the drugs in his hand, hear, at last, the dying of the scream?

Related Characters: Johann Hari , Harry Anslinger (speaker), Henry Smith Williams , Billie Holiday

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

Hari ends *Chasing the Scream* by noting one of the greatest ironies in the history of global drug policy: Harry Anslinger, who almost singlehandedly started the war on drugs, died while medicated with opiates in the hospital. In other words, on his deathbed, he finally tried the chemicals that he had dedicated his entire life to eradicating. Hari wonders how Anslinger felt: did he let himself enjoy the drugs, or did he continue to hate them? Did he regret becoming a hypocrite, demonizing people for using the exact same substances that he was using, too? Did he realize that his own ideas about drugs, which were based on seeing his neighbor scream through hysterical withdrawal many decades before, didn't match up with the reality?

Of course, Hari doesn't think that anyone can know what Anslinger really thought. Instead, he uses Anslinger's final, drugged-up moments to address central questions about the past and future of the war on drugs. He uses it to reiterate his theory that the drug war has always been an exaggerated response to exaggerated fear—including Anslinger's fear of drug-induced hysteria, the American public's fear of unfamiliar substances and racial equality, and the rest of the world's fear of the U.S. He also uses it to ask whether people like Anslinger can ever truly confront the fears that drive them to fight the war on drugs and learn to accept the scientific evidence about drugs and addiction. And finally, perhaps most importantly, Hari uses Anslinger's final moments to ask whether the world—and particularly the U.S.'s citizens and leaders—will allow his disastrous, unspeakably cruel policies to continue. Of course, Hari hopes that we can all "hear [...] the dying of the scream," or the end of the war on drugs.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

While watching a close relative and ex-boyfriend battle addiction, Johann Hari develops a drug habit of his own: he starts taking narcolepsy pills to fuel days-long writing binges. He has often surrounded himself with addicts, whom he calls "my tribe, my group, my people." Nearly every country wages a war on drugs and treats addicts as criminals. Hari has long opposed this approach, but he is actually replicating it by criticizing and punishing himself for his pill habit.

Hari starts by describing his personal connection to the drug war. This explains his interest in the topic and helps him connect with his readers—who may have picked up a book about the drug war because they, too, have personal connections to addiction or drug violence. These anecdotes also show that Hari doesn't take drugs lightly: he deeply understands the suffering that addiction can cause, so he cares deeply about finding the best solutions for it. For Hari, like for most people living in modern Western societies, the drug war is a deeply ingrained part of everyday life—so much so that it's easy to forget that drugs haven't always been illegal, and drug addicts haven't always been treated as criminals.

One morning, Hari decides to learn about the bigger picture of the war on drugs. He throws away his pills and flies to New York City to start interviewing experts—but his journey will ultimately span nine countries over three years. In the process, he will meet a diverse cast of characters who will show him that most popular assumptions about drugs, drug addiction, and the war on drugs simply don't match up with reality.

In addition to presenting the vast range of topics that Chasing the Scream *will cover, Hari explains why he structures the book around the stories of the individuals he interviewed and researched. Together, these stories offer a diverse, memorable picture of all sides of the drug war. Hari doesn't pretend that these people agree on everything—but he will show that they* do *agree on certain key points about how drug policy ought to work.*

CHAPTER 1: THE BLACK HAND

When Hari arrives in New York and begins interviewing experts, he learns that the war on drugs didn't start with President Nixon or Reagan in the 1970s or 1980s. Instead, it started decades before, with a man named Harry Anslinger. Hari visits Penn State University to look through Anslinger's archives, and he learns about how three key figures became part of the war on drugs. The first is Anslinger himself. In 1904, when Anslinger was 12, his neighbor began **screaming** uncontrollably. He rushed to bring her medicine from the pharmacy. She recovered, but her screams convinced Anslinger that drugs turn a certain subset of the population into hysterical, vicious degenerates.

Hari began his research with a misconception that most of his readers are likely to share: he thought that modern U.S. drug policy started in the 1970s, most likely because President Nixon coined the term "war on drugs" in 1971. But in reality, Nixon was just building on Harry Anslinger's longstanding policies. Meanwhile, Anslinger's childhood encounter with his neighbor shows how personal experiences deeply shape people's perspectives on drug abuse—often far more than the actual scientific evidence about drugs. When these people gain political power, their experiences can lead them to transform structures that affect millions of other people's lives.

The second key figure is Arnold Rothstein. After nearly murdering his own brother as a toddler, Rothstein entered the illegal drug trade and grew up to become a vicious killer. The third key figure, Billie Holiday, spent her childhood helping clean a local brothel because the madam agreed to pay her by letting her listen to jazz records. But Holiday also suffered abuse there, and she turned to heroin to deal with the pain.

If Anslinger represents the politicians and law enforcement officers who lead the war on drugs, then Rothstein represents the violent gangsters who profit from it. Meanwhile, Holiday represents the addicts who use drugs to deal with their own pain and suffering, then get drawn into the crossfire between the Anslingers and Rothsteins of the world. This pattern has held remarkably consistent over the years—most of the people Hari meets on his journey are living out the legacy of either Anslinger, Rothstein, or Holiday.

Hari notes that drugs like heroin and cocaine were widely available in the U.S. until 1914, when the government addressed Americans' collective anxieties about drugs by outlawing and destroying them through the Harrison Act. In 1939, Billie Holiday famously began singing "Strange Fruit," a haunting song about lynching that helped launch the civil rights movement. Then, Harry Anslinger's Federal Bureau of Narcotics started harassing her—and eventually helped to kill her.

Drug prohibition is not an inevitable or natural policy choice—rather, there was a time before it. During this time, cocaine and heroin were legally available but clearly didn't cause widespread addiction or unrest. Moreover, Hari's research suggests that the U.S. didn't truly outlaw drugs because of evidence that they're harmful—instead, drugs were merely the government's excuse to use law enforcement to repress racial minorities (especially Black people). As Hari will later explain, the Harrison Act was the result of a manufactured racist panic about Black "cocaine fiends," while Anslinger sought to arrest Billie Holiday because he feared that her public activism would help topple Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws in the South.

When Anslinger took over the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the old Department of **Prohibition**, he had a tiny office and virtually no power. He used the Bureau to pursue his lifelong dream: to "eradicate all drugs, everywhere." In just three decades, he transformed the agency and launched the war on drugs.

Anslinger shows how power-hungry people can often set policy according to their own biases and priorities. The public may think that official policies are designed and vetted by trustworthy experts who know what they're doing, but Hari continuously warns his readers against falling into this assumption. In the war on drugs, it couldn't be further from the truth.

As a teenager, Harry Anslinger supervised a team of Sicilian railroad workers who frequently whispered about the "Black Hand" (a Mafia extortion racket). When one of the workers got shot, he explained the racket to Anslinger, who swore revenge against the Mafia and started obsessively researching it—even though most Americans, including law enforcement, didn't even think it was real.

Anslinger's experience with the Mafia explains why he brought a personal vendetta against organized crime to his work at the Bureau of Narcotics. It also shows how he obsessively held and pursued grudges. Meanwhile, U.S. law enforcement's consensus that the Mafia didn't exist shows how disconnected official policy can be from reality. Needless to say, Hari thinks that the drug war is another example of this same phenomenon.

During World War I, Anslinger worked as a diplomat in Europe. Part of his job was to send heroin-addicted sailors home—and this made him hate drugs even more. At the end of the war, he also had to deliver a secret message to the German Emperor—but he arrived too late, and he long blamed himself for Germany's postwar instability. All around him, he saw European cities reduced to rubble and starving people reduced to political violence. Later, during **Prohibition**, Anslinger worked in the Bahamas, fighting a war on alcohol smugglers. Then, Anslinger married into a wealthy, well-connected family that got him his job at the helm of the struggling Bureau of Narcotics.

Anslinger's experiences during the war shaped his approach to drugs at the Bureau of Narcotics. Already convinced that drugs ruin people's lives, Anslinger didn't bother to ask whether heroin actually caused *the soldiers' problems—rather, he just viewed their problems as further evidence that drugs needed to be eliminated. Meanwhile, his error with the German Emperor convinced him that he could change the course of history if he acted decisively enough, and his travels through Europe gave him a clear sense of how deeply modern societies can fall into disarray. He came to view the drug war as a way to save the U.S. in lieu of saving Europe. Finally, his path to government—through his marriage—shows that modern societies don't necessarily allocate power to the most capable or deserving people. Again, Anslinger's life story shows that it's dangerous to assume that people in power are rational or competent.*

To get more resources for the Bureau, Anslinger decided to wage war on marijuana, which was disproportionately used by Black and Mexican people. Despite having clear scientific evidence that marijuana use isn't harmful, Anslinger started telling the public that marijuana causes insanity and violence. Countless doctors approached him to explain that he was wrong, but he dismissed and threatened them. He directed the press to report on Victor Lacata, a man who murdered his family after allegedly smoking marijuana. In reality, Lacata had a lifelong history of serious psychosis, and his doctors never even noted marijuana use.

Anslinger openly used racist lies and fearmongering for his own political gain. Even though his agency was supposed to reduce *drug addiction and violence, in reality, the problem worsened as the Bureau got more power and resources. This shows how power can create perverse incentives: Anslinger actually benefited when drug addiction and violence got* worse. *It also shows how power can trump science: Anslinger's racist propaganda became the common wisdom about marijuana. Modern readers might be familiar with the scientific research showing that marijuana isn't seriously harmful, but they are unlikely to know that this research has existed since before marijuana was even outlawed.*

Yet Anslinger's plan worked: the public was frightened, and the government started pouring money into the Bureau of Narcotics. Anslinger's campaign was also based around racism: he publicly claimed that marijuana would make Black men attack white women. Meanwhile, he aggressively attacked his critics—he fired an agent who complained about his use of racial slurs, and he concocted false criminal allegations against scientists who disagreed with him.

Anslinger ran the Bureau like a dictator: he used the law to accumulate power and crush his opponents, not to actually benefit the people he was supposed to protect and serve. Worse, he got away with it, and his racism and political self-interest became the foundation for the drug policies that still exist today. Indeed, there's a clear, direct link between the racist foundations of the drug war in Anslinger's time and the racist way it's still fought today. Again, Anslinger's story wholly disproves the common assumption that drug policy has anything to do with the actual science about drugs.

Anslinger was also fixated on Billie Holiday. (When investigating this connection, Hari manages to meet Holiday's godson and get access to her unpublished writings.) Unsurprisingly, Anslinger hated jazz—not only was it about improvisation and cultural mixture, but its greatest proponents were Black marijuana smokers. Anslinger tried to get them all arrested, but he couldn't assemble enough evidence, so he went after one specific person instead: Billie Holiday.

Anslinger's crusade against Holiday shows how he used the war on drugs as a tool to pursue unrelated priorities that the government couldn't openly announce—like maintaining white people's political and cultural supremacy in the U.S. He went after Billie Holiday in order to turn her into a symbol of sin and criminality. He hoped that this would counter jazz's growing cultural power, which posed a challenge to segregation and white domination.

Billie Holiday grew up poor in segregated Baltimore. When she was 10, a neighbor raped her—she **screamed** and the police came, but they arrested *her*. They sent her to a brutal reform school, and she escaped and went to New York, where she started working alongside her mother as a prostitute. It was the only available work; she was only 14 and was nearly starving to death. Her vicious pimp Louis McKay beat her mercilessly, and she was sent back to prison. After getting out, she started drinking and doing drugs to numb her pain. She also started singing in Harlem bars. She became increasingly successful, but she was pressured into marrying McKay, who abused her and stole most of her money.

In addition to reflecting many of the injustices that Black Americans faced in the early 20th century, Billie Holiday's extremely traumatic early life also helps explain why she turned to drugs and alcohol. (Indeed, the connection between her personal life and her music is well-known.) Holiday's screams, like Anslinger's neighbor's, symbolizes this connection between drugs and deep psychological pain. The key question is whether drugs cause pain or are a response to them. (Holiday's experience suggests that it's the latter.)

Harry Anslinger hired the Black agent Jimmy Fletcher to bust Billie Holiday. Fletcher found that, while Holiday was using drugs, she also desperately wanted to quit. They became friends and stayed close—even after Fletcher admitted he was an agent, raided Holiday's apartment, and didn't find any drugs. In fact, he fell in love with her. But Anslinger still managed to get to Holiday. When Holiday finally broke up with Louis McKay, he furiously contacted Anslinger and agreed to help plant drugs on her and bust her. She went on trial and then to prison for a year. But worst of all, the government took away her performer's license, banning her from singing. She also struggled to form new friendships because she feared—rightly—that many of the people around her were undercover agents.

Holiday's real life didn't fit the narrative that Anslinger wanted to impose on her. Anslinger treated her as a remorseless criminal who simply broke the law for fun. But in reality, she was a lifelong victim of severe violence who was struggling to overcome the drug addiction she used to cope with that violence. Thus, Anslinger turned Holiday's suffering into an excuse for imposing even more suffering on her. This is an early example of a timeless pattern in the drug war: prohibition laws only worsen the pain, shame, and isolation that drive addicts to use drugs in the first place.

But Harry Anslinger didn't mind when white celebrities had drug problems—instead, he personally met with them and agreed to keep their secrets to protect their reputations. This was the point: the drug war was never originally about fighting addiction, as it claims to be today. Instead, it was about responding to white people's racist fears and sustaining their political power over non-white people.

In addition to showing that the drug war has always been a strategy for maintaining white people's domination over other races, Anslinger's racist double standard clarifies that he also knew the truth about drugs and addiction. Contrary to his public messaging, he didn't think that his white celebrity friends would turn into violent maniacs after taking drugs, because he knew that drugs didn't truly cause those effects. In fact, he was fully aware that people could be addicted to drugs and still live ordinary, productive lives—even when they faced significant public scrutiny.

This pattern started much earlier. For instance, the Harrison Act was partially a response to a series of sensationalistic articles about "negro cocaine 'fiends'" who allegedly became violent and extra-powerful when they consumed the drug. For the white public, it was easier to blame Black people's discontentment with U.S. politics on cocaine than on segregation. In the 1800s, white people's fear about economic competition from Chinese immigrants led to the outrageous myth that these immigrants were leading white girls into "opium dens" to rape them and hook them on drugs. White mobs massacred Chinese people, and then the government banned opium.

Drugs have long been a convenient, sensational excuse for racist violence, in part because most people know little about them. Thus, by linking drug policy to racism, Anslinger was actually continuing a long American tradition. The rhetoric that Hari cites here shows that the political elite wasn't deceiving *the public into supporting racist drug policies—rather, politicians won public support for these policies by explicitly marketing them as racist. In later chapters, Hari will show that this is still very much the case today.*

Hari returns to Harry Anslinger and Billie Holiday. To pursue Holiday, Anslinger hired the sadistic agent George White, who bragged about murdering suspects in cold blood. White planted drugs in Holiday's hotel room and arrested her, but she protested that she was sober and would submit to medical tests to prove it. This time, at trial, the jury found her not guilty. But she was still devastated.

White's behavior shows that Anslinger saw law enforcement not as a force for the common good, but rather as a powerful tool for advancing his own specific political agenda at any cost. While the courts ultimately served justice for Holiday, Anslinger still managed to humiliate and exhaust her through the legal process. This shows that law enforcement doesn't need to actually find *drugs in order to use the drug war as a tool for repressing the people they wish to target.*

A few years later, Holiday collapsed from a combination of malnourishment, cirrhosis, and heart and respiratory disease. But Anslinger's agents visited her in the hospital, planted heroin on her once again, and arrested her. She was chained to her hospital bed for weeks and banned from taking visitors. She recognized the absurdity of criminalizing addiction—and yet she also felt like she was a sinner, destined for hell. She died in her hospital bed, under police custody. Yet Hari concludes by noting that, despite its horrifying consequences, he understands Anslinger's impulse to save the world by destroying addiction.

Anslinger's vicious tactics again underline Hari's argument that the war on drugs was originally conceived as a tool for injustice. Anslinger wanted to punish Holiday as much as he possibly could—just like many nations still do to their addicts today. In fact, this passage serves as an important metaphor for the drug war as a whole: laws continue to punish sick, suffering drug users because they're based on the misconception that addiction can be crushed through force. But in reality, force does little to draw addicts away from drugs—instead, it only multiplies their suffering. Still, Holiday's internal conflict—like Hari's, which he described in the introduction—shows that drug addicts and their loved ones face the same conflict as Anslinger. Namely, they wonder if they can heal addiction through love or only destroy it through repression.

CHAPTER 2: SUNSHINE AND WEAKLINGS

In his papers, Harry Anslinger frequently ranted about his enemies, like Edward and Henry Williams. In his research, Hari discovers that these men were some of the drug war's first opponents. Henry Williams was a stern Los Angeles doctor who, like Anslinger, hated addicts and thought their lives had no value. But Williams claimed to discover shocking evidence that Anslinger wasn't *pursuing* the Mafia, but rather *working for* them—he was helping them corner the market for drugs by making them illegal.

It's easy to assume that doctors and researchers have only begun opposing the drug war in recent decades, as new evidence about drugs and prohibition has gradually shaped a new scientific consensus. But this assumption is wrong: the Williams brothers prove that there has always *been serious medical opposition to the drug war. Thus, the drug war did* not *spread because nobody knew better—rather, it spread because officials like Anslinger expressly chose to ignore the scientific evidence that disagreed with them. While unproven, Williams's accusation reveals an important truth about drug prohibition: it hands the market over to criminal gangs like the Mafia.*

In 1931, a heroin addict undergoing withdrawal visited Henry Williams's brother Edward, a doctor who specialized in opiate addition. Edward Williams wrote the man a prescription for heroin—which was common practice, as pure opiates taken under medical supervision aren't harmful to the body. But the addict was actually an undercover agent working for Anslinger. The police arrested Edward Williams—but his brother decided to fight back.

Edward Williams's practice shows that not only did some *doctors oppose the war on drugs, but there was actually a medical* consensus *about the safety of heroin before the government banned it. Thus, Anslinger arrested Williams for doing what was standard medical practice at the time.*

Henry Williams knew that before opiates like heroin were illegal, patients frequently bought them from pharmacies and used them without issue. Opiate users faced no stigma, and of the small minority who became addicted, most kept steady jobs. But the Harrison Act and Anslinger changed this. Addicts were still desperate to get drugs, which were now part of an illegal market—and far more expensive than before. Criminal gangs like the Mafia took over this market, while addicts took to crime to pay for the overpriced drugs. As drug crime grew, Anslinger's department got more funding and recognition.

Williams's specific insight was that drugs *are safe in and of themselves, but drug* prohibition *makes them harmful. This idea, which will recur throughout the rest of Hari's book, has been a clear scientific consensus since before the war on drugs even started. For people in the early 20th century, it was plain to see; but for people living today, who have never known a time before the war on drugs, it can be very difficult to separate drugs' effects from prohibition's. Meanwhile, Anslinger's perverse incentives came back into play: he* wanted *more drug crime and violence, because these phenomena made his job more important, so he pushed the policies that would increase them.*

The Harrison Act exempted doctors and prescriptions from the ban on heroin and cocaine, so Edward Williams started a clinic to help as many addicts as possible. It worked: the treatment helped them get steady jobs and give up crime. The city government celebrated Williams's success—but Harry Anslinger was furious at him. The Federal Bureau of Narcotics started shutting down addiction clinics around the U.S. Many of Edward Williams's former patients lost their jobs, returned to crime, and died on the streets. Around 20,000 doctors were convicted for breaking the Harrison Act, and Anslinger was dead set on making Edward Williams one of them.

Yet again, Anslinger managed to crush knowledge and justice with power: he circumvented the law and unnecessarily ruined thousands of lives, and nobody could stop him. Arguably, he inflicted far more senseless violence on addicts than drugs themselves did. Thus, his actions raise the question of when good intentions are no longer a justifiable defense for doing harm. Even though he believed that he was doing the right thing, he had clear, substantial evidence that he was doing just the opposite—but he chose to ignore this evidence instead of taking it seriously.

Henry Williams visited Anslinger in Washington to plead his brother's case. Anslinger lied to Williams, saying that the case was a mistake, but then aggressively prosecuted it anyway. The jury convicted Edward Williams, and doctors across the U.S. stopped prescribing narcotics. This caused an outcry. Anslinger's agents started quitting in protest; one doctor even tried to assassinate Anslinger.

Anslinger's disingenuous response to Henry Williams shows that he didn't care whether what he was doing was right, or whether Edward Williams was truly guilty of violating the law. Instead, like with Billie Holiday, he wanted to expand his own power by turning Edward Williams into a tool and a symbol. The backlash to Williams's conviction shows that many people at the time, including people in Anslinger's Bureau, knew the truth about drugs. But it also shows that since Anslinger didn't take these people seriously, they had little power to stop his drug war.

In 1938, Henry Williams published a book suggesting that the Bureau was shutting down addiction clinics in exchange for huge bribes from criminal drug gangs. But while the Bureau's California chief *was* convicted of doing this, there is no evidence that Anslinger ever did. Hari argues that Anslinger was motivated by fear and panic, not financial self-interest. Henry and Edward Williams ultimately died in obscurity and have been largely forgotten today.

Henry Williams's accusations are understandable in context, because Anslinger's policies didn't make logical sense: while he claimed to want to fight addiction, he was making it worse and fueling organized crime. But Williams made a crucial error that Hari sees recur throughout the history of the drug war: he wrongly assumed that Anslinger was acting rationally. In reality, Anslinger's drug policies stemmed from personal experiences and biases—which he then imposed on everyone else.

CHAPTER 3: THE BARREL OF HARRY'S GUN

Harry Anslinger helped criminalize drugs not just in the U.S., but across the whole world. This started when the city of Baltimore adopted all of the laws that Anslinger proposed but didn't see any decline in drug use or crime. Anslinger decided that the explanation was clear: *communism*. He started telling Congress that the Chinese were shipping heroin to the U.S. to turn addicts into communists. Even though Bureau agents proved that this was false, Anslinger kept saying it because he knew that the government would throw money at anything that contributed to the fight against communism.

Readers familiar with the drug war's global reach might have been wondering why Hari has focused on the U.S. thus far. But in this chapter, he explains that the U.S. imposed the drug war on the rest of the world. Rather than admit defeat and choose better policies, Anslinger convinced the government that his failed policies needed to expand even further *in order to truly succeed. Ultimately, then, he managed to impose his personal biases and vendettas on the entire world, as a global policy consensus.*

Next, Anslinger went to Geneva to tell the United Nations that the whole world needed to criminalize drugs. When other countries' diplomats refused, he threatened to cut off U.S. trade and foreign aid, while ignoring their arguments. Ultimately, Anslinger convinced every other country to start criminalizing and punishing addicts.

Just as Anslinger used every power available to him to repress Billie Holiday, Edward Williams, and his other enemies in the drug war, he unapologetically coerced the rest of the world into following his will. While these other countries' diplomats and leaders knew how damaging and ineffective Anslinger's policies were, it didn't matter—Anslinger had enough power to make them act against their own people's interests.

Around the same time, Anslinger had a psychotic breakdown. His letters show his extreme paranoia: he thought he was fighting a global conspiracy of addicts. But for other politicians, he channeled this paranoia into a compelling idea: drugs were the simple solution to complex problems ranging from racial inequality to geopolitical tensions. Hari argues that Anslinger was just following the "natural human instinct to turn our fears into symbols, and destroy the symbols, in the hope that it will destroy the fear."

Because Anslinger was so powerful, he managed to impose his beliefs on people around the world. Yet Hari sees a clear link between Anslinger's delusions and the social psychology of marginalization in general. Namely, Anslinger saw that drugs are a particularly effective scapegoat. Meanwhile, people care more about feeling like *they're fighting problems than the reality of whether those problems actually get solved. Therefore, attacking drugs is an easy way to make people* feel like *they're doing good, even if they aren't.*

Anslinger retired in the 1960s, after running the Bureau of Narcotics for more than three decades. Ironically, federal investigators concluded that the corrupt Bureau was actually the U.S.'s primary heroin supplier. Yet nobody in the government considered disbanding it. In 1970, Anslinger agreed to participate in a roundtable debate on drug laws with medical and legal experts. He was outmatched. The experts cited verified statistics and experimental evidence, while Anslinger simply invented one anecdote after another. Failing to rebut facts with his feelings, Anslinger eventually began comparing the experts to Hitler and saying that they would destroy the U.S. It was his final public appearance.

Anslinger's war on drugs had the opposite of its intended effects in virtually every way. But on the TV program, instead of accepting this reality, he stuck to the story in his head and lashed out at the people who showed him the facts. This scene's implications are particularly chilling because the Nixon administration significantly expanded the war on drugs starting in 1971. In other words, just a year after the drug war was publicly exposed as a failure, the government chose to ramp it up anyway. Hari's message is clear: science and the facts have never driven drug policy—rather, politicians' feelings and self-interest do.

CHAPTER 4: THE BULLET AT THE BIRTH

In his research so far, Hari has learned about the perspectives of doctors, law enforcement agents, and addicts—but not drug dealers, who were naturally much less likely to leave records behind. The exception was Arnold Rothstein, a brutal, powerful gangster who stroked his ego by doing interviews with journalists. Through these interviews, as well as biographies and the last available copy of his wife's memoir, Hari has reconstructed Rothstein's life story.

In the introduction to this chapter, Hari reaffirms his commitment to presenting as many perspectives as possible on the drug war. If Anslinger, Holiday, and the Williams brothers created the template for law enforcement officers, drug addicts, and humanitarian doctors in the war on drugs, then Rothstein became a model for the gangsters who would benefit most from drug prohibition. Rothstein's willingness to publicly talk about his life and crimes shows that he didn't fear retaliation from the government—he knew that he was above the law. In turn, this shows how the drug trade gives organized criminals so much power that they can easily corrupt and hollow out the government.

In the 1920s, Arnold Rothstein spent his days hanging around Times Square, waiting to collect on his debts. While small and unimposing, he was still "the most feared man in New York City." From a Times Square café, he coordinated a vast criminal network that involved everyone from gangsters and boxers to actors and police officers.

Readers may notice that Arnold Rothstein sounds a lot like Harry Anslinger: he had a similar kind of far-reaching power and wielded it in a similarly brutal way. He ignored other people's wants and needs, and he stubbornly used violence and coercion to get his way, no matter what stood in his path. This similarity suggests that the drug war strongly rewards ruthless violence.

The son of a respected Jewish cotton merchant, Rothstein was a math whiz from an early age. As a teenager, he started stealing money from his father to play craps. When he realized how profitable the gambling industry was, he started setting up underground casinos. He was obsessive and humorless about making money. He started rigging his betting tables. Then, in 1919, he famously paid the Chicago White Sox to throw the World Series.

Rothstein's adult obsessions can be traced back to his childhood—just like Anslinger's. Rothstein approached organized crime with the cold, calculating attitude of a profit-driven businessman—which shows that the illegal drug trade is similar in structure to the legal market. Of course, the difference is that Rothstein didn't face any legal constraints on his behavior.

During **Prohibition**, Rothstein got into the alcohol business. He soon expanded into drugs, shipping heroin in bulk from Europe (where it was still legal) to New York. He built a ruthlessly efficient drug gang around the same time as Harry Anslinger was shutting down legal heroin clinics. In other words, Anslinger's policies passed control of the drug trade from doctors like Henry and Edward Williams to gangsters like Rothstein.

Hari emphasizes that prohibiting drugs doesn't destroy the drug trade—rather, it just moves it underground, out of the purview of experienced professionals and regulators. Meanwhile, Rothstein's rise to power shows that there are unbroken links between alcohol prohibition, which funneled vast resources to gangsters like him from 1920–1933, and drug prohibition, which has done the same ever since. If the U.S. gave up on alcohol prohibition because of the harms it caused, Hari asks, why won't it do the same for drug prohibition?

Rothstein hated addicts as much as Anslinger did, but the massive profit margins made up for it. He threatened and paid off the police, who turned a blind eye to his crimes. Then, he started killing. He even murdered Alfred Lowenstein, the world's third-wealthiest man, right after striking a business deal with him. Sociologists know that criminals protect their drug supply chains by creating "a culture of terror" through extreme violence. Rothstein did this so effectively that nobody messed with him. For example, a pickpocket stole his pearl tie pin but mailed it back when he learned who Rothstein was.

The similarities between Rothstein and Anslinger continue to multiply: both were interested in the drug trade primarily as a source of power and profit, and both used drug addicts as mere fodder in their battles for control. The drug market's "culture of terror" is really the product of prohibition: in the black market, sellers must resort to violence in order to prevent others from overthrowing them through force. In a legal, regulated market, the judicial system can protect sellers. However, Anslinger's tactics show that law enforcement agencies often reward violence and terror just as much as the illegal drug market does—just not as openly.

Meanwhile, Rothstein treated his wife, Carolyn, like a prisoner: he didn't let her talk to anyone or leave the house. When he came home in the early morning, he would binge on cake and milk to deal with his anxiety. He knew that his days were numbered, and he started hallucinating about attempts on his life. He was shot and killed in 1928, just after Carolyn divorced him. Ironically, he died bankrupt. The police were afraid to investigate his death, and the murderer was never caught.

Rothstein's personal life shows how the black market's "culture of terror" infiltrates the lives of those who participate in it and comes back to bite even those who most benefit from it. Rothstein's life shows that the drug trade is like a pyramid scheme of violence: whoever uses the most violence gets rewarded, but eventually, the entire enterprise is bound to collapse.

Hari calls the shooting that killed Arnold Rothstein "the bullet at the birth of drug prohibition." This is because, after Rothstein's death, other gangs started competing for control of the drug market. Over time, the most vicious won out. The same is true of law enforcement. This is why, over the decades, the level of violence has continued to escalate in the war on drugs. And it's also why Hari sees Arnold Rothstein, Harry Anslinger, and Billie Holiday as the three key people who can help us understand it.

Common wisdom suggests that killing high-level gangsters will reduce conflict, but actually, just the opposite happens: it creates a golden opportunity for other people to seize power through brutal violence. Thus, far from eliminating drug-related violence, the drug war actually creates a cycle of escalating conflict over time, because the black market has no way to regulate itself besides brute violence. Thus, later participants in the drug war have simply relived the dynamic between Anslinger, Rothstein, and Holiday—only with far higher stakes.

CHAPTER 5: SOULS OF MISCHIEF

To understand how the drug war looks today, Hari decides to ask a drug dealer. Through a friend, he meets the imposing, chain-smoking former crack dealer Chino Hardin. Hari interviews Hardin several times over three years, during which time Hardin is also transitioning his gender to live his life as a man. As a teenager, much like Arnold Rothstein, Hardin spent his days standing on a street corner. He was selling crack, and there were hundreds of other young people like him, all over the U.S. He felt like it was his best shot at upward mobility—and at staying safe in his dangerous neighborhood. He ran a crew of four other boys and worked for one of Brooklyn's top dealers, making about $500 per week.

In the first part of the book, Hari sketched a general picture of the war on drugs: zealous agents like Harry Anslinger seek power by brutally repressing drug addicts like Billie Holiday, while prohibition hands control of the lucrative drug market over to violent gangsters like Arnold Rothstein. Meanwhile, doctors like the Williams brothers speak out about the science on drugs, but policymakers ignore them. In the following two sections (Chapters 5–10), Hari explains how this dynamic works today, when the stakes of the drug trade have never been higher. Chino Hardin's story will show how the drug market functions today, and why it's still based on a "culture of terror."

Chino Hardin learned to defend his reputation, turf, and property with coldhearted violence. When a group of older dealers tried to claim their block, Hardin and his crew beat them until they left. When Hardin's right-hand man Smokie picked a fight with a rival gang and then ran away like a coward, Hardin pulled a knife on the other gang to prove his mettle, then lashed Smokie with his belt as punishment. But instead of striking back at the other gang, Smokie attacked a random elderly man. He went back to prison. Hari concludes that "the war on drugs was not a metaphor" for Hardin—he was literally fighting a war to terrorize others and prove his worth.

Like Arnold Rothstein, Chino Hardin used terror to prevent his rivals from overpowering him or stealing his share of the market. His turf and place in his crew were never fully secure, so he had to constantly use violence in order to maintain them. Hari uses Hardin's story to recalibrate his readers' view of the drug war: people distant from its everyday violence are likely to think of it as a political metaphor, but it is really a literal war, an armed conflict being fought on streets around the world.

Hari notes that Chino Hardin's story fits with the academic consensus: the vast majority of "drug-related violence" isn't drug *users* attacking people while high, but rather drug *dealers* using violence to claim their slice of the market. The cause of this violence is the laws that *criminalize* drugs, not drugs themselves.

Competition for the drug market causes more violence than drug use itself, but the popular misconception that drug use fuels violence is convenient because it powerfully justifies the drug war. Yet again, public opinion is wedded to politicians' rhetoric, not science, so it simply doesn't match up with the reality of the drug war. Creating better drug policies will require the public to start believing scholars and journalists, not self-interested political actors.

When Chino Hardin was 13, he learned that he was conceived when an NYPD officer raped his mother, Deborah, who was addicted to crack. In fact, Deborah's mother was *also* a drug addict, so she was raised by a relative named Lucille. Several men kidnapped and gang-raped Deborah when she was a teenager, and to numb her pain, she turned to heroin and crack. Then, to fund her habit, she started robbing houses, including Lucille's. One day, when Lucille called the police on her, the officer raped her.

Hardin's story vividly illustrates how the drug war's cycle of violence engulfs entire communities and suffuses people's entire lives. Hardin's very existence is a product of the drug war's terror, and his reality has always been defined by it. Moreover, his mother's life story shows how this violence also cyclically fuels drug use: the drug war causes trauma and suffering, and people cope with this trauma and suffering by using drugs (which further fuels the drug war).

Lucille raised Chino Hardin, too. Still, he occasionally saw Deborah. Once, she kidnapped him, and another time, she brought him to a crack house, where a woman attacked him. (In response, Deborah nearly beat the woman to death.) Eventually, Hardin and his mother started randomly attacking each other—she would punch him in the face, he would throw things at her out the window, and so on. Later, she contracted HIV from injecting drugs, then ended up in a psychiatric hospital. After she got out, the police beat her to death while arresting her for a robbery.

Hardin's contentious relationship with his mother closely resembles the cycle of escalating conflict between drug gangs. Violence is the only source of authority and respect in their world, so it became the foundation of their relationships. Similarly, Deborah's mother's fight with the other addict shows that the drug war's "culture of terror" applies to addicts as much as drug users: violence is their only way to protect themselves, so they preemptively attack others in order to avoid suffering violence later on. And her tragic death shows that law enforcement participates in the "culture of terror," too, using senseless violence to maintain its power over the population.

Chino Hardin started selling crack shortly after Hardin's mother's death. At age 13, he went to juvenile detention. The staff treated him like an animal, and he learned to survive by acting cruel and heartless. When he was 16, he realized he was turning into his mother, and he couldn't bear it. He attempted suicide three times but survived.

Hardin continued the cycle of violence that consumed his mother's life and his neighborhood. Again, paradoxically, drugs and violence appear to be the only viable solutions to the suffering caused by drugs and violence. And instead of providing him alternatives to a life of crime, the legal system taught Hardin that he didn't deserve a stable, ordinary life.

As a young adult, Hardin noticed that "the paperwork seemed to vanish" every time he was arrested. He realized that his father, the police officer, had been hiding the evidence. (They only met once—Hardin's father was a "half crazy" paraplegic.) But Hardin's crew *did* go to prison, and they learned about all sorts of new crimes there.

Hardin's "half crazy" father helped improve his chances of leaving the drug trade and finding ordinary work by keeping felonies off his record. However, this episode only underlines how deeply corrupt and arbitrary U.S. law enforcement has become: an officer's decision to file (or lose) a few papers can make or break a young person's life.

Meanwhile, Hardin kept trying to win respect by acting tough, getting a girlfriend, and so on. Eventually, he tried crack—and soon, he was spending entire weeks partying and smoking nonstop. Hari notes that Arnold Rothstein was psychopath, so he gladly committed senseless violence. But Hardin's conscience tortured him, so he "drugged himself into psychosis" instead.

Hardin's descent into crack use shows how the war on drugs actually makes addiction worse: it traumatizes people, which gives them a reason to use drugs. In Hardin's case, he had to be vicious and coldblooded to participate in his neighborhood's "culture of terror," and he couldn't stand to do so without drugs.

When Hardin finally went to prison, he joined the Bloods gang, which gave him a community and sense of safety on the inside. He also fell in love with another inmate named Nicole, but since he only knew how to express his feelings through "aggression and loathing," he threatened her. Then, after Hardin's girlfriend got raped in Brooklyn, Nicole visited to comfort him. While Nicole eventually left prison, Hardin says that this "one act of human compassion" changed his life. Still, he had to deal with "the toughest gang of all" in prison: the guards. For instance, when Hardin fell in love with a beautiful young inmate named Dee, one of the corrections officers raped her in front of him. Later, Hardin insulted the officer, who then locked him in solitary confinement.

Hardin's connection with Nicole was a turning point, because it showed him that he could relate to other people on the basis of something besides violence. Yet everyone else in Hardin's environment—particularly the state-appointed corrections officers who were charged with fighting the war on drugs—continued pushing him to abandon compassion and embrace violence and cruelty instead.

After leaving prison, Chino Hardin started using more crack. It shut off his emotions, preventing him from feeling pain. But a few years later, he again decided that he couldn't turn into Deborah. He went sober, cold turkey, and then started confronting his feelings. He asked why his life turned out the way it did, and what government policy had to do with it.

Hardin eventually found his way out of the war on drugs by tapping into his emotions and seriously interrogating his identity. This shows that, to overcome violence and addiction, people need to come to terms with their deep-seated pain—not suffer even more of it, as the drug war's leaders continue to suggest.

In 2012, Chino Hardin led a protest march through Lower Manhattan. In his speech, he noted that while white people smoke marijuana at the highest rates, law enforcement primarily targets communities of color, which face nearly all the legal consequences. He also taught a class to at-risk teenagers in the Bronx.

Chino's transformation into an activist shows how people involved in the drug war can channel their pain and suffering into truly making a difference. But this requires learning about the connections between their personal experiences and the policy decisions that have set up the war on drugs. Of course, Hari hopes that his book can help make this kind of analysis possible.

In his twenties, Chino Hardin started to realize that there was something wrong with drug laws. He landed an internship at an anti-prison group and learned about the history of U.S. drug laws. Hardin's research led him to the same conclusion as Hari's: if the drug trade were part of the legal economy, the "extreme culture of violence" that surrounds it would vanish. Indeed, a Harvard study shows that **Prohibition** and the criminalization of drugs coincided with the U.S.'s greatest ever spikes in violence. Similarly, Hardin noted that his crew gave up on violence when they agreed to stop selling drugs.

To become an activist, Hardin first had to extract himself from the drug trade's "extreme culture of violence" and, crucially, find an alternative source of income. After doing so, he could learn how powerful people like Harry Anslinger deliberately set up the system that plagued the first two decades of his life with constant, needless violence. The Harvard study further suggests that this violence is the inevitable consequence of prohibiting substances that remain in demand. This means that the only way to win the war on drugs is to abandon it.

Hardin still wonders if, with different drug laws, Hardin's mother might still be alive today—or would never have been raped in the first place. He's still angry about her terrible behavior, but he tries to forgive and empathize with her. He even tries to empathize with his father, too. He now helps run the No More Youth Jails Coalition, organizing protests and successfully lobbying the government to close facilities like the one where he was first imprisoned. But he knows that there is much more work to do. Indeed, Hari points out that street dealing is only "the first layer" of the far-reaching violence caused by the drug war.

Hardin's feelings about his mother depend on his realization that none of her suffering was necessary, nor was it fully her fault. Different drug policies would have prevented nearly all of it. Thus, Hardin manages to empathize with his parents because he understands how policy, pain, and terror drove their poor decisions. Of course, Hari has shown that the people who made these harmful policies, like Harry Anslinger, were driven by their own pain and fear, too. Hardin's experience suggests that empathy and understanding are crucial to resolving the drug war.

CHAPTER 6: HARD TO BE HARRY

To understand the other side of the war between drug dealers and cops, Hari interviews 16 law enforcement agents. But the most interesting is the 50-something ex-police captain Leigh Maddox. She once spent her days patrolling the highway outside Baltimore, searching cars for drugs, arresting everyone she could, and seizing their property to fund the city's highly militarized police department.

Chino Hardin's story illustrated how vulnerable people join the drug trade (which appears to be their only shot at reaching a higher class status) and inadvertently end up acting out Arnold Rothstein's legacy instead. Leigh Maddox's story shows why well-meaning people join law enforcement in the hopes of doing good, but end up serving Harry Anslinger's brutal agenda instead. By presenting both of these stories together, Hari suggests that there are no clear heroes and villains in the war on drugs—rather, most people join with good intentions but get caught up in a system that puts those intentions in the service of evil.

Maddox joined the police because, when she was a teenager, her best friend, Lisa Taylor, took a trip to visit her boyfriend—and disappeared. Lisa's body was found several months later. Maddox had already applied to join the police. After graduating from the police academy, she read Lisa's file and learned what really happened: a drug gang raped and murdered her.

Much like Harry Anslinger, Leigh Maddox's traumatic personal experiences set her down a path to working in law enforcement. But unlike Anslinger, she was more interested in truly helping people than merely amassing power. Of course, these goals fit with the conventional wisdom about what the police do. But the reader will soon learn that in many cases, this conventional wisdom is just as far from reality as the common assumption that drugs turn people into violent criminals.

A few years after joining the police, Maddox infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan—when Klan members attacked local Black residents or carried illegal guns and drugs with them, she helped her police colleagues catch them. But soon, the Klan discovered her, and she barely escaped them alive.

Maddox's undercover job infiltrating the KKK is a clear example of meaningful police work: it helped stop violence and save innocent lives. It also underlines how dangerous and stressful policework can be. While this stress doesn't excuse police officers abusing their power, it certainly helps explain them.

Even more than the Klan, Leigh Maddox loved going after drug gangs. She thought that she was making a difference and saving lives by busting drivers on the highway. But she was wrong. For most offenses, Hari notes, arresting perpetrators reduces the amount of crime. But not for drug dealing. For instance, when the police officer Michael Levine arrested a hundred drug dealers on a notorious New York corner, a hundred new dealers showed up a few days later to replace them. Maddox found a similar effect: arresting gang members actually *increases* violent crime. This is because, when gang leaders go to jail, other gang members (and rival gangs) start fighting for control. Numerous studies confirm this pattern. For Leigh Maddox, this was a huge problem: it meant that she was actually making crime *worse*.

At first, Maddox saw an obvious similarity between her drug busts and her former position infiltrating the KKK: both involved stopping dangerous, violent lawbreakers. But then, she realized the crucial difference: drug dealers are essentially illicit businesspeople—they're dangerous not because of their ideology, but because there's demand for their product. Thus, while arresting KKK members can reduce the number of violent racist extremists out on the streets, arresting drug dealers won't necessarily shrink the drug market. Instead, it only shrinks the supply *of drugs, which makes joining the drug market an even more attractive option. (In turn, this makes prospective dealers more willing to risk violence in order to get into the market.) Thus, truly stopping the drug trade requires studying it as a* market *and intervening to reduce the* demand *for drugs.*

"The toughest gig" in policework is going undercover as a drug dealer. Leigh Maddox's mentor, Ed Toatley, died while working undercover: a dealer shot him in the head during a drug bust. When she visited Toatley in the hospital, Maddox realized that the war on drugs was needlessly killing police officers—just like it needlessly killed her best friend, Lisa Taylor. She realized that her job wasn't stopping drug violence: it was fueling it. The real solution to violence is to "legalize and regulate the drug trade."

Just like antidrug advocates might find it counterintuitive to think of addicts like Deborah Hardin as innocent victims of the drug war, drug reformers might find it preposterous to view police casualties like Toatley the same way. But Hari insists that both of these types of casualties are victims: drug users largely fall into addiction because of pain and trauma, and Hari suggests that law enforcement officers usually join the drug war because they've been deceived about its true purpose. The officers who spearheaded the drug war (like Harry Anslinger) may have viewed it as part of a virtuous crusade for good, but those who fight it today don't necessarily share this perspective. Instead, officers like Maddox clearly see that their orders are flawed and that their jobs are futile.

Maddox also learned that Black men are several times more likely to be arrested and imprisoned for drug crimes than white men. But she also knows that individual police officers aren't racist—they just work for "a racist machine" without realizing it. Similarly, when a decorated officer asked his boss why they only do drug busts in Black neighborhoods, the boss replied that it's too dangerous for the police to go after white people, who have powerful connections in the government. "Let's just go after the weakest link," the chief said: "those who can't afford the attorneys, those who we can lock up." Indeed, Hari notes, *most* Americans have broken drug laws. It's impossible for the police to enforce these laws against everyone—but very easy for them to focus on targeting "the poorest and most disliked groups."

Ironically, after infiltrating the KKK to try and protect Black communities from racist violence, Maddox ended up perpetrating the same kind of violence, arguably on an even broader scale. Her observation that law enforcement has become a "racist machine" shows that the modern drug war is still fulfilling Anslinger's original goal: it allows law enforcement to repress Black and immigrant communities. The police chief's comment explicitly confirms this: U.S. police officers' function is to profit by inflicting suffering on powerless people. Yet his comments also show that he believes his hands are tied—and that government policy is responsible for tying them.

Leigh Maddox started wondering how she could address these problems. She knew that if the police stopped seizing drug suspects' property, they'd lose much of their funding. Like Chino Hardin, she had every incentive to keep fighting the drug war. But she also started empathizing with the people she arrested. She joined Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) and started visiting poor Baltimore neighborhoods to learn how the war on drugs was affecting young people. She learned that after a drug arrest, young people can *never* again work, live in public housing, or even vote. But she never knew this when she was actually making those arrests.

Maddox pinpoints the specific policy mechanism that forces police to continue oppressing the communities they are supposed to protect and serve: money. *Even if individual officers aren't racist, their financial survival depends on continuing to enforce counterproductive, racist drug policies. In a way, the police force's business model is based on extorting the poor—much like how Arnold Rothstein's drug gang operated. Maddox only found her way out of the drug war by making the decision to value other people's lives above her own paycheck.*

Maddox decided to quit the police force, become a lawyer, and start defending drug offenders. But she doesn't feel like she's done enough to redeem her previous actions. She still meets too many people who will never get their lives back from the war on drugs.

Just like Chino Hardin, Maddox decided to channel her traumatic personal experience in the war on drugs into activism to help truly heal the drug war's violence. However, despite doing all that she can as an individual, she continues to believe that broad policy change is the only way to truly change the system.

CHAPTER 7: MUSHROOMS

The "dealers and users and cops" who choose to join the war on drugs aren't the only ones who have died from it. There are also "mushrooms." They're people like six-year-old Tiffany Smith, who was playing on the street when she was shot and killed during a turf war. "They call them mushrooms," Hari writes, "because they can pop up anywhere."

The drug war creates a backdrop of constant, unpredictable suffering that affects everyone who lives in the societies that are fighting it. Tiffany Smith is just one of the most tragic examples of this suffering. Of course, the drug war's physical and psychological toll falls disproportionately on the poorest and most vulnerable people in these societies.

CHAPTER 8: STATE OF SHAME

A year into his research, Hari starts feeling that people like Leigh Maddox and Chino Hardin are trying and failing to imitate the drug war's "founding fathers," Harry Anslinger and Arnold Rothstein. But Hari knows that others have taken Anslinger and Rothstein's "darkest impulses" much further. He decides to interview them in Arizona, Texas, and "the deadliest city in the world" (Ciudad Juárez).

Maddox and Hardin were willing to work with Hari because they started questioning their place in the drug war, decided to leave it, and began working to reform it. But Hari has pointed out that the drug war rewards whoever commits the most *violence, while practically ignoring anyone who isn't willing to hurt or kill others. Namely, the cruelest drug dealers and cops keep profiting from the drug war, while people like Hardin and Maddox have to make a living elsewhere. Thus, to fully understand the drug war's cycle of violence, Hari has to learn about the people at the cutting edge of its cruelty.*

In Arizona, women prisoners are forced to wear T-shirts with phrases like "I WAS A DRUG ADDICT," sing chants about their crimes, and work in a chain gang all day under the scorching desert sun. The day Hari visits them, they are picking up trash in front of political signs for Joe Arpaio, the sheriff who invented their punishment. Many of the women are in their teens and early twenties; the work is humiliating, and the heat is dangerous.

The conditions in Arpaio's prisons are an example of how the U.S. legal system treats drug addicts as valueless and subhuman. Arpaio isn't just indifferent to his prisoners' dignity—rather, he makes a public spectacle out of denying *them dignity. Of course, this policy's implication is clear: Arpaio believes that the public will reward him for treating addicts with the maximum possible cruelty. Needless to say, this idea isn't based on facts or evidence—instead, it's based on the same tendency to scapegoat drugs for social problems that Hari described in his chapters on Harry Anslinger.*

Joe Arpaio views Harry Anslinger as a hero, because he used to work for him. Arpaio even proudly calls his Tent City jail a "concentration camp." When Hari visits, he learns that the tents are freezing in winter and up to 140°F in summer. The prisoners only get to eat "slop"—a rotten meat paste—and can't even hug their own children when they visit. Hari meets a 20-year-old man, imprisoned for underage drinking, who has diabetes but is being denied his insulin. When Hari returns the next day, the prisoners refuse to speak—one passes him a note explaining that anyone who talks to him will be sent to "the Hole" (solitary confinement).

Arpaio is the clearest inheritor of Anslinger's legacy, both because of their professional connection and because he has taken Anslinger's strategy of inflicting maximum pain and suffering on drug users to an extreme. Arpaio's "concentration camp" comment indicates that he has intentionally built prisons resembling those of famously repressive societies throughout history, such as the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany. (There's also an actual historical connection between these policies: the Nazis' racial policies were based on the U.S. segregation policies that Anslinger helped enforce through the drug war.) Put differently, the U.S. has explicitly modeled its drug policy on the greatest human rights abuses in history.

Surprisingly, the officers agree to show Hari the Hole: a building of tiny, windowless isolation cells with no windows except a tiny slit in the door. The prisoners **scream** hysterically for help, and everything stinks of feces. A prisoner attempted suicide last night. But this kind of treatment is standard in the U.S. The prison psychologist tells Hari that most of the prisoners became addicted to drugs because of family trauma. While they boil in the desert, Arpaio has converted the air-conditioned county jail into an animal shelter.

The conditions in Arpaio's prisons continue to get worse and worse, and readers may be shocked to learn that this kind of cruelty is both legal and accepted in the U.S. Indeed, even the prison psychologist recognizes that Arpaio's tactics are counterproductive: addiction is a response to deep psychological pain, and inflicting more *pain on people does nothing to keep them away from drugs. Thus, Hari's research again suggests that the U.S. government's drug policy is deliberately callous and sadistic: it chooses to ignore the medical evidence about addiction and inflict needless violence on vulnerable people instead.*

Arpaio's Tent City may seem unusually cruel, but actually, it's typical of how the U.S. treats addicts. In fact, more Americans are imprisoned for drug offenses than Western Europeans are for *all* offenses—proportionally, the U.S. imprisons more people than any society in the history of humankind. In U.S. prisons, abuse, torture, and rape are routine. However, most countries treat addicts the same way. In fact, they imitate Arpaio's cruelty.

Hari's message is clear: the war on drugs has infected the very foundations of the U.S. legal system. The nation as a whole has replicated Anslinger's approach to addiction by building a legal system designed to inflict maximum suffering on drug users—but only if they come from vulnerable communities (which, practically, means poor communities and communities of color). Moreover, the U.S. has spread this norm around the world. Arpaio's Tent City may be a particularly extreme and memorable case study, but it's a useful tool for understanding the war on drugs as a whole.

A prison reform activist tells Hari about "a woman who was cooked in a cage," and he visits the archives to investigate. He learns that a mentally ill, formerly drug-addicted woman (Marcia Powell) attempted suicide in an Arizona prison. To punish her for seeking attention, the guards locked her in an empty cage in the desert. She **screamed** about the heat all afternoon, then eventually collapsed, dead. Guards watched her for hours, mocking her. Three of them were fired, but none faced legal consequences for her death. She was nearly buried in an anonymous grave at the prison, until a charity helped contact her family.

Marcia Powell's story shows how dehumanization—depriving people of their identities and voices—is a key part of the U.S.'s drug policy. In fact, the guards' attitude toward Powell reflects of the nation's attitude toward addicts in general: when they use drugs to deal with trauma, the government traumatizes them further. But when they plead for help, like Powell did when she was burning to death, the government punishes them for speaking. The fact that none of the guards faced legal consequences underlines the fact that such grave human rights abuses are essentially legal and accepted in the U.S., when they're directed against drug users.

Hari goes to Missouri to meet Marcia Powell's ex-boyfriend, Richard Husman, who tells him Powell's life story. Her adoptive family evicted her at age 13, leaving her to sleep on the beach and do sex work. Then, she joined the Hells Angels motorcycle gang—she helped them transport drugs in exchange for protection and a place to live. In Arizona, child protective services took away her first baby because of her addiction, and her boyfriend committed suicide. Then, she met Husman and quit drugs. They had a son and built an ordinary, stable life in Missouri.

Husman's story highlights two significant truths about Powell's life: first, she turned to drugs in order to cope with serious childhood trauma (which was, in part, the result of government failure). Second, she managed to overcome addiction on her own by forming a family. Both of these facts strongly support the scientific theory of addiction that Hari explains in the second half of his book: people turn to drugs in order to deal with trauma and isolation, and that they can overcome addiction by forming stable, loving connections with others.

But when Powell returned to Arizona to try regaining custody of her daughter, she was arrested on an old warrant for possessing 1.5 grams of marijuana (two joints). Her sentence was a year of house arrest. During this time, she relapsed into addiction and paranoia. Husman points out that, if Powell just had the proper medical help, she could have easily beaten her addiction. But instead, she got caught up in the criminal justice system and never came out. Later, Husman's stepson murdered his whole family—including his and Powell's son. Husman doesn't know if Powell learned about this before her death. If it weren't for the marijuana warrant in Arizona, Husman says, he and Powell would probably be back in the Midwest, raising a happy family.

Just like the drug trade continuously drew Chino Hardin back into a cycle of escalating violence, the Arizona government's extreme policies constantly brought Marcia Powell back into a deepening cycle of addiction and trauma. Hari clearly agrees with Husman: Powell's death was completely unnecessary and avoidable, and she would still be alive if officials had made better, evidence-based choices about how to treat drug users. Powell's story further shows how Anslinger's drug war continues to haunt drug Americans today.

CHAPTER 9: BART SIMPSON AND THE ANGEL OF JUÁREZ

In Ciudad Juárez, just across the U.S.-Mexico border from El Paso, a young man named Juan Manuel Olguín walks up to a dead body in the street. He's dressed as an angel, holding a sign addressed at those responsible for Mexico's drug violence: "Time Is Short […] Seek Forgiveness." Because of the drug war, Ciudad Juárez is the most dangerous city in the world. Overall, Mexico has seen at least 60,000 murders in five years—and endless incidents of "unimaginable sadism"—because of the multi-billion-dollar illegal drug industry.

Hari's trip to Ciudad Juárez gives him insight into the international dimensions of the U.S.'s drug war. He finds that U.S. policies have exported even more violence than they have created at home—and conditions are only getting worse, as the violence continues to gradually escalate over time. Olguín's protest highlights the utter brutality and senselessness of this violence, which turns human life and death into nothing more than a tool for profit.

When Hari visits Juárez, he immediately notices the posters of missing women. The city is a vast sprawl of houses in the desert, and he meets Olguín on the outskirts. After seeing his friends join cartels and fall into violence and addiction, Olguín "decided to become an angel." Over time, people in Juárez have simply gotten used to seeing bodies in the street. People who protest the violence are often murdered, too. But Olguín and several friends from his church decided that the risk is worth it. Wearing their enormous silver angel costumes, they stand by the roadside with their protest signs.

Juárez's femicide epidemic is well-documented in the international media, but most accounts don't clearly connect it back to its true origins: U.S. drug policy, which has passed control of the world's largest drug market to cartels (and continues to reward the most violent among them with the greatest power and influence). Through his angel costume, Olguín suggests that Juárez's killers can answer only to God—as the worldly authorities are no longer capable of stopping them.

Juárez is Arnold Rothstein's dream city: there is no rule of law, and criminals run the show. Even though it's far from Hari's comfortable life in London, the two cities are intimately tied together through the drug war. Three people exemplify its story: "an angel [Juan Manuel Olguín], a killer [Rosalio Reta], and a girl in love [Rubi Fraire]."

Juárez shows that, far from strengthening the government, Anslinger's drug war ultimately hollows it out by concentrating virtually limitless resources in the hands of criminal gangs. While Reta represents the informal cartel government that actually runs Juárez, Olguín represents the public that is forced to deal with a complete lack of public security and functional government. Finally, Fraire represents thousands more of the drug war's innocent victims.

Hari wants to learn "what life is like inside a cartel," but interviewing a cartel member would be impossibly dangerous. Instead, Hari visits a rural Texas prison to interview a young man named Rosalio Reta. When he was 15, Reta went to a summer camp in Mexico, where he learned how to behead, shoot, and kill with his bare hands. He was training to join the Zeta Cartel, which was founded by elite Mexican soldiers who received highly specialized training in the U.S., then went home, quit their jobs, and switched sides.

Reta's training with the Zetas shows how the drug war normalizes an extreme level of violence. Similarly, the story behind the formation of the Zetas shows how the drug war has given cartels enough resources to make joining them a far more appealing option than even prestigious government jobs like the elite ranks of the military. In fact, the U.S. quite literally gave criminal cartels the training and tools to fight the drug war. Thus, the drug war has incentivized violence and *funneled vast resources to anyone willing to commit it.*

Rosalio Reta grew up in Laredo, Texas, a poor city right on the border, across from the Zetas' main base in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. He has told two conflicting stories about why he joined the Zetas, and nobody knows which is true. When he was arrested, he told the police that he joined the cartel because he admired its second-in-command, Miguel Treviño. According to this version, he visited Treviño's ranch, then became a hitman, and he loved every second of it. But in his interview with Hari, Reta claims that he was forced to join against his will. After unwittingly following a friend's brother to the ranch, he says, he witnessed the cartel murdering people. Having seen too much, he had a stark choice: join or get killed.

Like Chino Hardin, Rosalio Reta grew up surrounded by the drug war: the Zetas had a powerful presence in both Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, and joining the cartel was clearly one of Reta's best chances at moving up in life. While readers can't know which of Reta's two stories about joining the cartel is actually correct, there's clearly a kernel of truth in each. Reta didn't fully understand what he was getting into when he joined the Zetas, and once he joined, getting killed would be his only way out.

Regardless of which story is true, Reta definitely joined the cartel that day, by murdering a man at the ranch. And once he was in, there was no way out. He became a professional hitman, killing at Treviño's orders. And he didn't tell anyone, least of all his family. During their interview, Reta avoids saying Treviño's name and warns Hari not to talk about him. Like Arnold Rothstein and Chino Hardin—but to a much greater degree—Treviño used extreme, unpredictable violence to terrify his rivals and maintain control over the drug market.

Treviño's behavior shows that the Zeta Cartel has taken the drug war's "culture of terror" further than anyone else. It forced Reta to participate in a level of violence far more severe than even what Chino Hardin experienced on the streets of New York. The Zetas' rise to power thus fits Hari's hypothesis that the drug war has inevitably become more and more severe over time, because whoever is most brutal gets to take over the market. The Zeta Cartel has clearly succeeded in one-upping its rivals through greater violence.

Reta lived in constant fear of this violence, including from people on his side. But he loved the job's perks: he had access to all the women, drugs, and money he could possibly want. Treviño once paid Reta $375,000 for killing a man. In wiretapped conversations, Reta and his friend Gabriel bragged about beating their rivals' relatives to death.

The benefits of working for the cartel don't clearly outweigh the downsides, but they are extraordinary enough to make it obvious why young people like Reta would choose to embrace a life of violence. Meanwhile, Reta and Gabriel's conversations indicate that another important reward for them was the sense of power and importance that they derived from killing.

Of course, this is all part of the cartel's broader strategy: whichever group employs the most violence can scare its rivals and get a competitive advantage in the drug market. Over time, other cartels catch up by adopting the same strategies, and the cycle repeats. This is why the drug war consistently becomes more and more violent over time: drug prohibition rewards whoever uses "the most insane and sadistic violence."

Hari elaborates on the thesis about drug violence that he first sketched in his chapters on Arnold Rothstein and Chino Hardin. Namely, drug prohibition locks criminals in a never-ending contest to seize power through more and more extreme violence. This thesis has disturbing implications: it suggests that drug violence will only get worse and worse over time, no matter how hard law enforcement fights it, until politicians finally agree to legalize the drug trade.

Treviño also bought off the police, military, and even federal officials through a combination of threats and bribes. The police even help the cartel kidnap and murder people. Mexico's weak rule of law and outsized economic dependence on drug money have helped the gangs take over.

The drug war has given gangs so much power that, in places like Nuevo Laredo, they have even overtaken the government. Indeed, the Zetas' special forces training indicates that there's no longer a clear separation between the state and organized crime in Mexico. This is the scenario that Henry Williams first imagined in the 1930s. Yet it isn't particularly different from the U.S. today, where drug gangs and law enforcement are technically on opposite sides, but ultimately have the same effect: they both significantly escalate drug-related violence.

Soon, Treviño's men went after Reta. They attacked him in the woods and slashed him all over his body. According to one story, they were trying to stop him after he lost control and started killing random people for sport. But in their interview, Reta tells Hari that the cartel turned on him because he wanted to quit. Regardless, he managed to escape to the U.S. and turn himself in. He's serving two life sentences and will probably die in prison. A rival gang has already tried to murder him, and he worries that the cartel will kill his family on the outside. He warns that it might go after Hari, too.

Again, Reta's testimony is highly unreliable: it's unclear whether he merely fled from sadistic murderers or actually became one himself. But regardless, his story still captures important truths about the drug war and the endless, brutal violence it fosters. During his time in the cartel, violence became both more commonplace and higher-stakes. The longer he spent in the cartel, the more violence he committed, the less significant each act of violence became to him, and the more likely it became that he would eventually become a victim—whether because of a misstep or because he started to threaten the people he worked for. Finally, Reta's warning for Hari is a testament to how deeply invested drug cartels are in continuing the drug war and preventing more progressive drug policies from taking hold.

Regardless of which story is true, Hari concludes, Reta never would have become a sadistic, ruthless killer if it weren't for the war on drugs. After their interview, Treviño becomes the Zetas' leader and is then captured by the police. There's a new turf war for control of Nuevo Laredo, and the violence continues.

Hari doesn't deny that Reta might have been unstable and prone to crime no matter how he grew up—he merely argues that the drug war channeled Reta's worst impulses into a life of extreme violence. Meanwhile, following the pattern that Leigh Maddox observed in Baltimore, Treviño's capture did nothing to reduce drug violence—it just gave new gangsters a chance to rise to the top.

CHAPTER 10: MARISELA'S LONG MARCH

Rosalio Reta's story represents the most extreme violence of the drug war, but Hari wants to understand how everyday Mexicans experience it. This is how he learns about a young woman from Ciudad Juárez named Rubi Fraire. When she was 11, on a family vacation, she accidentally got left behind at a diner. But she wasn't worried: she knew that her mother, Marisela, would always come back for her. And she did. Three years later, Rubi fell in love with Sergio Barraza, a young man who worked at the family's carpentry store. One day, she disappeared. Marisela eventually found her: she was pregnant and living with Sergio. Marisela and Rubi rekindled a relationship.

Just like Tiffany Smith, whose murder Hari described in Chapter 7, Rubi Fraire's story represents the way that the drug war drags innocent ordinary people into peril. In particular, it makes all other conflicts more dangerous because it creates powerful criminal organizations that are willing to pursue their goals with lethal force. Fraire's relationship with Sergio Barraza began as an ordinary teenage love story, but the fact that Fraire disappeared with Sergio suggests that their relationship eventually became dangerous.

Then, Rubi and Sergio mysteriously disappeared again. They left a note saying that they wanted to get away from Marisela. And for the first time, Rubi didn't call or come back. After several months, Marisela visited Sergio's family—and found Sergio and the baby, but not Rubi. Then, Sergio vanished with the baby. Marisela's family started putting up flyers to look for him. Within weeks, an anxious young man named Angel called. He told Marisela that Sergio had picked him up and offered him a job—then forced him to help transport Rubi's dead body.

Sergio was obviously responsible for Rubi's disappearance, but Marisela could do nothing to stop him—and clearly didn't expect the police to help her. When Angel finally contacted her, he gave her the information she needed, but his fear put Marisela's case in jeopardy. He surely knew that the penalty for crossing people like Sergio was death, so reaching out to Marisela was selfless—but also extremely dangerous.

Angel and Marisela filed a police report, but nothing happened. Marisela started visiting the police station every day to demand action, then investigating Rubi's death herself. She eventually found Sergio's location and number. Just days after breast cancer surgery, she tracked Sergio down in another city, 16 hours away, and brought him to the local police. He confessed to murdering Rubi. The Juárez police found fragments of her body in a dump for slaughtered pigs. Marisela went digging through the dump, looking in vain for the rest of Rubi's body.

The police did next to nothing to help Marisela investigate Rubi's disappearance and bring Sergio to justice. Readers will rightly suspect a link between this police inaction and the war on drugs. Marisela persevered, but much like Angel when he contacted her, Marisela had little reason to expect that justice would be served (and every reason to expect she'd be punished for seeking it).

At Sergio's trial, Angel testified about seeing Rubi's body and said that Sergio threatened to kill him if he spoke out. From the stand, Sergio begged Marisela for forgiveness. But despite his confession, the judges inexplicably acquitted him. Then, Angel and his whole family were murdered.

Rubi's case shows how, even when everything appears to go right, Mexico's legal system fails to deliver justice, presumably because it functions entirely at the mercy of cartels. Meanwhile, Angel's murder demonstrates that there's no reward for standing up for justice—just further retaliation and violence. Angel's death also gives the reader important context to help them understand how dangerous (and courageous) Juan Manuel Olguín's angel protests are.

Marisela started protesting in the streets every day, holding a picture of Rubi. Other mothers who had lost their daughters joined her. Eventually, she found another address for Sergio and tracked him down again in yet another city. She called the police, but Sergio escaped arrest. Finally, Marisela tried one more desperate measure: she marched from Juárez more than 1,000 miles through the desert to Mexico City and demanded action from the president. But he wouldn't even meet with her.

Marisela used every conceivable tool to raise awareness about the injustice that she suffered. But at all levels, Mexico's government remained completely indifferent and unresponsive to her protests. This shows how the drug war has normalized serious violence—while Marisela and Rubi's story might seem extraordinary to Hari's readers, it was utterly ordinary in Juárez during the drug war.

Then, Marisela learned why the police wouldn't act: Sergio is in the Zeta Cartel, who run the Chihuahua state government. Just like Arnold Rothstein, the Zetas have "bought [themselves] a place above and beyond the laws." Marisela went to the state capitol and called a press conference to announce what she learned about the Zetas controlling the government. The governor refused to meet with her, so she continued protesting. One evening, the capitol's security detail mysteriously disappeared, and a hitman shot and killed Marisela.

The most obvious explanation for the government's indifference ended up being the right one: the Zeta Cartel used its extreme power to shut down the legal process that could have brought Sergio Barraza to justice. Of course, the broader implications of this failure are profound: it shows that the war on drugs undermines democracy altogether by giving organized crime veto power over the elected government. Ultimately, Marisela's tragic death suggests that justice cannot be served until the drug war ends—for now, cries for justice are more likely to be silenced than heard.

Marisela's son now lives in the U.S. He tells Hari that the drug war has killed too many innocent people like his mother—and it hasn't even reduced drug use. Instead, it has strengthened the cartels. If drugs were legalized, Marisela's son says, the cartels would lose much of their power. This reminds Hari of how **Prohibition** backfired—something that even Harry Anslinger recognized. Two years after Marisela's death, the police killed Sergio during a shootout. This means that he will never get a trial, and Marisela's family will never learn the truth.

Just like the deaths of Deborah Hardin, Marcia Powell, and Tiffany Smith, Rubi Fraire and Marisela Escobedo's deaths were utterly unnecessary and avoidable. Marisela's son expresses the central idea of Hari's book so far and foreshadows the ideas that he examines in the rest of it. Namely, all the available evidence indicates that the drug war has only worsened addiction, increased violence, and hollowed out the rule of law around the world. This means that modern countries must try legalizing and regulating drugs instead.

In Mexico, the drug war has killed countless people and badly weakened government institutions. But the Mexican people didn't *choose* this drug war; the U.S. government imposed it on them. In the 1930s, Mexico put Leopoldo Salazar, a pro-legalization addiction doctor, in charge of national drug policy. Harry Anslinger furiously lobbied the Mexican government to fire Salazar—and succeeded. Later, when Mexico started giving addicts legal access to safe drugs, Anslinger blocked U.S. opiate exports to Mexican hospitals until the Mexican government gave up and started doing Anslinger's bidding.

International audiences—and particularly Americans—tend to blame Mexico's people and government for the severe drug violence that continues to plague the country. But the historical record shows this attitude to be ignorant and harmful at best, or underhanded and deceitful at worst. In reality, Anslinger coerced Mexico into adopting a drug policy that it knew wasn't in the country's best interests. And today, Mexico's violence is still fueled by the flow of drugs to the U.S. If the U.S. government no longer limited drugs to the black market, then legal corporations would take the cartels' place in manufacturing and supplying drugs to U.S. consumers.

Ever since, just like the cartels, the U.S. has given Mexico a dilemma: money or a bullet. If Mexico refuses to join the U.S.'s drug war, the U.S. will undermine Mexico's economy. Hari can only imagine how Rubi Fraire, Juan Manuel Olguín, and Rosalio Reta's lives would have been if the U.S. let Mexico "choose drug peace instead of drug war."

Hari isn't comparing the U.S. government to the cartels just to be facetious or provocative. Instead, he's faithfully presenting the results of his reporting: the historical record clearly shows that the U.S. has inflicted at least as much violence and suffering on Mexico as the cartels—not least of all because the cartels could never exist without the U.S. drug war. It's fitting that Hari ends the first half of his book in Mexico: the suffering caused by Anslinger's drug war in Mexico is much greater, more overlooked, and harder to overcome than it is almost anywhere else.

CHAPTER 11: THE GRIEVING MONGOOSE

During his research, Hari often asks himself what the drug war's true purpose is. Officially, according to the UN and the U.S. government, it's to eliminate all drug use, everywhere in the world. Hari's perspective on this idea transforms when he meets the scientist Ronald K. Siegel, who tells him a story: a mongoose sees its mate die during a storm, then eats hallucinogenic plants to cope. In fact, Siegel's research has shown that all kinds of animals, from grasshoppers and bees to cows and monkeys, intentionally eat psychoactive plants. A herd of Indian elephants broke into a moonshine warehouse and went on a drunk rampage, for instance, and traumatized water buffalo started eating opium plants during the Vietnam War.

So far, Hari has focused on the drug war, but in the rest of the book, he begins to look at alternatives to it. First, he investigates the science about drug use and addiction, and then he examines policy solutions that can succeed where the drug war has failed. In addition to providing a more lighthearted contrast to the devastating story of Marisela Escobedo from the last chapter, Ronald K. Siegel's research on animals suggests that drug use is far more natural than modern humans might assume. The key finding in Siegel's research isn't merely that animals use drugs, but rather that they specifically use them to cope with pain. This implies that humans may use them for the same purpose—and Hari will make and defend this point in the chapters that follow.

The UN's drug-free world pledge seems outlandish to Hari because the UN's own statistics show that 90 percent of people who use drugs aren't harmed by them. But the 10 percent who *are* harmed are generally the most visible: they "make up 100 percent of the official picture." And governments intentionally reinforce this picture—for instance, when a WHO study found that the vast majority of cocaine users don't become addicted, the U.S. government threatened the WHO with funding cuts, forcing it to suppress the evidence.

The UN's stated goals are totally disconnected from the reality of the drug war and the established scientific evidence about drugs. While Hari acknowledges that it's easy to overestimate the proportion of drug use that is harmful, the UN clearly knows that most drug use isn't *harmful. Thus, the UN should also recognize that it makes little sense to eliminate most drug use (not to mention eradicating all drugs). Hari suggests that the drug-free world pledge's real purpose is instead to make peace with the U.S. government, which continues to push Anslinger's antiquated stance on drugs. In other words, the U.S. is still pressuring the rest of the world into ignoring the scientific evidence and criminalizing drugs.*

Hari notes that there are two different arguments for drug reform: an easy one and a hard one. The easy argument is that drugs are always harmful, but drug prohibition simply makes the problem far worse. But this argument is only partly true. The harder but more accurate argument is that *most* drug use is harmless, responsible, and positive, but a small minority is terribly harmful. This is the point of Professor Siegel's research: like other animals, humans naturally seek out consciousness-altering substances. Drug use is ubiquitous across history, in all human societies. Siegel calls it "biologically inevitable"—just like the natural drives for food, drink, and sex.

While the hard argument against drug prohibition actually matches up with the scientific evidence about drugs, the easy argument is politically useful because it reaches the same conclusion without challenging the common misconception that all drug use is harmful. Hari clearly understands why people who believe in the hard argument might choose to win political support through the easy one. However, as a journalist, he's committed to telling the truth, so he fully explains the hard argument and the scientific evidence that justifies it. Specifically, most drug use isn't harmful because taking intoxicants is a universal human and animal behavior. However, a select few humans use intoxicants to avoid their everyday reality, and this behavior can *cause serious problems.*

Hari describes a 10-day festival in ancient Greece, where revelers took drugs and saw incredible hallucinations. Held annually for 2,000 years, the festival was highly secretive and run by government officials. Greeks viewed the drug, a fungus chemically similar to LSD, as a way to connect with the gods. In fact, this drug use was foundational to Western art, philosophy, literature, and science. The festival didn't end until the rise of Christianity, which insisted that the Church should offer people's only experience of ecstasy and connection to God.

Hari describes this ancient Greek drug festival because, in addition to backing up Siegel's conclusion that drug use is natural (or "biologically inevitable"), it also counters many common assumptions about drug use. For instance, it shows that drugs aren't an exclusively modern phenomenon. The festival also proves that drug use is compatible with great artistic insight and scientific achievement. And it demonstrates that, far from causing madness and unrest, widespread drug use can actually offer great benefits to society. In a nutshell, this festival shows that drug use can mean all sorts of things in all sorts of different settings—but this heavily depends on how any given society treats it.

Hari concludes that Harry Anslinger was part of a long tradition of repressing intoxication, which extends back to the beginning of recorded human history. Just as Victorians struggled to acknowledge that everyone has sexual fantasies, modern people are horrified to admit that everyone seeks out intoxication. Indeed, Professor Siegel argues that drug use is really an extension of humans' own brain chemistry. After all, the brain naturally produces endorphins (which resemble morphine), and pleasure is really just a similar chemical release.

Siegel's analysis helps Hari reframe drug use for his readers. Most modern people see drugs from the drug war's perspective, as inherently dangerous and transgressive. But Hari wants his readers to learn to think of drugs as just one of the many natural tools that humans have always used to explore the world, enjoy themselves, and come together with others. What's more, understanding how the non-addicted majority benefits from drug use can help readers clearly understand why drugs are so harmful to the addicted minority.

CHAPTER 12: TERMINAL CITY

To understand the small minority of drug users who *do* become addicted, Hari visits a group of scientists in Vancouver. Their story begins with Judith Lovi, a Jewish woman living in the Budapest ghetto during the Holocaust. Her husband had disappeared, and her parents were about to be murdered at Auschwitz. One day, she suddenly stopped producing breastmilk for her newborn son, Gabor, who was crying constantly. She called the doctor, who told her that *all* the Jewish babies he saw were crying. Judith ultimately reunited with her husband, and they escaped to Vancouver. Gabor grew up to become a doctor. And the Budapest doctor's insight about crying Jewish babies helped Gabor discover the mystery of addiction.

This story brings Hari to a point that he has repeatedly hinted at throughout the book so far: drug addiction is often a response to trauma. The doctor's comment about crying Jewish babies indicates that, even before they can speak, infants can sense when adults are facing stressful and traumatic situations. And even if they're too young to form distinct memories of that trauma, it can still have lasting effects on them.

At the beginning of his research, like most people, Hari assumed he knew how addictions form. He thought that drugs contain "very powerful chemicals" that change people's brain chemistry and make them physically dependent on those drugs. Indeed, many experiments have shown that caged rats compulsively take drugs like cocaine until they kill themselves. In fact, Harry Anslinger and Henry Williams even agreed on this "pharmaceutical theory of addiction." But others don't—including Gabor Maté.

The "pharmaceutical theory of addiction" (which Hari also calls the "drugs-hijack-brains theory") is such a pervasive, commonsense idea that many readers likely don't even know that it's not settled science. Of course, part of why it's such a popular theory is that it squarely supports the drug war: if the chemicals in drugs cause addiction on their own, then clearly it's preferable to keep these chemicals out of people's hands. Yet doctors who reject this theory don't dispute the clear fact that drugs contain "very powerful chemicals." Instead, they dispute the idea that these chemicals are the primary cause of addiction. For instance, Hari will soon show that, counterintuitively enough, the rats in the cocaine experiment don't drug themselves to death just because of the strong chemicals in cocaine.

Hari interviews Gabor Maté in Vancouver. After becoming a family physician, Maté started working in Downtown Eastside, a rundown neighborhood with one of the highest concentrations of drug addicts in the world. Most North American cities kick addicts out of public housing and off of social support, but this only makes their lives even worse. In contrast, a Vancouver nurse named Liz Evans founded the Portland Hotel Society, which gives addicts housing and tries to treat them as humanely as possible. Most doctors thought she was crazy, but Gabor Maté thought she had a point, so he went to work for her.

In the U.S. and Canada, addiction and homelessness frequently go hand-in-hand, but people rarely question this association. In reality, Hari explains, it's because rents are expensive and most cities have adopted policies to prevent addicts from getting subsidized housing. Following the drug war's norms, these cities punish addicts for using drugs by taking away their access to social services. This kind of policy is based on the assumption that the threat of losing services will deter people from using drugs. But the Portland Hotel Society takes the opposite approach, based on the idea that a lack of services like housing is actually one of addiction's causes. In other words, where drug war policies assume that addiction is a choice that people will abandon if their conditions become poor enough, Evans assumes that addiction is actually a response to poor conditions, so these conditions have to improve before people will quit drugs.

At the Portland Hotel Society, Maté realized that most serious addicts "spent their lives being chased away or chastised" by authority figures. But Maté was different. Even though he still judged and looked down on addicts, he also listened to them with sympathy. He learned that addicts turn to drugs because they're the only thing that can prevent them from constantly "feel[ing] disgusting and ashamed." (Indeed, this describes addicts like Billie Holiday, Deborah Hardin, and Marcia Powell, who all used drugs to cope with traumatic childhood experiences.) Maté concluded that drug addiction is a *response* to serious emotional damage, not a cause of it.

Maté's observations strongly supported Evans's hypothesis: worsening addicts' living conditions won't convince them to stop using drugs, because their drug use is generally a response to poor living conditions in the first place. Maté's patients were all addicted to drugs because they preferred constant intoxication to living with overwhelming emotional pain. While addiction often worsened this pain, it was almost never the original cause. Thus, it makes little sense to treat addiction as the root cause of addicts' problems. At worst, punitive policies only drive addicts deeper into addiction by amplifying the pain that their addiction helps them withstand.

Every day, millions of people legally take opiate painkillers in hospitals around the world. According to the pharmaceutical theory of addiction, they should all become addicts. But in reality, Maté has found, very few do. He concluded that addiction involves two distinct factors: "a potentially addictive substance or behavior and a susceptible individual." In fact, the highly detailed Adverse Childhood Experiences Study has found that traumatic childhood events significantly multiply the odds of addiction, and that two-thirds of injection drug users can trace their addictions to childhood trauma. Another cutting-edge study found a clear link between indifferent or cruel parenting and drug use, impulsivity, and "personal and social maladjustment." All this data shows that most people's common assumptions about addiction are completely wrong.

Maté doesn't deny that drugs have powerful chemical effects—only that these effects can cause addiction entirely on their own. After all, the pharmaceutical theory can't explain why the vast majority of drug users, like the patients who receive opiates in the hospital, never become addicted. In fact, blaming addiction on drugs themselves is confusing the symptom for the cause. Ultimately, it's just another way to scapegoat drugs for the actual problems that lead people to use them. Just like Anslinger once blamed drugs for social unrest, for example, doctors now blame drugs for people's maladjustment and emotional pain, which generally have deeper, often less readily identifiable causes.

Both Billie Holiday and Harry Anslinger recognized that there is a relationship between early trauma and addiction, but they didn't entirely understand why. Neither does Hari, and he wants to find out. A year into her work at the Portland Hotel Society, Liz Evans came up with an answer. A woman named Hannah, who funded her serious alcohol and heroin addictions through sex work, was living at the hotel. Like many indigenous Canadians, Hannah was taken from home and forced into an abusive foster family as a child. One night, she came back to the hotel covered in blood, after a man beat and raped her. While Liz carried Hannah up to her room, Hannah repeatedly blamed herself for everything that had happened to her. Liz suddenly understood that people turn to drugs to deal with this kind of pain.

Hari uses Hannah's story to clearly illustrate Dr. Maté's theory of trauma and addiction. Of course, Hari also wants his readers to empathize with drug users by understanding the unbearable levels of suffering that many of them endure. Indeed, Hannah has lived through a great deal of trauma, so it follows that she dedicates her daily life to forgetting as much as possible. Her drug use might make her trauma worse in the long term, but it clearly didn't cause it in the first place. And when Evans saw Hannah's trauma up close, she finally understood that childhood trauma follows people throughout their whole lives, unless they manage to resolve it for good. Drug use is a convenient, if temporary, way to cope with it.

Hari concludes that childhood trauma explains the difference between the minority of drug users who become addicted and the majority who don't. But understanding this doesn't make dealing with addicts any easier. Gabor Maté's patients insult, threaten, and spit at him. (One is a Nazi who taunts him about his grandparents' deaths at Auschwitz.)

Maté's ideas about trauma not only explain who becomes susceptible to addiction—they also help explain Hari's analysis of the drug war. Namely, Hari has pointed out that many people who have caused serious pain and suffering through the drug war first joined it because of their own striking childhood experiences. For instance, Harry Anslinger heard his drug-addicted neighbor's screams, Chino Hardin had to cope with his drug-addicted mother, and Leigh Maddox joined the police after her best friend was murdered by a drug gang. Just like Maté's patients, these drug warriors chose to manage their trauma in ways that inadvertently passed it on to others.

Meanwhile, Maté has developed an addiction of his own: he randomly rushes to the music store and buys CDs he never even listens to. When he learned about the link between traumatic childhood experiences and compulsive behavior, he thought of his own infancy in the Budapest ghetto. He didn't understand what was happening, but he absorbed Maté's mother's stress. Music was the only thing that helped her relax. Still, his patients' trauma is even more extreme.

Maté connects the dots between his music-buying addiction and his own childhood trauma from spending his earliest years in a Jewish family living under Nazi occupation. Even though he was too young to understand what was happening at the time, he still absorbed his parents' trauma—and the strategies they used to cope with it. This is why music still helps him relax. Notably, Maté's analysis of his own childhood also shows that trauma isn't all-or-nothing—instead, it's a spectrum, and the more severe trauma people experience, the more likely they are to turn to extreme measures like drug addiction to deal with it.

Hari walks around Downtown Eastside, wishing he could tell the ordinary people who look down on addicts that addiction is really a response to deep pain. He wonders how the addicts see him. Meanwhile, he notes that childhood trauma can't explain addiction in its entirety, and he points out that another Vancouver professor, Bruce Alexander, wants to explain the other factors involved.

Hari's account of his walk shows how Maté's theory helped him change his perspective on addicts. While the drug war encourages people to think of addicts as evil criminals, Hari has always viewed them with a mix of revulsion and pity. But Maté's principle about trauma causing addiction enables Hari to truly empathize with addicts for the first time: he learns to see their outward suffering and disarray as reflections of their inward emotional pain and dysregulation.

Over dinner, Gabor Maté tells Hari, "if I had to design a system that was intended to keep people addicted, I'd design exactly the system that we have right now." The drug war attacks, ostracizes, and criminalizes people, which exacerbates the pain that drives them to use drugs. Consequences like incarceration, violence, disease, and poverty simply don't discourage drug use. The key to actually fighting addiction is providing better health and social services to families, including prenatal care and programs to identify and stop child abuse. These programs currently exist, but they're inadequate almost everywhere in the world.

Maté's theory explains why the drug war doesn't decrease addiction (as people like Leigh Maddox have already pointed out to Hari). The drug market is driven primarily by addicts' demand for drugs, and this demand is driven by emotional pain and trauma. Thus, the more pain and trauma a society inflicts on its people, the more drug use (and drug sales and trafficking) that society can expect to see. The drug war is specifically designed to inflict pain on addicts—clear examples of this include Harry Anslinger's persecution of Billie Holiday and the conditions at Joe Arpaio's jails. Thus, the drug war actually worsens the conditions that lead people to use drugs, so it tends to increase addiction over time. The alternative is to stop scapegoating drugs as the cause of social problems and actually fight the problems themselves.

Meanwhile, addicted adults need support, reassurance, and acceptance from the people around them. For instance, through her connection with people like Liz Evans and Gabor Maté, Hannah gradually improved at the Portland Hotel and even reconnected with her birth family. Evans believes that all of the people she treats deserve love and respect.

In addition to yielding a different set of policy priorities for society as a whole, Maté's theory also offers individuals clear, actionable strategies for helping people in their lives overcome addiction. By understanding that addiction is rooted in trauma, people can learn to empathize with the addicts in their lives—and this empathy is exactly what addicts need in order to move beyond trauma and improve their lives.

CHAPTER 13: BATMAN'S BAD CALL

As a child, Bruce Alexander read a comic that shows Batman watch a group of criminals beat up an addict. Alexander's father told him that Batman didn't intervene because junkies are "worthless human beings." Years after learning about Alexander's research in university, Hari gets the chance to meet him at the Downtown Eastside library in Vancouver. Alexander is clearly part of the community—an addicted woman even approaches him to thank him for his groundbreaking work.

Bruce Alexander's Batman comic and his father's comments capture modern Western societies' standard attitude toward drug users, but Gabor Maté has already given a more empathetic alternative. Alexander's popularity at the library suggests that he has also learned to embrace this alternative over the course of his career. It indicates that his research has meaningfully improved drug users' lives, whether by providing them with resources or by helping others view them in a more positive light.

Alexander tells Hari about how, as a young professor, he was assigned to teach a class on social issues in psychology. To prepare, he visited Downtown Eastside and offered free family therapy to local drug addicts. His first patient was a 23-year-old addict who worked as a shopping mall Santa Claus in the winter. Alexander expected his patients to lack insight into their lives, but to his surprise, the young man fully understood the severity of his addiction.

Even after training as a professional psychologist, Alexander still believed in common misconceptions about addiction, which shows how powerful they can be. For instance, he still believed that drugs erode addicts' minds, preventing them from understanding or controlling their drug use. This misconception is powerful and dangerous because it encourages people to treat addicts as irrational and give up on saving them. But the reality is that addicts often act rationally *by taking drugs: in the moment, they rationally prefer the drug's effects to feeling their intense psychological pain, and in the long term, they rationally know that continuing to use drugs is likely to harm them.*

Later, Alexander learned more perplexing facts. First, there were periods in the 1970s when the Canadian police prevented any heroin from coming into Vancouver. This meant that there wasn't actual heroin in the "heroin" that addicts were using—it was all filler. But, strangely, heroin users didn't undergo withdrawal despite the fact that (unbeknownst to them) they weren't taking heroin during this time. In fact, nothing changed: they noticed the "heroin" was weaker but stayed addicted and behaved exactly like they did before. Then, Alexander noticed that heroin withdrawal just resembled a bad flu—it wasn't severe and life-threatening, like he had been taught. The pain of withdrawal, Hari writes, is mostly "the return of all the psychological pain that you were trying to put to sleep with heroin in the first place." In fact, withdrawal almost never kills people.

Vancouver's heroin-free periods and the surprisingly mild effects of withdrawal both reinforce Hari's argument that the psychological, habitual side of drug use has a stronger effect than the physical dependence that addicts may form. These observations have important consequences. First, if the ritual of drug use matters more than drugs' actual effects, then this suggests that treatment programs could help addicts quit drugs by giving them new habits and rituals to perform. Second, if withdrawal is mostly about psychological pain, then addicts can avoid the worst of it by developing other strategies for coping with their trauma.

A student challenged Alexander's theory of addiction by citing famous studies that show that caged rats will self-administer cocaine until they kill themselves. But Alexander wondered if this may have been because the rats were isolated in an empty cage, with nothing to do but take drugs. To test his idea, he put one group of rats in empty cages and another group in "Rat Park," a cage full of rats' favorite things—like toys, food, and friends. He gave all the rats two bottles, one with morphine and one with water. The isolated rats consumed morphine at five times the rate of the rats in "Rat Park." This suggests that addiction isn't a disease—it's an adaptation to one's environment.

Most people interpreted the original rat study as proof that cocaine is so strong that it causes addiction on its own. However, Alexander's experience with addicts led him toward a different explanation. His "Rat Park" experiment confirmed his suspicion, at least in rodents: drugs' physical effects contribute less to addiction than environment does. If this is also true of humans, then overcoming addiction must require finding a more enriching, meaningful, Rat Park-like environment.

Alexander modified the experiment to continue testing his hypothesis: he isolated the rats for two months and gave them huge amounts of morphine. Then, he put them in Rat Park. Surely enough, they all gave up the morphine. In fact, the Vietnam War provided a human version of this experiment: a fifth of U.S. soldiers developed heroin addictions during the war, but 95 percent of them recovered when they returned home.

The second version of Alexander's experiment is significant because it shows that addiction is consistently reversible, which has important implications for drug treatment. Namely, it suggests that treatment programs should focus on helping addicts rebuild enriching lives and connections, rather than just forcing them to stop using drugs. Indeed, the example of the U.S. soldiers supports this approach: the soldiers managed to kick their heroin addictions when they returned home because were reunited with their loved ones and familiar environments, while all of the stressors that drove them to use heroin during the war were no longer present.

These examples show that people whose environments make them feel isolated and powerless are far more likely to become addicts than those who live in safe environments and have healthy relationships. In other words, *social circumstances* distinguish the 90 percent of drug users who don't get addicted from the 10 percent who do. Alexander specifically focuses on *dislocation*—or losing a sense of meaning that is rooted in a specific group or place. (One example is indigenous Americans losing their land and culture through colonization.) Alexander concludes that modern society causes chronic isolation, which encourages addiction.

Just as drug use can be a reaction to serious childhood trauma, Alexander suggests that it can also be a reaction to a much less specific (but no less severe) sense of purposelessness. Maté views drugs as a response to trauma because they can help alleviate pain, while Alexander's idea that drugs are a remedy for meaninglessness is based on the principle that drugs can give people a sense of calm and control that they might lack otherwise. Still, the connection between Maté and Alexander's ideas is clear—after all, dislocation (like native people losing their land) is often a traumatic event in and of itself.

Bruce Alexander's findings help illuminate Gabor Maté's: children who experience serious trauma struggle to build healthy relationships as adults, and they end up feeling isolated. One of Alexander's colleagues suggests talking about "bonding" instead of addiction: if people can't bond to *each other*, they bond to compulsive behaviors instead.

Alexander and Maté are really describing two dimensions of the same problem: trauma and isolation tend to go together. Specifically, trauma leads people to isolate themselves, and people often experience isolation as traumatic. In turn, when cut off from others by trauma and isolation, people are likely to seek meaning and stability through behaviors they can control (like drug use).

Alexander also helps explain why addicts continued as usual even when there was no actual heroin in Vancouver. Besides their exciting life of getting high and committing crime with other addicts, Alexander notes, many addicts' only real alternative is a lifetime of boring low-wage work. In other words, they don't just bond with drugs themselves—they also bond with the subculture that surrounds drug use. This gives them a sense of identity. Thus, even when there was no real heroin, addicts still stuck with their subculture—at least it was better than nothing.

Alexander once again warns that it's counterproductive to view addicts as irrational. Instead, he shows that becoming a drug addict—and even taking fake drugs—can actually be a perfectly rational decision for people with few other options in life. Just as addiction helps people deal with trauma by making their pain go away, it also helps people deal with dislocation by giving them some identity to latch onto. Thus, Alexander agrees that drug addiction isn't addicts' true, underlying problem—instead, it's more often a solution *to their true underlying problems.*

Hari also wonders about the other side: the scientists who still think that chemicals cause addiction. He decides to meet Robert DuPont, the founder of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), which funds 90 percent of global drug research. At an anti-drug conference, DuPont gives a passionate speech about how drugs "hijack your brain and cause chemical slavery," then privately admits to Hari that these metaphors aren't accurate, since people generally overcome addiction on their own. He also tells Hari that he never thinks about the environmental factors that may contribute to addiction because he doesn't think they matter.

In contrast to Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander, Robert DuPont simply repeats the conventional "drugs-hijack-brains" theory without citing any real evidence for it. While his role at the NIDA shows that he has an exceptional amount of power over global drug policy, his conversation with Hari shows that he's more interested in pushing Anslinger's conventional wisdom about drugs than seriously investigating the rigorous scientific evidence on them. Just like Anslinger, DuPont doesn't listen to the facts because he has already made up his mind. Thus, the drug war continues simply because people in power don't care enough to look at the real evidence.

Hari learns that that DuPont's attitude is standard among scientists: they study the biochemistry of drugs to the exclusion of everything else. World-renowned drug researcher Carl Hart tells Hari that the scientific establishment's ideas about addiction are based on "smoke and mirrors" because governments only fund research that advances the tenets of the drug war. Eric Sterling, a lawyer who helped write national drug policies, agrees. He tells Hari that the NIDA knows it would be shut down if any of its research opposed the "drugs-hijack-brains theory."

Carl Hart helps Hari understand the rational self-interest behind DuPont's denialism: DuPont's power and reputation depend on the "drugs-hijack-brains" theory that he has been pushing for several decades. Similarly, the U.S. government as a whole cares more about protecting its drug war policies than learning scientific truths about drugs. Thus, the stakes for scientists and doctors look much like they did in Anslinger's time: disagreeing with the common myths about drugs means risking their careers. By studying drugs' biochemical effects in a vacuum instead of actually studying addiction, they can do meaningful research while steering clear of this political conflict. However, as evidence about drugs' effects continues to pile up, it becomes easier and easier to jump to the inaccurate conclusion that these effects must cause addiction.

This is exactly what happened to Bruce Alexander: after his first groundbreaking Rat Park experiment, his university cut off his funding. The administration worried that his work would invite public and political backlash. Alexander was astonished to see other scientists completely disregard his results and keep pushing proven falsehoods about addiction instead.

Once again, governments and universities act remarkably like drug cartels when their interests are threatened. The university's backlash to Alexander shows how the powerful political consensus about drugs prevents solutions to the drug war from emerging. Notably, Alexander works in Canada, not the U.S., but the U.S. government's drug war can still easily reach him. Again, the ongoing drug war shows how power can trump truth, while reform requires fighting to put truth above power.

Reflecting on his research, Hari realizes that he still hasn't figured out why the drug war started in the early 1900s, why people so easily accept Anslinger's message, and why societies keep stepping up the drug war even though it's clearly making crime and addiction *worse*. Bruce Alexander offers answers. In modern society, Alexander argues, most people feel "the need to fill an inner void." Since the beginning of the 20th century, people have become wealthier than ever before, but also more isolated and dislocated. People cope with this dislocation through addiction—whether to drugs, technology, consumerism, or even the drug war itself. Hari concludes that "the drug war began when it did because we were afraid of our own addictive impulses, rising all around us because we were so alone."

Alexander's nuanced point can be easy to miss: in addition to explaining why modern life fosters addiction, he's also saying that the drug war itself is really a form of addiction. Just as addicts cope with pain and disconnection by using drugs, drug warriors cope with their "inner void[s]" by scapegoating drugs for their (and society's) problems. In fact, Alexander and Hari are proposing that we ought to think of drug addiction as just one among many kinds of compulsive behaviors, which people use to cope with their sense of alienation and loneliness in the modern world. Thus, it's possible to see Harry Anslinger's vicious opposition to drugs, Robert DuPont's insistence that only his science counts, Gabor Maté's obsessive music-buying, and hardcore drug addiction as different versions of the same behavior.

Hari sits in a Vancouver park, contemplating Bruce Alexander's idea that addiction should be seen as a collective problem, not an individual one. This means that drug policy should focus on creating a healthier, less dislocated society, where people find happiness through fulfilling relationships. This would reduce both drug addiction and our destructive modern addiction to consumption.

Alexander's work on addiction, isolation, and connection helps Hari view drug addiction in its social and political context. Conceptualizing addiction as a shared social problem helps him transition to the last part of his book, which focuses on political alternatives to the drug war. Just as Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander propose addressing individual cases of addiction by attacking its root causes—like trauma, dislocation, and isolation—Hari wants to address the broader social problem of addiction in the same way.

Hari now believes that most of addiction is environmental, but he still wants to know how much of it is chemical. He discovers Richard DeGrandpre's pioneering experiment on nicotine patches. Nicotine, the active ingredient in cigarettes, is at least as chemically addictive as cocaine and more than 150 times deadlier. Yet, while patches completely satisfy the body's chemical urge for nicotine, only 17.7 percent of patch users quit smoking. This speaks to the difference between *dependence* on a drug, which is physical, and *addiction*, which is primarily psychological. In reality, dependence is really just a small part of addiction.

DeGrandpre's experiment shouldn't be misinterpreted as offering a definitive, precise, perfectly quantifiable explanation for addiction. For instance, it would be wrong to say that DeGrandpre has proven that 82.3 percent of addiction is psychological. Instead, Hari cites DeGrandpre's experiment because it succinctly captures the most important conclusion from all of the experiments that Hari has described in this chapter so far: the main driver of addiction is psychology, not chemical dependence.

CHAPTER 14: THE DRUG ADDICTS' UPRISING

Vancouverites constantly tell Hari that Downtown Eastside used to be far worse. They largely attribute its change to a homeless poet and drug addict named Bud Osborn. Hari meets Osborn in his book-filled apartment, and Osborn tells Hari about a fateful day two decades before. Homeless and addicted, Osborn heard ambulances all day and kept wondering if they were for his friends. He ran into a friend named Margaret, who explained that her cousin just overdosed, and then her partner found her body and committed suicide—all right in front of their young son. Osborn remembered his own childhood and thought, "This has to stop." He resolved to fight the system.

The fifth and final part of Hari's book strikes a much more optimistic note: it focuses on how reformers have successfully combatted the war on drugs in different places around the world, and it uses these experiences as a springboard to encourage readers to fight for policy change. Bud Osborn's story shows how even the most powerless and reviled people, like addicts, can make a difference by organizing. Margaret's story speaks to the profound pain that both drives addiction and results from addiction. Needless to say, Osborn recognized that he and other addicts were living out the same cycle as Margaret's cousin, and they needed healthier and more effective ways to deal with their trauma than by using drugs.

Bud Osborn's father, Walton, was a bomber pilot during World War II. When his plane was shot down over Austria, the Nazis took him as a prisoner of war, but he survived and ultimately returned to the U.S. Walton drank nonstop. When his wife, Patricia, began seeing another man, he had a breakdown, and his friends took him to the local jail to sober up. Walton hanged himself in his cell, and the local newspaper blamed Patricia for his death.

Osborn's father experienced the kind of deep trauma that Gabor Maté has argued is typical of drug addicts. Just like in Chino Hardin's family, this trauma passed itself down in a cycle: because Walton Osborn failed to deal with his own trauma from the war, he ended up traumatizing his wife and child through his suicide.

Patricia and Bud were ostracized, and she fell into alcoholism, too. She started telling Bud that his father died in the war. For many years, Bud thought that she was right—and that his memories of his father were all hallucinations. Patricia would disappear for days at a time, and Bud blamed himself. One day, Bud was forced to watch a man rape his mother in their trailer. He attempted suicide, then started writing poetry, playing sports, and disassociating from the world in order to avoid his pain. Then, he discovered pills and alcohol. In college, he kept attempting suicide, but he also found meaning through poetry.

Just like Walton inadvertently passed his trauma onto Patricia, Patricia ended up inadvertently passing her trauma onto Bud. She led him to seriously doubt his own sanity and worth. Then, her rape further traumatized both her and Bud. Of course, this episode likely explains why Margaret's story reminded Bud about his own childhood: just as Margaret's cousin's child watched his parents overdose and commit suicide, Bud had to watch his mother endure one of the most traumatic possible experiences. Understandably, Bud devoted his life to looking for strategies to cope with his pain.

Bud Osborn went to New York to volunteer for a government antipoverty program, and he ended up staying in the city. That's where he discovered heroin. It made him truly feel good for the first time in his life. By helping his traumatic memories fade away, it even enabled him to have sex for the first time—while listening to Billie Holiday. Then, for five years, Osborn fled across the country to avoid fighting in Vietnam. He didn't use heroin, but he was suicidal. He attempted suicide yet again but failed, so he continued living on the streets. Osborn's mother contacted him from a psychiatric hospital to report that she was running for president. Osborn decided that he had to leave the U.S., so he fled to Vancouver.

Bud Osborn's drug use fits perfectly into Gabor Maté's theory that addicts are people who spend their entire lives in deep pain and can only find relief through drugs. Far from Anslinger and DuPont's theory that drugs hijack people's brains and make them crazy, heroin actually allowed Osborn to feel safe and normal for the first time. Moreover, it's significant that Osborn relapsed into depression after stopping heroin use—again, this supports Maté's theory that for addicts, drugs are actually the solution to pain (even if they end up causing more pain down the line).

On the day that Osborn met Margaret, he already knew that the drug war made overdoses far *worse*. Under drug prohibition, addicts don't know how pure their drugs are, so they can easily underestimate their dose. And they use drugs in secret to avoid police attention, so when they *do* overdose, passersby are less likely to find them and call for help. Osborn also knew that several European countries had virtually eliminated overdose deaths by letting addicts use drugs in safe rooms, under medical supervision. He decided that the addicts needed to organize, so he began leading political meetings in a local church.

Many of the key sociological findings about prohibition and addiction are simply common sense to addicts like Osborn. Scientists and policymakers might debate whether banning drugs makes them more dangerous, for instance, but Osborn knew firsthand that it does. And because he knew that other countries had successfully made drug use safer, he knew that it would be possible to do the same in Vancouver. Of course, this echoes Hari's goal in this final part of his book: he wants activists, addicts, and their loved ones to know that there are *successful alternatives to the drug war, and that they* do *have the power to help create those alternatives.*

At Bud Osborn's meetings, the addicts agreed to organize patrols to identify and stop overdoses. They also learned to perform CPR. Soon, the drug users started organizing for bigger changes and participating in city meetings to represent their community. They genuinely tried to help others, even when the public was hostile—for instance, when parents complained about needles on playgrounds, Osborn organized a patrol to clean them up. At the time, Vancouver's conservative mayor, Philip Owen, wanted to lock up every drug addict and dealer, and the police simply ignored drug users' concerns.

To Hari, one of the main issues with drug prohibition is that it essentially bans collective action to reduce the harms of drug use. The government certainly won't facilitate this sort of action, and medical professionals and charity organizations that choose to step in often face legal challenges. This is why Osborn's approach was so ingenious: he got addicts themselves to implement harm reduction strategies. In addition to making their own lives much better, their collective action helped them connect to one another and made them a visible group in local politics. In other words, it gave them a voice and helped them combat the stigma against drug use. Osborn's activism provides a clear template for how addicts and activists can bring about change in their own communities.

Osborn and his group formalized their organization, naming it the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (or VANDU). They put a thousand wooden crosses in a public park to represent the thousand people the city had lost to overdoses in four years. Then, they started protesting at city meetings with a wooden coffin. Hari notes that these tactics were possible because the Portland Hotel Society ensured that addicts wouldn't lose their housing for publicly coming out. For the first time ever in the drug war, addicts "were putting prohibitionists on the defensive."

Like ACT UP's famous AIDS protests in New York, VANDU's protests were designed to make the public confront the suffering they were imposing on a marginalized group. Before VANDU's protests, political inaction's serious consequences were largely invisible, but VANDU made it impossible to ignore the high death toll from drug prohibition. Hari's point about the Portland Hotel Society is not just a side comment to connect this chapter to previous ones—it's actually central to his analysis of why VANDU succeeded. Just as addicts often need love and support in order to stop using drugs, they also needed stable housing in order to have the luxury of protesting. This shows how providing basic services to addicts can have a domino effect by helping them build power and achieve greater political change in the long term.

To satisfy VANDU, the city gave Bud Osborn a seat on the board. While the rest of the board admitted that they hoped Downtown Eastside's addicts would all get HIV and die out, Osborn secured funding for VANDU and built a safe injection site. All across the city, people were starting to see addicts as humans with dignity, not worthless monsters. Meanwhile, addicts felt better about *themselves* because of their participation in VANDU. And for the first time ever, Osborn felt like he truly belonged somewhere. His story supports both Gabor Maté's theory that trauma causes addiction and Bruce Alexander's theory that a supportive, enriching environment can solve it.

VANDU's trajectory shows how marginalized people's social movements can succeed: they have to build power outside institutions until those institutions let them in. Then, they can use a combination of outside and institutional power to change policy. Once Osborn was on the board, city leaders and residents could no longer view addicts as irrelevant and sub-human. Meanwhile, Hari also shows that political activism can help addicts find the human connection and sense of purpose that they generally need to overcome addiction.

Vancouver still faced a serious overdose problem, so VANDU got the city to declare its first ever public health emergency. While city leaders knew they couldn't dismiss addicts as irrelevant anymore, there was one holdout: Mayor Owen, who refused to change any drug policies. But eventually, Owen agreed to meet addicts—and he started to understand their problems and stories. He agreed to give VANDU members a voice during public press conferences and open North America's first safe injection site in Downtown Eastside. He gradually abandoned all of his prohibitionist ideas and came out in favor of legalizing all drugs.

While Osborn and VANDU began achieving greater and greater victories, once again, power trumped truth: Mayor Owen remained totally committed to the drug war's myths (just like Anslinger, DuPont, and so many others). However, in a remarkable turn of events, VANDU built enough power to make truth win out. Mayor Owen's switch from prohibitionist to drug activist shows how hearing addicts' stories and personally connecting with them can be a transformative process. Needless to say, Hari wrote this book in part because of his faith in such stories.

At Vancouver's safe injection site, InSite, addicts get clean needles and private booths where they can safely use drugs. It also has trained nurses, counseling services, and a detox center. Vancouver is now North America's most progressive city in terms of drug policy. Many local residents worried that InSite would increase drug use and crime, but it did just the opposite. In a decade, the neighborhood's life expectancy increased by 10 years, and its overdose rate decreased by 80 percent.

The public's initial attitudes toward InSite made sense in the context of the drug war, which presents all drug use as a dangerous crime. However, the program's effects showed just the opposite: making it safer for addicts to use drugs dramatically reduces the harms associated with drugs. In fact, InSite succeeded where the war on drugs had failed for years. This strongly supports Hari's thesis that drug prohibition *causes the harms usually attributed to drugs themselves.*

When Bud Osborn died of pneumonia in 2014, the city closed off streets and held a huge memorial service for him. Before his death, he finally completed his dream of changing a life through poetry. He read a poem about suicide for a group of high schoolers. One of them had just survived a suicide attempt, and she insisted on keeping a copy of the poem.

Osborn's final years show how addicts can overcome pain and dislocation by finding a sense of purpose. Sometimes, paradoxically enough, this doesn't even require them to give up drug use. His memorial service also shows how addicts can use politics to collectively fight their marginalization and win respect.

CHAPTER 15: SNOWFALL AND STRENGTHENING

Visiting Vancouver gives Hari a sense of hope for the first time in his research. He decides to look for other "positive experiments" of drug reform, but he quickly realizes that he won't find any more in the Americas. He goes to Europe instead—starting with his home, the U.K. He contacts John Marks, who ran an experiment prescribing heroin in Liverpool as a young psychiatrist. During the region's industrial decline, the conservative government decided to cut its subsidies and leave its economy to collapse. There were widespread riots in the area, and then heroin use started to spread. John gave people prescriptions for a week's worth of heroin at a time.

Hari's chapters on Vancouver showed how governments can follow the science, listen to addicts themselves, and choose better drug policies. In this chapter, he looks at how these policies actually work. Liverpool's heroin epidemic fits Bruce Alexander's theory that drug addiction is a response to social dislocation and decline, and Marks's heroin clinic shows what might have happened in the U.S. if Harry Anslinger hadn't succeeded in shutting down Edward Williams's clinic in the 1930s. It's easy to see how just a small policy change—new laws allowing doctors to prescribe drugs to addicts—could spread Marks's model far and wide.

Hari's findings surprised him: he used to assume that the U.K. fought the war on drugs exactly like the U.S., just a bit less intensely. Historically, the U.K. also outlawed drugs in response to a racial panic, but unlike in the U.S., U.K. doctors refused to comply. For two generations, they prescribed heroin to addicts so that they could live stable, healthy lives. Drug addiction rates were far lower than in the U.S. Harry Anslinger worked hard to shut down this system, but he failed.

Like Vancouver's drug addicts, the U.K.'s doctors won crucial, lifesaving drug law changes through political organizing. The key to their success was not merely establishing a consensus about the benefits of better drug policies, but actually building power around this consensus.

Tasked with planning a regional anti-drug strategy, John Marks hired the researcher Russell Newcombe to study his patients. Newcombe found no HIV infections, drug crime, or overdose deaths. Most of the patients had jobs, families, and clean bills of health. In fact, doctors know that pure heroin is safe to inject. Most street addicts' problems, like abscesses and infections, come from dirty needles and the adulterants added to heroin (which range from dust and coffee to bleach and cement). When Marks realized this, he decided that the real problem wasn't drugs, but the laws prohibiting them.

Hari has emphasized that drug prohibition causes far more damage than drugs themselves, but so far, he has focused on drug-related conflict and violence. Newcombe's research takes this even further: he shows that even the medical *problems ordinarily associated with drugs are actually the result of prohibition. This makes sense—as Hari has already pointed out, doctors frequently prescribe opiates like heroin in medical settings without serious adverse effects. Thus, Marks's program shows that drug legalization doesn't mean spreading addiction and crime across the globe—rather, it means sending more people to more doctor's appointments.*

Marks expanded the heroin prescription program, enrolling hundreds of new patients. Over the next 18 months, addicts committed 93 percent fewer robberies and became ordinary law-abiding citizens. After getting her prescription, one addicted mother switched from prostitution to waitressing overnight. There were also fewer drug dealers on the streets.

The effects of Marks's program were remarkable: it's difficult to imagine any other policy intervention reducing crime so sharply. His results offer compelling evidence that prohibition isn't just responsible for most *of drugs' negative effects—rather, it appears to be responsible for* nearly all *of them.*

Unlike Henry Williams, John Marks didn't think that heroin users would remain addicted for life—he assumed that his patients would recover. This is because he knew the data showing that most addicts grow out of addiction, usually after about 10 years. Thus, the public feared that the program would *increase* drug use, while Marks assumed that it would have no effect. But drug use actually *fell*. This is because, under drug prohibition, the best way for addicts to fund their habit is by selling drugs to others. Prescriptions eliminate this pattern, saving countless people from addiction.

Marks's data about recovery is significant: not only does it contradict the common assumption that drug addicts are a stable, unchanging population, but it also highlights how interventions to help addicts have profound long-term benefits. Namely, rather than merely supporting addicts and allowing them to continue using drugs for the rest of their lives, such programs can actually turn them into fully functioning, productive members of society. Finally, Marks's finding about the reduction in addicts selling drugs to others underlines how so many of the harms associated with drug use are specifically driven by the high price that the black market requires addicts to pay for drugs. Legal clinics don't just give addicts safer drugs—they also ensure that drug users don't have to make money through crime or spend all of their money on drugs.

While some opposed John Marks's prescription policy—like the Communists, who thought he was delaying the revolution by drugging the masses—the regional government took notice and replicated his program in every town. But then, Marks went on a widely-publicized tour of the U.S. to talk about his policy, and the U.K. embassy in the U.S. pressured the U.K. government to shut down Marks's program. In a matter of days, Marks's patients returned to street drugs, lost their jobs, and returned to crime. Within two years, a tenth of them had died of overdoses. Blacklisted in the U.K., John Marks left and moved to New Zealand.

Marks's program was shut down because it contradicted the same conventional stories about drugs and the drug war that Harry Anslinger first popularized in the 1930s. It's easy to think that the program was shut down because it succeeded, and the government didn't want to admit the truth about the drug war. But that isn't what happened. Actually, Hari presents the government's reasoning as far less sophisticated: it didn't even bother to ask whether Marks's approach was successful. Instead, it simply viewed a doctor prescribing heroin to addicts as scandalous, and the reasoning ended there. Needless to say, creating more effective drug policies requires pushing governments past this kind of knee-jerk reaction.

Next, Hari visits Geneva, the city where Harry Anslinger first forced the international community to join his war on drugs—and where the Swiss government is now starting to dismantle it. In the 1980s and 1990s, Switzerland saw a spike in addiction in visible public places like a Zurich train station and a Bern park. But then, President Ruth Dreifuss changed everything. Hari meets her for an interview in her apartment.

President Dreifuss is a rare example of a powerful politician who actually chose to follow the scientific evidence rather than the drug war's truisms. Dreifuss's story can provide a model for other politicians who want to end the drug war, as well as for activists who want to change their elected leaders' minds.

Growing up, Ruth Dreifuss was bullied for her Jewish identity and her political ambitions—at the time, Swiss women couldn't even vote. In 1993, as Switzerland suffered from Europe's worst HIV epidemic, Dreifuss took over its national health policy. She met with addicts, sex workers, and doctors. One told her about Marks's experiment in Liverpool, and she decided to replicate it. She convinced the Swiss government to build a nationwide system of heroin and methadone clinics.

Dreifuss arrived at her policy solutions in the same way as Vancouver mayor Philip Owen: she actually met the people affected by the drug war, learned about their needs, and then looked for proven policy solutions that would meet those needs. Unlike so many of the drug war's leaders (particularly in the U.S.), she didn't base drug policy on self-interest or ulterior political motives. This suggests that the first step to a humane drug policy is treating addicts with dignity and respect. It also speaks to the power of personal connections and stories in changing people's minds. Of course, this explains why Hari structures this book around the stories and voices of people affected by the drug war (rather than just providing dry policy analysis).

Hari visits a heroin clinic in Geneva. Inside, he meets Jean, an old man wearing a tweed suit. For years, Jean spent all day every day using, selling, and finding money to pay for adulterated street heroin. Then, he joined one of Dreifuss's heroin clinics. Now, he goes to the clinic for his fix and has the rest of the day free to work. He's healthy and happy; he feels "reborn." In the clinics, addicts don't endlessly increase their doses over time; instead, most increase for a time, then stabilize at a consistent dose, and then finally start to decrease it. Jean is no exception.

Jean's story demonstrates the incredible upsides of legalizing and regulating drugs. Heroin addiction once ruined Jean's life not because his chemical dependence on the drug prevented him from working and living normally, but rather because prohibition left him with neither the time nor the money to do anything but *take heroin. By reclaiming heroin from the black market and returning it to the medical system, Dreifuss's policy has solved nearly all of these harms. Just like many ordinary people take psychoactive medications every day for mental illnesses, Jean takes his heroin every day but otherwise lives a perfectly normal and productive life.*

A clinic doctor tells Hari that the treatment's purpose is to help addicts gradually fill their lives with other meaningful connections and activities, until they no longer need heroin. Eighty-five percent of patients quit within three years. Addicts have traded a violent, exciting street subculture for a boring clinic waiting room. Meanwhile, Swiss cities have reclaimed the public spaces, like parks and train stations, that were once swarmed by addicts. Crime, HIV infections, and overdose deaths have fallen steeply. Beyond finding jobs and homes, addicts have also stopped selling drugs on the street. And it's much cheaper to fund the clinics than to put drug users through the legal system.

Like Marks's experiment in Liverpool, Switzerland's clinics dramatically reduced all the significant social costs of drug use, which again shows that these costs are really the result of prohibition, not drugs themselves. The doctor's explanation shows that Switzerland's system takes the scientific evidence about addiction seriously: it understands that addiction is a response to pain and disconnection, and that truly ending it requires solving these root causes first. Making drug use utterly boring is one important part of this. Bruce Alexander pointed out that many addicts bond to the subcultures surrounding drug use, but Switzerland's system eliminates these subcultures and encourages addicts to find meaning and excitement in other parts of their lives. Of course, this also helps make drugs less politically controversial.

Hari points out that Dreifuss managed to pass the world's most progressive drug policies in one of the world's most conservative countries. When Swiss citizens challenged Dreifuss's clinics, she made the opposite argument from Harry Anslinger: the drug war causes chaos and disorder, whereas the clinics create order and peace. In two different referendums, more than two-thirds of Swiss voters favored keeping Dreifuss's reforms. Her success shows Hari that, to truly change drug policy, reformers must learn to convince conservatives.

Dreifuss's success shows that the key to making better drug policy politically possible is changing the stories that people believe about drugs. Rather than promising the Swiss people an endless war against evil, Dreifuss promised them peace, quiet, and safety. In turn, Switzerland's success allows it to become an example for other countries.

In one clinic, a shy young patient handed Dreifuss a letter explaining that the clinic helped him get off the streets, learn self-respect, and find a job. In fact, he worked for the government, in Dreifuss's department. For Dreifuss, this was proof of the program's success. Yet she has had to defend it against international meddlers, particularly the U.S. and U.K. governments, which have tried to lobby her to stop it. She refused—instead, she helped found the Global Commission on Drug Policy, which lobbies against the drug war.

Dreifuss's encounter with this patient demonstrates that, when it comes to drug policy, her real priority is helping addicts recover and lead healthy lives—not punishing them for their poor decisions or moral failings. Moreover, the fact that the patient works in Dreifuss's department underlines Switzerland's belief that well-managed drug addiction is compatible with a meaningful life and even taking on serious public responsibilities. This would never happen in the U.S. or U.K. today. As Hari notes, these countries continue to spread misinformation about drugs and support the war on drugs internationally—just as Harry Anslinger did a century ago. Thus, overcoming the drug war will require not just changing policies in individual countries, but also changing the global political consensus about drugs.

When Hari discusses Swiss heroin clinics, Americans frequently tell him that the U.S. *does* prescribe strong opiates, like Oxycontin and Vicodin, and they have led to a disastrous drug epidemic. Baffled, Hari turns to experts. They explain the U.S. opiate epidemic by answering three important questions.

The U.S.'s severe opiate epidemic shows that merely providing people with drugs through legal prescriptions isn't enough to fight addiction. Rather, effective policy depends on the way *that drugs are available and the* kind *of services that are available to treat addiction.*

The first question is when American opiate addicts start to cause problems. Drug policy expert Meghan Ralston tells Hari that, whereas Switzerland prescribes opiates to addicts, the U.S. does the opposite: it forces doctors to cut off opiate prescriptions to addicted patients. *This* is when addicts turn to street drugs and start overdosing, committing crimes, and causing other social problems. But this also shows that the U.S. can eliminate many of the opiate epidemic's detrimental effects by simply letting doctors prescribe opiates to addicts.

The U.S. government steps in to prevent doctors from making the best medical decisions for their patients. Thus, the U.S. gives ordinary people access to potentially addictive drugs but abandons them if they form addictions. There is a clear parallel between this policy and the U.S.'s original drug prohibition laws. Just as prohibition pushed drug use from the legal market into the black market, the law against prescribing drugs to addicts forces them to stop using safe, legal drugs and start using dangerous, adulterated black market drugs instead.

The second question is why the U.S. prescription drug crisis is growing so fast. Most Americans blame greedy doctors and pharmaceutical companies, who get patients "accidentally addicted" to opiates. But doctors have always given surgery patients heroin, without creating accidental addicts. Hari argues that Bruce Alexander's research offers a better explanation: Americans are experiencing an unprecedented wave of distress and isolation, mainly because of falling middle-class wages and the Great Recession. If it weren't for opiates, Americans would probably turn to other drugs instead.

The "accidental addict[ion]" story doesn't explain the opiate epidemic because it's based on the disproven pharmaceutical theory of addiction (which Hari also calls the "drugs-hijack-brains" theory). Instead, Hari points to the U.S.'s equally widespread epidemic of dislocation, isolation, and trauma—which is also the result of government policies that encourage severe inequality. Thus, while the war on drugs encourages people to think of drug addiction as an individual problem that the addict alone is responsible for, in reality, it's just the opposite: it's a collective problem that calls for collective solutions.

The third and final question is why patients transition from weaker opiates, like Vicodin and Oxycontin, to stronger ones, like heroin. Most Americans blame this on chemicals: they think that addicts constantly need stronger drugs, or higher doses, to stay satisfied. But the real reason is "the iron law of prohibition." During **Prohibition**, Americans switched from beer to liquor, which was more widely available because it was more profitable for traffickers to transport drinks with a higher alcohol content. In general, people prefer mild intoxicants, but prohibition encourages suppliers to offer the strongest intoxicants they can. Thus, prohibition causes people to use stronger drugs.

In John Marks's clinic, most heroin users quit after around a decade, and in Switzerland's heroin clinics, most users stabilize and then reduce their dosages over time. These examples both show that addicts don't *automatically need higher doses over time (although they may certainly choose higher doses if their feelings of pain and disconnection grow). Instead, the iron law of prohibition shows that the real culprit is economic forces in the drug market. This result parallels many of the other findings Hari has explained throughout his book—like the fact that the level of violence in the drug trade tends to steadily increase over time.*

Similarly, Americans once consumed opiates and cocaine through drinks and cough syrups. But drug prohibition encouraged traffickers like Arnold Rothstein to sell stronger drugs: powder cocaine and injectable heroin. This iron law also applies to the opiate crisis. Oxycontin users want to keep using Oxycontin, but heroin is much easier to find on the street—and a third of the price. Even though the real problem is drug prohibition itself, Hari concludes, people keep blaming the chemicals and using this to justify more prohibitionist policies. The pattern keeps repeating; a Geneva heroin clinic doctor compares it to society relapsing. But she also promises that "at every relapse, you learn something new."

The iron law of prohibition also implies that if drugs are made legal, people will choose to use weaker and less dangerous forms. Hari shows that Oxycontin users make a rational decision when they switch to heroin, simply because of how the black market is structured. Needless to say, in a legal drug market, the government could give them the opposite incentive by making more dangerous *drugs more expensive. The doctor's comments about relapse and growth are a metaphor for her (and Hari's) hope that after repeating the drug war's mistakes enough times, modern societies will eventually move past them.*

CHAPTER 16: THE SPIRIT OF '74

Hari's next stop is Portugal, the only country in the world that has decriminalized all drugs. He walks around beautiful, sunny Lisbon, then meets João Goulão, the doctor who pioneered the country's drug policy. When Goulão was 19, Portugal was suffering under a repressive dictatorship. Goulão secretly joined the resistance movement, even though his father was a loyal employee of the regime. In April 1974, he joined the bloodless revolution that overthrew the dictatorship and established democracy. He credits the revolution with teaching him that it's always possible to change powerful systems when they aren't working.

Thus far, Hari has discussed small-scale victories, like Vancouver's safe injection site, to wider-ranging experiments, like Switzerland's system of heroin clinics. Now, in his final section, he looks at the most radical and transformative drug policy of all. In addition to explaining Goulão's push for reform, Portugal's 1974 revolution also serves as a metaphor for the nation's revolutionary drug policy (and the anti-drug war revolution that Hari hopes to help launch). But it's also evidence of Portugal's strong commitment to true democracy—namely, the principle that everyone in society has equal value and an equal right to lead a dignified life. As the reader will soon learn, Portugal is one of the only countries in the world that extends this dignity to drug addicts.

After the fall of the dictatorship, the beautiful Algarve region in southern Portugal saw an unprecedented influx of tourists—and drugs, especially heroin. Goulão was working there as a doctor. The medical system had little experience treating heroin addicts, and the government adopted "the international prohibitionist playbook" of criminalizing drugs. But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Portugal's serious heroin and AIDS epidemics only got worse and worse because addicts were afraid to seek medical care.

By the 1980s, countries like the U.S. had built a strong political and cultural consensus around the "international prohibitionist playbook" over the course of decades. In contrast, Portugal faced an overnight drug epidemic and had to build a new system of drug policies all at once. This gave Portuguese leaders more latitude to experiment with new and innovative drug policies. Of course, they stuck to the U.S.'s drug war playbook at first, but they faced far less political pressure to adhere to these policies in the long term.

Goulão set up an addiction treatment center in the Algarve. In 1997, he became the nation's chief addiction doctor, and in 1999, he joined a government commission to redesign the national drug policy. The commission recognized that most drug users aren't addicted, and that criminalizing addicts only worsens their issues. It declared that the government should treat addicts with compassion and help them build better lives. It proposed reintegrating drug users into society, decriminalizing all drugs, and shifting money from policing and prisons to education and recovery programs.

Just as Switzerland's drug policy succeeded in large part because Ruth Dreifuss actually consulted with drug addicts and doctors, Portugal's succeeded primarily because the nation gave an experienced addiction doctor the power to set national drug policy. This starkly contrasts with countries like the U.S., which treat drug policy as a law enforcement issue. By presenting drugs as a health issue instead, Portugal built an effective, science-based drug policy that applied the insights of leading researchers like Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander.

Portugal's heroin epidemic was so massive, Goulão argues, that almost everyone personally knew and sympathized with an addict. This helped persuade Portugal's parliament to pass the commission's plan. The nation decriminalized drug use and possession, but it did not legalize the drug trade, which would have triggered significant international backlash. While prohibitionists were predicting a massive spike in drug use, Goulão was busy repurposing "the big, lumbering machinery of the drug war" to focus on treatment and prevention instead.

Throughout this book, Hari has argued that people's political attitudes toward drugs are based in their emotional responses to drugs—which, in turn, depend on the drug users they may know and the stories they believe about drugs. Goulão made this same observation, and he turned it to his political advantage. Rather than harnessing people's resentment and anger toward addicts, like Anslinger did in the U.S., Goulão channeled their love and sympathy—just like Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander suggest. It's crucial to distinguish between Portugal's decriminalization *policy, which still restricts the supply of drugs to the black market, from* legalization *policies that create well-regulated drug markets and cut criminal gangs out of the equation. Of course, decriminalization is a crucial step toward legalization, and Hari argues that Portugal very well may have chosen legalization if it weren't for the political pressures it faced.*

Hari visits the Dissuasion Commission, the office where the Portuguese police send any drug users they encounter. A psychologist interviews each user to see if they just do drugs recreationally, or if they have a serious addiction. Recreational users then meet professionals like the sociologist Nuno Capaz, who offer advice about how to use drugs safely. For instance, Hari watches Capaz tell a 17-year-old boy who was caught smoking marijuana about how the drug might affect his concentration in school. The Commission also directs riskier users and addicts to the services they need, ranging from needle exchanges to immediate, free treatment.

In Portugal, decriminalization doesn't mean simply leaving drug addicts alone. Rather, it means proactively offering them the services that they need to overcome addiction and build more meaningful, socially connected lives. Thus, Portugal has a drug control system, just like the U.S. and other countries committed to the drug war do. The difference is that Portugal's system prioritizes public health professionals who take drug addicts' needs and autonomy into account, instead of police officers and prison guards who view addicts as criminals to be captured and controlled through force. Needless to say, these professionals are far better equipped to identify and remedy the actual problems they encounter. For instance, unlike many officials in the U.S., Nuno Capaz and his colleagues don't automatically assume that all drug use is problematic—instead, they follow the scientific evidence, which shows that only a minority of drug users develop serious addictions. As a result, they work to dispel drug war propaganda rather than spreading it.

Next, Hari visits a Portuguese drug rehabilitation center, where he watches addicts receive massages designed to help them deal with withdrawal pain and learn to relax without drugs. Goulão understands that addicts choose drugs in order to escape internal pain, so he has designed the facility to help patients develop insight into themselves. Over the year and a half that addicts spend in treatment, they learn to acknowledge and express their emotions through group games. This approach couldn't be more different than the U.S.'s prison system.

The rehabilitation center is an example of how Portugal has built a comprehensive network of services for addicts. It recognizes that they don't all have the same needs, and it offers them treatment options depending on what they need. Again, its system is based on scientific evidence and treats addicts with dignity.

After recovering addicts go through the treatment center, the Portuguese government helps them find dignified work. It gives companies tax breaks to hire them, and it helps them start small businesses. Hari again notes that the drug war does the opposite: it marks addicts for life with a criminal record, making it nearly impossible for them to find work.

Portugal's economic programs again show that the country's government is committed to helping addicts through every stage of recovery. It treats them with dignity by affirming their ability to become responsible and productive members of society. And most of all, it focuses on repairing harm, not punishing the people who commit it.

Portugal also has a solution for the addicts who aren't yet ready to quit. At Lisbon housing project, Hari watches a line of addicts receive methadone and counseling at a parked van. The psychologist knows them all, and his job is to help them make safer decisions, like smoking heroin instead of injecting it. Hari points out that these addicts are standing in public, where "their friends and neighbors and employers" can see them—he argues that this is why treatment can't succeed without decriminalization. Later, he follows the social workers who help the city's most vulnerable, homeless addicts, particularly by offering them clean needles. Again, he's struck by the addicts' reaction: under drug prohibition, they would panic and run away.

The methadone van is another example of how Portugal's drug treatment system reduces harm by providing addicts with relevant resources, no matter where they are in the cycle of addiction or the process of recovery. Moreover, it puts addicts in the driver's seat by respecting their right to make their own autonomous decisions about drug use and treatment. This helps them build the sense of control and dignity that the drug war often denies them. In fact, Hari's point about "friends and neighbors and employers" seeing drug users take methadone highlights one of the most powerful advantages of Portugal's approach: it eliminates the stigma *surrounding drug use, which is one of the main reasons that drug users tend to suffer more and more as they fall into addiction.*

In Oporto, Hari meets Sergio Rodrigues. Years ago, during the age of drug prohibition, the police used to beat Sergio up for fun. His friends were addicts, and they were constantly dying. Then, when Portugal's drug policy changed, a street team approached Sergio to offer clean needles, safety advice, and a pathway to recovery. He went to a treatment center, but it didn't work, so he tried a "therapeutic community," where he received methadone and counseling. He found a job, started a relationship, and almost entirely quit using drugs. Now, he's an ordinary citizen, a taxpaying family man. Hari thinks about how differently Sergio's life would have turned out in a prohibitionist country.

Rodrigues's story shows how Portugal's network of treatment programs works to gradually transform addicts' lives over the long term. When the police beat Rodrigues under prohibition, they sent him the message that his life had no value. In contrast, under decriminalization, treatment services helped him rebuild connections, understand the factors that led him into addiction, and value himself as a human being. Thus, Rodrigues's story embodies the healing power of Portugal's revolutionary system, which can help even the most marginalized, desperate addicts transform themselves into healthy citizens.

Hari explains that his main concern about drug legalization is how it might affect children. For instance, scientists know that regular marijuana use permanently damages teenagers' brains. To understand how the Portuguese system affects them, he visits a high school, where the class watches a video of a man offering cocaine to a girl and then debates what she should do. The students openly discuss their own drug use, while the teacher patiently mediates the conversation and explains the true risks of cocaine use. The class decides that the girl should say no. By prioritizing honest conversation, Hari argues, the Portuguese approach helps young people make better decisions.

One of the most common defenses of drug war policies is that they deter vulnerable young people from trying, getting addicted to, and damaging their brain development with drugs. In admitting that he shares this concern, Hari reminds the reader that he takes the risks of drug use and the harms of addiction extremely seriously. However, Hari's experience in the Portuguese classroom quickly resolves his concerns because it shows him that decriminalization doesn't convince children that drugs are harmless or good. If anything, it takes away some of drugs' allure by removing the taboo that surrounds them in prohibitionist societies.

Hari acknowledges that decriminalization scares many people, who fear that it could backfire and increase drug use. This is how João Figueira, Portugal's top drug policeman, once felt. He passionately opposed decriminalization, and then was astonished to see it work. He tells Hari that Portugal's overall rate of drug use is well below the European average, while its number of addicts, overdoses, and HIV cases fell sharply after decriminalization. Teenage drug use is also very low. Drug-related crime has disappeared, Figueira explains, and poor people no longer fear the police, which makes investigations far easier. Regardless of their political leanings, most Portuguese people are happy with decriminalization, which they view as common sense, or a settled issue.

Figueira's change of heart shows how successful drug policy can transform public attitudes about drugs, even among the staunchest and most powerful prohibitionists. Like Vancouver's safe injection site, John Marks's prescription program in Liverpool, and Switzerland's heroin clinics, Portugal's approach has achieved all of the drug war's aims while erasing virtually all of the violence associated with it. Some of its benefits even exceeded drug reformers' expectations—like the way it has fostered goodwill between law enforcement and the communities they police, and the way it has brought the country together politically.

After meeting João Figueira, Hari wanders around Lisbon "lost in a head-rush of optimism." Figueira's change of heart proves that reformers can win over even staunch "drug warriors." Hari believes that most of these warriors are compassionate and well-intentioned (like Figueira), not paranoid and resentful (like Harry Anslinger). In this way, they're just like the reformers: they want to save lives, protect young people, and reduce addiction. Portugal shows that there's no contradiction between embracing compassion and crushing addiction. Rather, compassion for addicts is the *way* to crush addiction. If the U.S. took Portugal's approach, it would save $87.8 billion per year. People like Leigh Maddox are already fighting for this.

Hari's "head-rush of optimism" reflects his conclusion that Portugal has found the solution to the drug war. It's true that, in the past, power has consistently trumped truth in the drug war—in other words, people like Anslinger imposed the policies they preferred, even when all the evidence contradicted the reasoning behind those polices. But for the most part, drug policy reform isn't about noble heroes fighting coldhearted villains. Instead, both sides want the same thing—reducing addiction and the harms it causes—but just disagree on how to achieve it. Hari now believes that it's possible to persuade both sides through case studies like Portugal.

But as Hari wanders around Lisbon, he also meets many drug dealers. He admits that, with the drug trade still illegal, users still have to buy from criminal gangs. Still, Goulão knows that it's just a matter of time before a changing international consensus makes it possible for Portugal to legalize the drug trade, too.

Yet while Portugal's policy represents a monumental step forward, it's still far from perfect. Most countries around the world continue to favor the drug war, which Hari has previously suggested is because the U.S. influences other countries. Thus, drug policy is an international issue—and this means that policy reform in one country could potentially influence other countries to make similar changes.

Hari closes with the story of Antonio Gago, a boy who started using heroin in the Algarve in 1996. During drug prohibition, Dr. Goulão helped Gago find help and deal with childhood trauma. After decriminalization, Gago moved into one of Goulão's therapeutic communities and quit using drugs. Now, like many former users throughout Portugal, he spends his mornings driving around and reaching out to addicts on the street. Gago's story shows Hari that while drug prohibition spreads violence and suffering across society, decriminalization spreads "a healing ripple." Hari concludes that Portugal's drug policy is the truest expression of the 1974 revolution's democratic spirit: it treats everyone, including addicts, as equally important.

Like Sergio Rodrigues, Antonio Gago puts a human face on Portugal's successful decriminalization policy. In a country like the U.S., he would likely be dead, homeless, or incarcerated. In other words, other nations would have chosen to sacrifice his life, while Portugal chose to save it. Moreover, Gago's outreach work shows that, just as networks of drug users can worsen addiction by drawing people into drug-use subcultures, they can also heal it by providing people with pathways out of addiction. This is why Hari describes "a healing ripple": when decriminalization helps addicts, they start to help one another, too.

CHAPTER 17: THE MAN IN THE WELL

When Hari starts his research, Portugal has the world's most progressive drug laws. But then, the tiny country of Uruguay and two U.S. states fully legalize cannabis for the first time. Hari visits Uruguay and interviews its eccentric president, José Mujica, to understand the effects of legalization. During Uruguay's dictatorship, Mujica spent more than two years imprisoned at the bottom of a well. He coped by talking to himself and befriending frogs and insects.

Hari returns to the Americas to look at how a select few governments have gone even further than Portugal, by legalizing marijuana and creating regulated markets for its sale. While none of these governments have established public health programs as comprehensive or successful as Portugal's, they do show how better drug policy can address the supply side of the equation as well as the demand side.

After his father's death, Mujica spent his childhood selling flowers in Uruguay's capital, Montevideo. When he was in university, the country fell into a deep crisis, and the army started planning to overthrow the government. Mujica and his wife joined a guerilla group that gave food and weapons to the poor. The police shot him, then imprisoned and tortured him and his wife until the dictatorship fell 13 years later.

Mujica's remarkable backstory shows that, like all the other drug reformers Hari has profiled so far, he was a dreamer and an underdog before he rose to power and changed the future of drug policy forever.

In 2009, Mujica was elected president. But instead of embracing the presidential lifestyle, he continued living on his farm, donated most of his salary to the poor, and took the bus to work. He legalized abortion, same-sex marriage, and marijuana. Drug cartels were eyeing Uruguay as part of a potential trafficking route to Europe. Mujica's team studied the evidence and realized that the best way to stop the cartels would be to legalize drugs. But he had to overcome the two factors that had always made legalization impossible: U.S. influence and popular opposition. Fortunately, U.S. states were already legalizing marijuana, and Mujica quickly convinced the Uruguayan public to back legalization, too.

Mujica is about as far as a politician can get from Harry Anslinger or Joe Arpaio. His eccentric lifestyle choices demonstrate that, unlike the vast majority of politicians, he cares far more about sticking to his moral values than gaining and wielding power. And like Ruth Dreifuss, his primary focus when governing was to reduce violence and suffering in general, not just help the people he thought most deserved it. Thus, rather than choosing the most politically convenient explanation for drug violence and immediately translating it into policy, he approached the issue with enough humility to actually seek out and follow the scientific evidence.

The most famous drug legalization activist in history was Timothy Leary, the militant Harvard professor who famously promoted using drugs like LSD and defying social norms during the 1960s counterculture movement. But Mujica consulted with the English scientists Danny Kushlick and Steve Rolles, who wanted to legalize drugs for the opposite reasons as Leary: to *prevent* young people from using them and *maintain* political stability. During his reporting career, Hari befriended them.

Hari mentions Timothy Leary because he's likely to be the kind of person (or the specific person) whom most people imagine when they think of legalization: an unstable drug user who wants to destroy the foundations of civilized society. But in reality, the arguments for legalization are really no different from the ones for decriminalization.

Kushlick and Rolles believe that modern societies already have the framework they need to legalize drugs. They point out that tobacco and alcohol were once prohibited around the world, until governments realized that legalization is safer. Today, tobacco is legal, but modern societies still view smoking as harmful and unpleasant. This social pressure has greatly reduced tobacco use in the last half-century. Kushlick and Rolles suggest treating less harmful drugs, like marijuana, the same way as alcohol and tobacco. Meanwhile, they suggest integrating more harmful drugs, like heroin, into the existing medical prescription system.

The drug war has taught most people to unthinkingly accept the "drugs-hijack-brains" theory and associate drugs with madness, violence, and crime. As a result, it's tempting to imagine drug legalization as a radical, scary departure from the existing system. But Kushlick and Rolles suggest that in reality, it wouldn't be. Legalization would simply mean fewer street dealers and more stores and prescriptions. The public wouldn't be forced to take drugs or even accept them in most places.

Under legalization, Kushlick and Rolles suggest, users would get pure drugs from doctors, pharmacists, and regulated stores—rather than adulterated drugs from dangerous criminal gangs. Just like the end of **Prohibition** in the 1930s U.S., drug legalization would dramatically reduce crime and violence. Kushlick calls legalization "a drama reduction program" because the drug trade would become, above all, boring and tedious. The difference between decriminalization and true legalization is whether the government regulates the *supply* of drugs.

Elsewhere in the book, Hari has suggested that it would be better for drug users to get pure, medical-grade drugs for several reasons. Most importantly, the dangerous adulterants in drugs wouldn't affect their health, and they would be able to choose the precise dose they want to use, rather than gambling with drugs of unknown strength. Medical-grade drugs would be cheaper and more reliably available, which would save drug users time and money. Similarly, drug users wouldn't have to risk dealing with violence in order to get them. But perhaps most importantly, a legalized drug market would shut down the organized drug crime that has plagued places like Ciudad Juárez and hollowed out institutions like the Mexican justice system.

Understandably, many people fear that legalization will increase drug use—which could increase addiction, overdoses, and young people's risk of using drugs. Hari discovers that the scientific evidence on this question is mixed. For instance, when the Netherlands decriminalized marijuana, drug-use rates didn't increase. But when it allowed cafés to sell marijuana, use *did* significantly increase, including among young people. However, marijuana use is still less common in the Netherlands than in the U.S. or in the EU as a whole. Moreover, many people switched from alcohol to marijuana, so when alcohol use is included, legalization actually *reduced* overall drug use in the Netherlands.

Hari again emphasizes that he's no pro-drug fanatic—instead, he's seriously concerned about the possible dangers of drug legalization, which is why he analyzes them in full. While he admits that the data still isn't conclusive, he will soon go into detail about the harms that increased drug use may cause. Notably, since mere decriminalization doesn't appear to cause the same increase in usage as legalization, some readers might conclude that it is a better option.

On the other hand, the available evidence strongly suggests that in the U.S., **Prohibition** decreased both casual drinking and serious alcoholism by 10 to 20 percent. Put simply, many people prefer not to break the law, and Prohibition made it much harder to find alcohol. Hari argues that drug reformers must admit that legalization will probably cause "a modest but real increase in [drug] use."

Even though the data is still inconclusive, Hari thinks that the drug warriors are right to fear drug use increasing under legalization. His readers will have to decide for themselves whether they agree, and whether the numerous benefits of drug legalization are worth the drawbacks of "a modest but real increase in [drug] use." Hopefully, in time, evidence from places like Uruguay will provide a clearer picture of legalization's true effect on drug consumption.

While legalization may increase drug use in general, it will dramatically reduce the *harm* associated with drug use—which is more important. First, legalization will help teenagers. Years ago, when a 12-year-old asked him for help buying liquor, the undercover cop Fred Martens realized that it's much easier for American kids to get marijuana, pills, and heroin than liquor because the U.S. strictly regulates alcohol vendors. Legalization will put the same requirements on other drugs, and therefore dissuade underage people from using them.

It's misleading to simply focus on the number of people who use drugs because, as Hari has repeatedly argued, the majority of drug use isn't actually harmful (and much of it is beneficial). Still, youth drug use is generally harmful in and of itself, because young people's brains are still vulnerable and developing. And Fred Martens's anecdote suggests that drug prohibition actually drives young people toward using more harmful, less regulated substances. Still, scientific studies would clarify this potential risk of legalization.

Next, the evidence is less conclusive about whether legalization will reduce drug addiction. Alcohol **Prohibition** in the U.S. suggests that it won't, while Portugal's experience suggests that it will. In particular, Portugal shows that investing in effective treatment programs is the key to reducing long-term addiction.

Again, scientists need to collect better evidence before they can definitively say whether legalization affects addiction. Of course, the only way for them to collect this evidence is by analyzing societies that actually do legalize drugs. Hari also points out that legalization itself probably won't be the key factor that affects addiction rates. Instead, those rates will depend on the quality of the treatment options available for addicts. Of course, it's still possible to create better treatment programs if drugs remain criminalized, or if they are decriminalized but not fully legalized.

Finally, the evidence from Vancouver and Geneva suggests that legalization will also dramatically reduce overdoses, for two reasons. First, it will give users access to unadulterated drugs, so they actually know what dose they are taking. Second, the iron law of prohibition suggests that lower-dose drugs will be more available and more popular after legalization.

The evidence about drug legalization's effect on overdose deaths is far clearer and stronger than the evidence about its effect on children's drug use or overall addiction rates. As dying of an overdose is the worst-case scenario for a drug addict, this evidence supports the hypothesis that legalization will make drug use far safer for addicts overall.

Yet Hari still struggles to convince himself that all drugs should be fully legalized. What about powerful drugs like meth and crack? Should they be openly available, and would doctors ever prescribe them? While these substances only represent five percent of the overall illegal drug market, they're still controversial. Some drug reformers think they should remain banned, while others believe that people should have the right to take any drug they want, even if it harms them. And others propose that these drugs should only be available in regulated clinics, like the safe injection sites in Vancouver and Switzerland.

Next, Hari emphasizes that legalizing all drugs does not mean treating them all in exactly the same way. Policymakers and the public will have to debate what exact policy structure to use, and they can choose the specific solution that minimizes the harm of each specific drug. Of course, Hari's overarching point is simply that legalization gives the government control over the drug market—and any democratic solution to regulating drugs is inevitably preferable to leaving them completely uncontrolled in the black market.

But Hari still worries about crack and meth. As a child, he learned that crack and meth are so powerful that nearly everyone who uses them becomes an addict. However, the pioneering drug researcher Dr. Carl Hart has found that only a minority of crack and meth users—about 20 percent—ever become addicted. Hari scarcely believes this when Hart first tells him. But later, he remembers that trauma and isolation are much more responsible for addiction than the chemical hook in drugs. Whereas the drug war spreads trauma and isolation in order to fight the chemical hook, legalization exposes a few more people to the chemical hook in order to reduce trauma and isolation.

Like much of the research that Hari has cited throughout his book, Dr. Hart's work on crack and meth totally contradicts the common wisdom about drugs. But this doesn't mean that Hart's research is unreliable—instead, it shows that the common wisdom is disconnected from the reality of drug use and addiction. For Hari, a slight increase in crack and meth addiction is a small price to pay in exchange for better treatment options, like those that Portugal has adopted. Of course, it's also highly likely that the people who are willing to try drugs just because they're legal don't belong to the traumatized, isolated minority who end up addicted. Still, some readers might still prefer policy options that provide better treatment without making drugs like crack and meth widely available.

Hari concludes that readers should assess their values and "draw up a balance sheet" to decide whether to support legalization. After three years of research, he has one very good evidence-based argument against legalization: it will modestly increase drug use. Meanwhile, there are several good evidence-based arguments *for* legalization. It will crush drug gangs around the world, which will significantly reduce violence. It will make it harder for teenagers to access drugs, it will reduce overdoses, and it will free up resources for addiction treatment programs. Perhaps most importantly, it will turn addicts and prisoners into productive members of society. Of course, the pros and cons might vary for different drugs.

Hari offers his own personal conclusions about drug legalization, but ultimately, he encourages his readers to come to their own conclusions. This is particularly important because, as he has shown throughout the book, popular debates about the drug war are usually dominated by politically motivated stories with little grounding in science. Fighting this tendency requires starting with the evidence, not with a preformed conclusion. Thus, while Hari strongly believes that legalization will bring all the benefits that the drug war has long promised, his goal is to start productive conversations about drug reform, not necessarily to convince readers of his own opinions.

Following Kushlick and Rolles's recommendations, Mujica's government made it legal for Uruguayans over 21 to buy marijuana in pharmacies and grow it in their homes. This policy isn't a radical historical anomaly—rather, drug *prohibition* is the anomaly. In the future, Hari hopes, people will learn to view prohibition as a century-long failed experiment. Hari recalls his visit to President Mujica's shack on the outskirts of Montevideo. Mujica and his wife both tell Hari that by owning fewer material things, people can learn to focus on what really matters: winning freedom for themselves and others.

After giving a complex theoretical explanation of how legalization would work and what it would do, Hari describes Uruguay's system—which is likely to seem remarkably tame to his readers. Certainly, it's far tamer than the drug war. Indeed, it's scarcely different from the system for buying legal alcohol and tobacco in most modern democracies. And Hari's readers are likely to find it even less unusual today, when legal marijuana is common throughout the Americas and Europe, than they would have when he first published this book.

CHAPTER 18: HIGH NOON

After learning about the benefits of drug legalization, Hari still wants to know how it can become politically possible—particularly in the U.S., which launched the war on drugs. In less than a decade, activists got marijuana legalized through public referendums in the states of Colorado and Washington. However, these activists ran totally different campaigns.

In the last chapter, Hari explained how drug legalization policies would function and predicted what their effects would be. In this chapter, he explores how drug activists can build a successful movement for legalization. As a journalist, he's particularly interested in the messaging strategies that can win support for these movements. While not all of his readers will necessarily support legalization, many of the points he makes in this chapter apply to decriminalization and other reforms, too. Finally, the U.S. is a particularly important site for drug reform because it has long imposed the drug war on the rest of the world—so, changing domestic drug laws in in the U.S. is one of the best ways to put an end to prohibition around the world.

In Colorado, the activist Mason Tvert challenged the state governor, the millionaire brewery owner John Hickenlooper, to a tongue-in-cheek duel: Tvert would take a hit of marijuana every time Hickenlooper took a sip of beer until one of them died. Of course, Tvert's point was that the scientific evidence shows marijuana to be much safer than alcohol. In college, when he was arrested for smoking marijuana, he realized that it was strange for the university to crack down on weed but openly accept underage alcohol drinking—which seemed to cause many more problems. After moving to Colorado, Tvert set up an activist group with one simple message: the science shows that marijuana is safer than alcohol. For years, he made little progress.

Tvert organized his campaign around the scientific evidence about marijuana, and Colorado's peculiar political situation—including its brewer governor and reputation for marijuana use—may have made this a particularly appropriate choice. His point was that if society has decided to permit alcohol, it logically must permit marijuana, too. But in his campaign, Tvert paid little attention to the history or the harms of the drug war. Activists working in communities where these harms are more salient might prefer to emphasize them in their own campaigns for policy change.

Meanwhile, in Alaska, Tonia Winchester was going through a high-school antidrug campaign called DARE. She hated drugs, including marijuana, and never used them. As an adult, she became a local prosecutor in Wenatchee, Washington, where she realized she was mainly prosecuting young Black and Latino men for marijuana possession—even though most marijuana users are white. She realized that she was leading a racist system and ruining young people's lives with convictions that locked them out of the labor market forever. When she learned that her office was prioritizing marijuana cases over domestic violence ones, she decided to push for change.

Where Tvert's interest in marijuana stemmed from his personal drug use and his knowledge of drug research, Winchester's came from a totally opposite place: her close-up knowledge of the drug war. She grew up believing the drug war's myths about drugs and addiction, and it wasn't until she challenged these myths as in adult that she saw that the drug war was unnecessarily and disproportionately harming young people. She could see that her office was essentially buying political power and reputation by ruining young people's lives—just like the U.S. drug war has ever since it began under Harry Anslinger.

Mason Tvert and Tonia Winchester attacked Harry Anslinger's war on drugs from completely opposite angles. Tvert defended marijuana as a healthier alternative to alcohol, and he constantly forced the government to defend its absurd prohibition laws. But to avoid alienating the public, he avoided pro-legalization arguments that could apply to other drugs besides marijuana.

Tvert and Winchester's strategies demonstrate two possible approaches that drug reformers can take to fighting prohibition. While Tvert's approach is grounded in science and logic, its focus is mostly limited to marijuana, because it still accepts the basic assumption that the legal status of particular drugs should depend on how safe or dangerous they are.

In Washington, Tonia Winchester avoided talking about marijuana itself and clarified that she wasn't advocating actually smoking it. Instead, she focused on her experience as a prosecutor and explained how drug prohibition was ruining young people's lives. She believed that Tvert's focus on the safety of marijuana was "a stupid argument [that] doesn't persuade people." Instead, she emphasized the *dangers* of drugs and argued that legalization was a way to reduce them.

While Winchester's strategy largely ignores the scientific evidence about drugs, it also has several important advantages. First, it fits neatly with the misconception that all drugs are inherently harmful. Since this myth can be so hard to disprove, it may be easier to just build on or ignore it. Second, it applies equally to all *drugs. Third, it avoids alienating voters who aren't very scientifically literate. And finally, it's grounded in the active desire to* save *people from the harms of the drug war (whereas Tvert's argument was based on the premise that marijuana simply isn't harmful).*

Ultimately, because of the differences between their campaigns, Colorado and Washington legalized marijuana in very different ways. Colorado focused on expanding the freedom to use marijuana, while Washington focused on reducing the harms associated with its use. When they got their initiative on the state ballot, Winchester and her campaign co-leader Alison Holcomb realized that the changes they were pioneering could eventually spread all over the world.

While Colorado and Washington's legal marijuana policies both offer important precedents for the rest of the world, the differences between them show that the stories that activists choose to tell about legalization have significant consequences further down the line. Thus, Hari suggests that activists should consider what kind of system they want to create when choosing their messaging.

Hari notes that, a century after Harry Anslinger used racist arguments to ban marijuana for the first time, Winchester used anti-racist arguments about creating a more equal legal system in order to legalize it. Meanwhile, Colorado's legalization campaign also saw echoes of Anslinger's drug war. One local sheriff argued that marijuana users should be executed, while a Latinx radio host feared that legalization would invite cartel violence.

Winchester and Tvert's campaigns show that the drug war is still deeply tied up with the Americans' attitudes about race—just like it was in Anslinger's time. On the one hand, many Americans are eager for solutions to racial inequality; on the other, many Americans have also lived their whole lives steeped in the drug war's common wisdom, and it is difficult to imagine them ever abandoning it.

Hari asks which approach is better: the Colorado campaign's or the Washington campaign's. While Hari's instincts lie with Washington, he also knows that Americans are more willing to accept legalization today because they no longer believe in hysterical myths about the drug (like Anslinger's warning that marijuana turns people into psychotic killers). And Tonia Winchester agrees: she tells Hari how meeting marijuana users helped her overcome her prejudices about the drug. Still, Hari is apprehensive about *some* of Tvert's arguments, like the idea that it's better for teenagers to smoke marijuana than drink beer. Yet both Tvert and Winchester's campaigns won by 10-percent margins. And after legalization, the margin of support in Colorado became nearly two-to-one.

Hari shows that the Colorado and Washington campaigns both succeeded in different but complementary ways. This is because each captured half of the whole truth: Tvert explained the science that the drug war has denied, while Winchester explained the drug war's real political consequences. Regardless of whether any campaign could truly combine these two ideas without losing a focused message, it's clear that both of these ideas can succeed in the right context. Hari clearly hopes that, given this level of political support, it's only a matter of time before voters across the U.S. agree to end the drug war—which will let other countries do the same.

When choosing between Tvert and Winchester's approaches, there's one more key question: which can be applied to other drugs besides marijuana? Tvert readily admits that his approach can't, because other drugs *are* far more dangerous than alcohol. While he still believes in legalization, he doesn't think that other drugs should be regulated like marijuana is now in Colorado. In contrast, the Washington argument—that drug prohibition is more harmful than drugs themselves—*does* apply to other substances besides marijuana. But both campaigns agree that marijuana legalization is the first step to broader policy change.

While Tvert essentially ran a single-issue campaign for marijuana, Winchester's approach set the foundation for a long-term fight to entirely end the drug war. Of course, Hari's goals align with Winchester's more than Tvert's, so he encourages his readers to follow her approach in their activism. They can certainly repeat Tvert's arguments about marijuana's safety, too, but Hari suggests that they ought to remain focused on the longer-term goal of fighting the drug war as a whole.

Mason Tvert is right to say that marijuana is safer than alcohol, but Hari wonders whether the same is true of other drugs. When a prominent British scientist measured the harm from different drugs, he found that alcohol is actually the most dangerous of all. Alcohol's "harm score" was 72; the next-highest were heroin (55), crack (54), and meth (32). Hari admits that this may be hard to believe, but it's scientifically proven. Columbia neuroscientist Carl Hart argues that accepting this is the first step to demystifying other drugs, like meth and crack, which are as vilified today as marijuana was in the early 1900s.

The available scientific evidence actually contradicts Mason Tvert's claim that other drugs besides marijuana are generally more dangerous than alcohol. This may be difficult for the public to stomach, as alcohol is generally accepted across modern societies, while meth and crack are highly stigmatized and viewed as extremely dangerous. While Hart believes that activists have to change social attitudes toward other drugs in the long term, he points out that this doesn't necessarily have to be part of the same struggle as the fight against the war on drugs. After all, Winchester's campaign shows that it's possible to fight the drug war without condoning drug use.

Hari knows that Dr. Hart is right about the importance of educating people about drugs. But he also worries that telling the truth will alienate people who know how badly these drugs harm the people who become addicted to them. Alcohol might cause "horrible damage," but drugs like crack and meth still cause "only-slightly-less-horrible harm." In the future, Hari concludes, citizens and activists will determine whether Tvert or Winchester's approach is more successful.

Hari struggles to find a reasonable middle ground between Hart's long-term goal of teaching people to accurately assess the dangers of drugs and activists' short-term goal of ending the drug war through any means necessary—including by emphasizing how harmful drugs and addiction are under prohibition. For instance, even though alcohol might actually be more harmful than crack, focusing on this evidence could undermine efforts to stop the drug war because most people will struggle to believe it. Under prohibition, after all, crack addiction carries many dangers that alcohol addiction does not. It's generally easier for alcoholics to remain socially accepted and find effective treatment because the drug they take is legal, and they don't have to worry about overdosing on drinks of an unknown alcohol content.

In Colorado, Governor Hickenlooper eventually supported the legalization law. Then, the government set up a network of licensed stores and resolved regulatory issues like what kind of edible products to allow. As he discusses these issues with a state official, Hari realizes that they're totally boring. This is what it means for the drug war to end: replacing violence and death with boring government regulation. Hari cries "a tear of relief."

The drug war has caused little besides unnecessary suffering, so Hari argues that the best thing that can happen to it is for it to fade away into insignificance. Today, drug policy deeply shapes millions of lives, but under legalization, it would become just another mundane issue for leaders and experts to hash out. This is why Hari lets out "a tear of relief" while learning about Colorado's utterly boring debates over regulation: this is what the end of the drug war looks like.

CONCLUSION: IF YOU ARE ALONE

During his research, Hari frequently returns to London, but he doesn't feel ready to see the addicts in his life: his relative and his ex-boyfriend. He constantly thinks about the drug war's victims. For over a century, they have been dying unnecessarily. Among others, Hari remembers Billie Holiday, Deborah Hardin, and Marcia Powell. He thinks of Marisela Escobedo and her daughter Rubi, Bud Osborn's friends in Vancouver, and all of Edward Williams and João Goulão's patients who didn't live to see decriminalization. He remembers the thousands more who have died anonymously.

Hari began Chasing the Scream *by explaining his personal connections to drugs, which motivated him to learn about the history of the drug war and the reality of drug addiction. Now, in his conclusion, he brings the book full circle and returns to London. On the one hand, his extensive knowledge about drugs can make him a better friend, ally, and advocate for the addicts in his life. On the other, his research has also given him a keen sense of how unnecessary and pointless most addicts' suffering is. Now, he sees the drug war as a futile century-long crusade that has merely piled tragedies on tragedies.*

When Hari meets up with his relative and his ex, he learns that both quit drugs a year ago. His relative is now working at a phone help line for addicts, while his ex is going to Narcotics Anonymous meetings and finally coming to terms with his painful childhood. Hari is delighted.

Hari's relative and ex seem to have overcome addiction on their own. But they have succeeded despite the drug war, not because of it: they quit drugs because they found ways to connect with others and heal their deep-seated pain, not because they faced harsh punishments from the government.

But then, Hari's ex relapses. Most people would stage an intervention to try and whip their addicted loved one into shape. But this is drug war logic, and it doesn't work. People connect with drugs when they can't connect with other people, so cutting off relationships only makes the problem worse. Instead, Hari offers to deepen his connection with his ex. He invites his ex to talk or visit whenever he needs it.

At the beginning of his book, Hari noted that a version of the drug war constantly plays out in his head: he wonders whether to approach the addicts in his life with compassion or tough love. Now, having learned about the true causes of addiction from Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander, he knows that compassion is the right answer. Addicts like his ex really need opportunities to reconnect with other people and find a sense of purpose in their lives.

As Hari writes this conclusion, his ex is next to him, passed out after a drug binge. "The opposite of addiction isn't sobriety," Hari writes. "It's connection." Love is the best way to fight addiction, and nothing has interrupted it better than the war on drugs. By criminalizing and ostracizing addicts, modern societies only cut them off even further from the people around them.

Hari returns to the central insight from his research, which explains why the drug war has only worsened the problems it claims to solve. Because disconnection and trauma drive addiction, forcing an addict to stop using drugs without changing any of the other conditions in their life is likely to make them worse, not better. To really overcome addiction, they have to heal their deep emotional wounds. But others can help them. This principle can be applied at every scale: individuals can use love to help people in their lives overcome addiction (like Hari with his ex). Institutions and charity organizations can fight addiction by extending love and support to addict populations (like the Portland Hotel Society). And, finally, entire societies can end addiction and drug-related violence by building new drug policies that support drug users' physical and mental health (like Portugal).

Hari is also using this wisdom to cope with his own pill habit. Whenever he feels like taking drugs to suppress his feelings, he seeks out the people he loves instead. Soon, his desire to use drugs fades away. However, while Hari is no longer "fighting a drug war in [his] own head," numerous people—mostly poor people and people of color—are still fighting a more literal drug war in their neighborhoods. This doesn't have to continue; drug laws can and must be changed.

Hari's story about his own addiction offers another example of how the work of scientists like Gabor Maté and Bruce Alexander can help people fight addiction. In fact, he's actually talking about preventing *addiction. Rather than bonding with drugs, he argues, people should deliberately bond with other people (who, unlike drugs, can actually love them back). Then, they can channel their individual victories into the broader political project of fighting addiction and the drug war through love and connection.*

Almost a century ago, even Harry Anslinger concluded that alcohol **Prohibition** was a mistake. Today, Billie Holiday's godson—who works with heroin addicts at a San Francisco homeless clinic—clearly sees that the drug war is a mistake, too. And yet ending it often seems politically impossible. But Hari remembers how the gay rights movement changed the course of human history in just a few decades, even though most of its earliest leaders died without knowing it would succeed. Drug activists today are much like gay activists in the 1960s: even if they can't see the end of the war on drugs, they can take the first steps.

Ironically, Anslinger clearly saw the terrible downsides of alcohol prohibition, but he never extended this insight to his own war on drugs. For Hari, Anslinger's blindness to the war on drugs is also a metaphor for modern societies' attitudes toward drugs in general. Namely, they have already tried prohibition and seen it fail, but they keep repeating it anyway, because they are afraid to acknowledge their mistakes. Hari concludes that building a mass movement against drug prohibition is the best way to shake political leaders out of this paralysis.

Chino Hardin and Bud Osborn have shown Hari that anyone—even reviled drug users—can make a difference if they start to speak up and persuade people. Edward Williams and Billie Holiday have demonstrated that even people who fail during their lifetimes can set the stage for others to succeed decades later. The first step to overcoming the drug war is the same as the first step to overcoming addiction: make a connection with someone else.

Through these stories, Hari encourages his readers to take action, even if they don't fully believe that they can make a difference. Even if the drug war began with just one man, ending it will be a massive political struggle that requires collective action. As Hari pointed out in his chapters on Bud Osborn and Portugal, politics is one of many ways that addicts can develop the connections they need to heal. Thus, organizing isn't just the political solution to the drug war: it's also the personal solution to addiction.

In conclusion, Hari notes two last important details about Harry Anslinger: he started using *and* dealing drugs. First, in the 1950s, Anslinger learned that the powerful Senator Joe McCarthy was addicted to heroin. To avoid a public scandal, he sold the congressman safe, clean heroin on the government's dime. When a journalist discovered this story, Anslinger threatened him into silence.

Senator McCarthy was famous for publicly persecuting hundreds of his political opponents by accusing them of communism. In this way, his zealotry and extreme paranoia about communism resembled Anslinger's attitudes about drugs. Anslinger's deal with McCarthy shows his corruption and double standards: he didn't take issue with drug use when his allies were the ones doing it. Yet Hari is also making another, deeper point about the hypocrisy of power: just like addiction is often really a reaction to trauma, Anslinger's obsessive focus on drugs (and McCarthy's on communism) was really a reaction to his own anxieties and fears. In reality, Hari concludes, the drug war's endless cycle of violence began with the scream from Anslinger's childhood.

At the end of his life, Anslinger started taking morphine for his chest pain. He died pumped full of opiates, the same chemicals he spent his life trying to suppress. Hari wonders what Anslinger thought when he received his first dose. Perhaps he remembered **the scream** he heard all those years before, as a young boy in Pennsylvania, and "all of the people he had made scream since" through his war on drugs. Or perhaps he finally felt the scream fade away.

Hari ends with a final image of Anslinger's hypocrisy, but his goal isn't merely to condemn Anslinger as evil. Instead, Hari is actually trying to empathize with Anslinger, who dedicated his whole life to an obsessive crusade against something he was too afraid to understand. The more he punished addicts, the more they yearned for drugs, and the more he fought the drug trade, the further it slipped into the black market. Thus, Anslinger's drug war wasn't just a devastating failure for the societies that fought it: it was also a personal failure for Anslinger himself, because the more he chased the scream to try and silence it, the more screams he created. And his final days on morphine represent how he inevitably lost his war on drugs. When Hari asks if Anslinger remembered the screams or let them fade away, this isn't just a metaphor for heroin's effects: it's also a way of asking whether Anslinger finally accepted the truth that the drug war was futile and that drugs aren't nearly as dangerous as Anslinger thought. Of course, Hari is also asking whether global society will finally learn the same lesson, accept the scientific evidence about drugs, and overcome its addiction to the drug war once and for all.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jennings, Rohan. "*Chasing the Scream*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Oct 2021. Web. 22 Oct 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jennings, Rohan. "*Chasing the Scream*." LitCharts LLC, October 22, 2021. Retrieved October 22, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/chasing-the-scream.

To cite any of the quotes from *Chasing the Scream* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hari, Johann. Chasing the Scream. Bloomsbury. 2016.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hari, Johann. Chasing the Scream. New York: Bloomsbury. 2016.