OMNI DRUG WAR NEWSLETTER #1, December 10, 2012. Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.

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Contents #1
TomDispatch/Lewis Lapham: Drug War, War on Terror, National Security State
Jerecki’s Documentary, The House I Live In, Drug War Disasters
Kerry Kennedy Threatened in Mexico
DEA Global Reach
Jimmy Carter v. Drug War
Documentary Addiction on Tobacco Industry Disinformation

December 9, 2012

Tomgram: Lewis Lapham, Drugs and the National Security State
It started out as a metaphor: “the war on drugs.” But it became ever more dismayingly real as time passed, initially as a fierce assault on young black men who ended up in jail in outrageous numbers. More recently, it’s coming to seem ever more like a grim description of onrushing reality, an actual war, which shouldn’t surprise anyone living in a country that now has the habit of militarizing just about everything from hurricane relief to foreign aid.

These days, south of the border, U.S. drones are flying intelligence missions; the CIA is getting shot at by the Mexican police; Pentagon civilian employees and private contractors have settled into a Mexican military base; the U.S. ambassador to that country arrived directly from his previous assignment in Kabul, Afghanistan; and rumors about the possibility of sending in U.S. special operations forces to take out Mexican drug kingpins (à la Osama bin Laden) are now circulating. And don’t forget the way the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives armed Mexican drug gangs thanks to “Operation Fast and Furious,” its movie-title-inspired disaster of a “gunwalking” set of sting operations.

Meanwhile, in Central America, there’s been a flurry of war-on-drugs military construction work from the Pentagon. In addition, a Drug Enforcement Agency team, “originally created to disrupt the poppy trade in Afghanistan,” has been at work in Honduras, guns drawn, killing locals (including pregnant women). The Pentagon has also been ramping up its anti-drug operations in Honduras, and Green Berets have been assisting their Honduran counterparts in the field. In fact, the Pentagon has been building new bases there specifically “patterned on the forward bases in Iraq and Afghanistan that gave troops a small, secure home on insurgent turf,” to fight a drug war based, reports the New York Times, on the “lessons of Iraq.”

Of course, my limited understanding of the “lessons” of Iraq and Afghanistan is: don’t do it! But what do I know when so many knowledgeable military-minded types are already promoting a war in the neighborhood? And what could the famed former editor of Harper’s Magazine Lewis Lapham know when he points out that our
drugs “wars” are dulling our good sense, while encouraging our country to become ever more security mad and locked down? All he does, after all, is edit *Lapham’s Quarterly*, which, four times a year, brilliantly unites some of the most provocative and original voices in history around a single topic. (You can subscribe to it by clicking here.) TomDispatch thanks the editors of that journal for allowing us to offer an exclusive look at his take on our endlessly failed drug wars in a slightly adapted version of the introduction to that magazine’s winter issue, “Intoxication.” *Tom*

**Raiding Consciousness**

*Why the War on Drugs Is a War on Human Nature*

*By Lewis Lapham*

[This essay will appear in "Intoxication," the Winter 2012 issue of *Lapham’s Quarterly*. This slightly adapted version is posted at TomDispatch.com with the kind permission of that magazine.]

The question that tempts mankind to the use of substances controlled and uncontrolled is next of kin to Hamlet’s: to be, or not to be, someone or somewhere else. Escape from a grievous circumstance or the shambles of an unwanted self, the hope of finding at a higher altitude a new beginning or a better deal. Fly me to the moon, and let me play among the stars; give me leave to drown my sorrow in a quart of gin; wine, dear boy, and truth.

That the consummations of the wish to shuffle off the mortal coil are as old as the world itself was the message brought by Abraham Lincoln to an Illinois temperance society in 1842. “I have not inquired at what period of time the use of intoxicating liquors commenced,” he said, “nor is it important to know.” It is sufficient to know that on first opening our eyes “upon the stage of existence,” we found “intoxicating liquor recognized by everybody, used by everybody, repudiated by nobody.”

Click here to read more of this dispatch.

**MARIJUANA REFORM IN US AND NEW FILM**

As a filmmaker committed to addressing the injustices of the “war on drugs” and its devastating impact on American communities, I awoke on November 7 to a renewed sense of purpose. Beyond working to support the movement for marijuana reform in Colorado, Massachusetts and Washington, I had traveled to California in the week leading up to election day to work for the passage of Proposition 36, a vital piece of legislation that reduces the severity of California’s notorious “three strikes” law. By voting to amend the law so that offenders with two nonviolent “strikes” against them cannot henceforth receive a life sentence for a third strike that is petty or nonviolent, Californians have sent a resounding signal to the rest of the country: it is possible to retreat from the tragic excesses of America’s criminal justice nightmare. The same state that helped lead the way into the darkness of draconian sentencing for nonviolent crimes has begun, it seems, to lead us back toward the light. And because every state has its own special brand of excess when it comes to the treatment of nonviolent offenders, as California goes, so, I hope, will go the nation.

About the Author

**Eugene Jarecki**

Eugene Jarecki is an acclaimed filmmaker who has twice won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, first in...

Also by the Author

**California Rolls Back ‘Three Strikes’—Will Others Follow?** *(Drug War and Drug Policy)*
Along with marijuana decriminalization in other states, the success of Proposition 36 in California is a ray of hope for those trapped in the abyss of the War on Drugs.


In my new film, *The House I Live In*, I try to understand how this country became a land without pity in our treatment of drug crime. We are the world’s leading jailer, with more of our citizens behind bars than any other country on earth. The statistics speak volumes. Over forty years, the “war on drugs” has cost a trillion dollars and accounted for 45 million drug arrests. Yet for all that, America has nothing to show but a legacy of failure. Drugs are cheaper, purer, more available and used by more and younger people today than ever before. Perhaps this explains why any mention of the issue was notably absent from this year’s presidential campaign. Ever since Richard Nixon declared the “war on drugs” in 1971 and proved the electoral power of anti-crime rhetoric, politicians of both parties have known, as sure as they know where their bread is buttered, that talking tough on crime is smart politics. But what happens when people begin to acknowledge that the war is a total failure? What if politicians are starting to realize that associating themselves with this loser is just plain bad politics?

In making my film, I wanted to travel beyond the statistics, so I visited more than twenty-five states to meet people at all levels of the drug war whose lives have been affected by our misguided laws and vast prison system. What I found on the ground was nothing short of shattering. Wherever I went, everyone involved—prisoners, cops, judges, jailers, wardens, medical experts, senators—all described to me a system out of control, a predatory monster that sustains itself on the mass incarceration of fellow human beings. Their crimes, most often the nonviolent use or sale of drugs in petty quantities, have become such a warping fixation for our prison-industrial complex that they are often punished more severely than violent crimes.

So where do we go from here? How do we fix this? After so many years and with so many lives already affected, there’s no silver bullet. But for me and many others working to restore sanity to the criminal justice system, Prop 36—a small step for California—may indeed prove a giant step for the nation. Every state has a hand in our drug-war disaster, since every state has its share of excessive policies and practices in law enforcement and the courts. All of these can and should be challenged by a justice-seeking electorate.

Last I checked, every state is also facing a budget crisis. And herein lies perhaps one of the
best pathways toward the light. California voters have not only set the stage for greater justice and smarter law enforcement; they will also save the state more than $100 million a year in wasteful criminal justice spending. Yes, fiscal conservatism can go hand in hand with a concern for justice and human dignity. Suddenly, Grover Norquist and Chris Christie have common cause with Al Sharpton and Russell Simmons.

This is why the ranks of those opposed to the drug war are growing (even Pat Robertson recently voiced his opposition, echoing Brad Pitt, one of my film’s executive producers). What this means is that reformers can now turn from California to other states across the country and offer them a win/win: by reducing excesses in their criminal justice systems—like stop-and-frisk in New York City—they too can improve the quality of mercy in their states, produce greater public safety and save vast sums of money at the same time. Who can argue with that?

George Zornick reports that Barney Frank and Ron Paul have joined forces to pressure Obama about the federal stance on the new state marijuana laws.

MEXICO: DRUG WAR VIOLENCE
Human Rights Defender Kerry Kennedy Detained, Threatened by Mexican Military

Robert F. Kennedy's Daughter Nearly Meets Tragic Fate at Drug-War Checkpoint

A squad of heavily armed Mexican soldiers this past weekend accosted Kerry Kennedy, the daughter of Robert F. Kennedy, while she and her 14-year-old daughter were traveling in southwestern Mexico to attend Easter Sunday mass.

The incident played out in the Mexican state of Guerrero, near the city of Acapulco, at a time when the Mexican military is under increasing scrutiny for human rights violations related to its role in the war on drugs.

Also accompanying Kennedy, president of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, was Mexican human-rights defender Abel Barrera as well as a team of lawyers — who attempted to point out to the military-unit commander that the soldiers were violating Mexican law, but to no avail.

“We were stopped, harassed, threatened and detained by eight soldiers in battle fatigues brandishing automatic weapons,” Kennedy writes in a recent op/ed penned for the Inter Press Service, in which she recounts her experience.

"After establishing that we were an international human rights organization, the lieutenant responsible
for the checkpoint maliciously demanded to inspect our belongings for narcotics. He raged menacingly, “I am the authority, I have the power.” At that moment, my heart stopped.

Kennedy, a prominent Catholic author and long-time human rights activist, had reason to feel dread. Since Mexican President Felipe Calderon declared war on Mexico’s drug “cartels” in late 2006, more than 65,000 Mexicans have been murdered and thousands more disappeared, tortured or raped — no small number at the hands of Mexico’s military, the spearhead of Calderon’s drug-war dragnet.

A November 2011 report by Human Rights Watch found that in five Mexican states alone (including Guerrero) security forces are allegedly responsible for “more than 170 cases of torture, 39 ‘disappearances,’ and 24 extrajudicial killings since Calderon took office in December 2006.”

A recent story in the Wall Street Journal reports, “military prosecutors say they are investigating more than 3,500 cases of human-rights violations allegedly committed by soldiers, including cases of killings, rape and torture.”

Kennedy and her teenage daughter that day, on the road to church, could easily have become the latest victims in a drug war that has escalated far beyond the control of US and Mexican policymakers.

It is a drug war fueled by US consumer demand for drugs moving north and a river of iron flowing south, into Mexico, that gives teeth to the carnage — a river fed by US programs such as the $1.5 billion Merida Initiative and the hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons shipments approved via the State Department’s Direct Commercial Sales program.

“Instead of reducing violence, Mexico’s ‘war on drugs’ has resulted in a dramatic increase in killings, torture, and other appalling abuses by security forces, which only make the climate of lawlessness and fear worse in many parts of the country,” Human Rights Watch Americas Director Jose Miguel Vivanco said in prepared statement announcing his organization’s report on abuses by Mexico’s security forces. . . . (from Tom B)

DEA GLOBAL REACH REVEALED BY WIKILEAKS
Ginger Thompson and Scott Shane (NYT). “Cables Reveal Far Reach of Drug Agency.” ADG (12-26-10). “The Drug Enforcement Administration has been transformed into a global intelligence organization with a reach that extends far beyond narcotics,” with “87 offices in 63 countries.” “In far greater detail than previously seen, the cables, from the cache obtained by WikiLeaks…offer glimpses of drug agents…”

**Jimmy Carter, “Call Off the Global Drug War”**


Excerpt: "In a message to Congress in 1977, I said the country should decriminalize the possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, with a full program of treatment for addicts. I also cautioned against filling our prisons with young people who were no threat to society, and summarized by saying:
'Penalties against possession of a drug should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself.'
READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/266-32/6298-focus-call-off-the-global-drug-war

ADDICTION TO TOBACCO: CORPORATE ANTI-SOCIAL PRODUCTS AND CONTROL OF INFORMATION

C-SPAN Q&A (Brian Lamb) 2-20-12 served the public well by interviewing the director and the scientific advisor of the new documentary, Addiction, Inc. (Acappella Pictures). Charles Evans, Dir., and Victor de Noble explain the long struggle to stop the tobacco companies from pushing nicotine and the systematic obstruction of the truth by the tobacco officials. It was not until 2000 that the industry finally admitted tobacco was addictive and contained many other harmful chemicals, decades after its officers knew.

The larger significance of the film is its revelation of the enormous power of large, unregulated corporations to sell harmful and even lethal products by controlling information and Congress.

Another significance only barely discussed but greatly implied is how the US government for forty years spent billions on a “War Against Drugs” while millions of its citizens were being deliberately and systematically addicted to nicotine by giant corporations making huge profits and the government was silent, then feeble, and only recently taking meaningful action. The truly needed war all along was against tobacco.

Young people need to see this film. Public officials, teachers, regulators, journalism professors, and other already well-informed people will find this a powerful assistance in their efforts to stop tobacco companies and other corporations from hurting and killing people. (Dick)

[Similar disinformation campaign by the fossil fuel industry impeded official and public understanding of the reality and urgent danger of anthropogenic global warming. See OMNI’s related newsletters and Book forums. D]

BOOKS
--Charles Bowden, Murder City, Ciudad Juarez.... Interv. Democracy Now 3-16-10

- Amazon.com: mexico drug war: Books
  www.amazon.com/s?ie=UTF8&keywords=mexico%20drug%20war&page=1&rh=n...
  Books : "mexico drug war" ... Any New Release; Last 30 days (4) Last 90 days (29) Coming Soon (3) Department : Any Department; Books; Politics & Social Sciences (246)
- War on Drugs - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
  en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Drugs
  History · United States · Foreign policy and · Public support and...

Richard Davenport-Hines, in his book The Pursuit of Oblivion ... Describing the failure of the War on Drugs, New York Times columnist Eduardo Porter noted:
• Book Review: The War on Drugs Is a War on Freedom
www.thenewamerican.com/reviews/books/item/13313-book-review-the...
In his book The War on Drugs Is a War on Freedom, Laurence Vance illustrates the absurdities and inconsistencies of the federal government’s drug war in America ...
• U.S.-Mexico drug war partnership under Calderon broke new ...
articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/28/world/la-fg-us-mexico-drug-war...
U.S.-Mexico drug war partnership under Calderon broke new ... President Felipe Calderon’s war against drug gangs, the U.S. became a ... in audio books.
• Best US drug war policy? Do nothing, new book says. « Knopf ...
doubleday.knopfdoubleday.com/2011/01/26/best-us-drug-war
Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group ... One in a series of excerpts from THE NEXT DECADE by Stratfor CEO George Friedman.
•
• Africa and the War on Drugs: a new book and online debate ...
africanarguments.org/2012/10/18/africa-and-the-war-on-drugs-a-new...
On 22nd October the RAS, Zed Books and the International African Institute will be launching (at SOAS) the latest book in the African Arguments series, Africa…
• Welcome | Drug War Facts
www.drugwarfacts.org
Free online book - a collection of categorized information on various aspects of the drug war, all presented with full source citations and, where possible, links to ...
• Exposing New Books on the Government Scams Drug War & ...
www.independent.org/publications/the_independent/pdf/TII_News_14...
(continued on page 3) (continued on page 3) New Books on the Drug War & Tenure Exposing Government Scams ABC-TV's John Stossel addresses the Independent

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