On June 9, 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed H.R. 11143 into law, creating the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) and entrusting the Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, with the responsibility of establishing the first federal organization whose sole purpose was to rid the nation of illegal narcotics. When the bureau opened its doors on July 1, 1930, Mellon named former vice counsel with the State Department and recently displaced assistant commissioner of Prohibition, Harry J. Anslinger, as the FBN’s acting commissioner. Two weeks into his new position, the heat of this new charge was already singeing Anslinger, as South Carolina Senator Coleman Livingston Blease rose on the Senate floor, waved a tin of opium, and shouted “this was purchased only one block from where we are now deliberating.” The senator’s showboating reminded the new FBN director that “time was running out, if the newly formed Federal Bureau of Narcotics was to win and hold the respect of Congress and the public, it would have to act fast.” For the following thirty years, Anslinger was indeed fast and ferocious, as he carried out the mission of the FBN and turned the fight against drugs into a national obsession. In fact, Commissioner Anslinger shepherded the passage of a series of legislative bulwarks, spanning the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act up to the 1956 Narcotics Control Act. In addition, he provided spectacle-hunting authors with the juicy anecdotes that fueled Hollywood’s notorious 1936 drug exposé, Reeper Madness, which avows that “women cry for it, men die for it”; and he dabbled in his own forms of cultural production by writing fear-mongering articles such as “Marihuana: Assassin of Youth,” which linked “marijuana fiends” with “murder (and) degenerate sex attacks.” Thus, through more than thirty years of service, Anslinger pushed antidrug legislation and both supported and produced countless horror stories spread throughout the American public—as
Although separated by a half-century, these two events demonstrate the continuation of the U.S. government's hysterical response to illicit narcotics, which, stretching from Anslinger up to the present, has been based on the assumption that some drugs (but not all) and some users (but not all) are so dangerous that they require the mobilization of the legislative, executive, judicial, penal, intelligence, and military institutions of the United States. This supposed threat has rallied the government and the public to support various campaigns against drugs, some of them so extreme that we have been taught to refer to them as part of a larger drug war. Much as recent foreign wars have relied upon the media's breathless representations of smart bombs and nationalism-pumping portrayals of heroic troops, so the drug war has produced an onslaught of media spectacles. In fact, the drug war has been waged largely by producing dramatic, made-for-television moments. Whether it was DEA agents posing atop a small mountain produced by a one-thousand-pound marijuana bust in 1982, Nancy Reagan and a live television crew accompanying the police on a warlike drug raid in South Central Los Angeles in 1985, or two eggs crackling in a frying pan in 1987—this is your brain on drugs—the drug war has been fought, in large part, by marshaling fear-mongering images meant to cower Americans. While these spectacles target individual fears about how drugs and drug users assault your neighborhood, your children, and your brain, the drug war has also relied on suggestions that it somehow defends the national security as well. Linking the fight against drugs to defending the nation has thus created another platform from which elites stir up nationalism to distract the citizenry from other issues, all while consolidating the power of the state. Indeed, during an era when the threat of communism was declining, and rendered before the tragedy of 9/11, the drug war filled a gap in our national consciousness by offering Americans a new series of enemies to be feared and pursued by the military, and to be punished and incarcerated by the prison-industrial complex.  

Contrary to the habitual fear-mongering driving the drug war and the prison-industrial complex, I argue that it is our civic responsibility to try to peer behind drug war spectacles to make sense of how the drug war has turned from a campaign against illegal drugs into a campaign for the mass incarceration of particular segments of America. Moreover, I argue that part of the collateral damage of this drug war is democracy itself. Indeed, the loudest media voices, intricate government-sponsored campaigns of panic and propaganda, strict draconian laws, and a new vocabulary of the dismissive now mute one of the fundamental principles of our modern democracy: honest debate. For almost any discussion of drugs in Washington or among
the mass media is often ended before it starts by the shouting of a litany of pejorative terms, such as “pothead,” “soft on crime,” “crack whore,” “drug fiend,” “violent criminal,” “drug lords,” “gang bangers,” and the like. These dismissive rhetorical terms are meant to eliminate all discussion of alternatives to mass incarceration and to portray select Others as beyond redemption or rehabilitation, hence pushing public policy and sentiment toward either the imprisonment or military eradication of the dreaded source of fear. And so, since President Reagan’s announcement of a crack epidemic, prisoners serving drug sentences have become 53 percent of the federal prison population and 20 percent of state prison populations. Thus driven largely by the drug war and its corresponding rhetoric of dismissal—forget redemption, rehabilitation, or second chances, drug users must be dismissed as monsters—America’s prison population has ballooned to more than 2 million citizens.4

At the same time as this domestic rush toward mass incarceration, the United States escalated a series of international antidrug campaigns in Central and South America. Initiated under the Clinton administration as Plan Colombia, and continued under the George W. Bush administration, including a 2007 budget request of $721 million for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative in Colombia alone, these efforts have led to the further militarization of the region, skyrocketing drug prices, and no discernable drop in drug usage in the United States. These investments have produced spectacles abroad as well. In March 2008, two particularly gruesome murders of leaders of FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia) were hailed as victories in the war. The first victim, Raul Reyes, believed to be FARC’s second-in-command, was gunned down in a raid on the guerrilla’s camp in Ecuador, setting off a week of diplomatic stalemate and sovereignty boasts between Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. The murder of the second victim, Manuel Jesus Muñoz, recalled the gangster mythology of yesteryear, as Muñoz’s severed hand was turned in to authorities by one of his own men, who deserted the brigade. In addition, in a stunning move in May 2008, Colombian President Álvaro Uribe signed the extradition papers of fourteen paramilitary soldiers who were bound to face drug charges in the United States, while also attempting to hide the political scandal of his party’s ties to drug warlords (such charges have engulfed his cabinet and family) while simultaneously negotiating a free-trade agreement with the United States. Like most wars, then, the drug war is metastasizing, leaping across national borders, encircling an ever-widening network of allies and enemies. Critics have argued that plans like Plan Colombia are less of an effort to stop drug production than covert means of funding a string of human-rights-abrogating regimes that, in the name of fighting drugs, use SWAT-like special forces and paramilitary hit squads to curtail oppositional parties and grassroots organizing by those opposed to U.S. interests. Both at home and abroad, then, the rise of a new punishing democracy is directly related to the drug war.5

This chapter responds to this domestic and increasingly international crisis by unpacking the rhetorical history of our approach to illegal drugs in the United States, thus enabling readers to understand how the prison boom of the last twenty-five years is driven largely by arrests stemming from the drug war. Moreover, I demonstrate how drug-related punishment strategies influence our national conversations on poverty, social justice, race, class, gender, incarceration, and education. Because these critical conversations are too often clouded by the hysteria caused by our drug warriors, this chapter attempts to reclaim a voice in this conversation, hence both enabling readers to rethink the drug war and the norms of democracy more broadly. Ultimately, I argue that abolishing the prison-industrial complex depends in large part on ending the disastrous and now decades-long war on drugs.

Governing Through Fear; or, The Drug War as the Engine of the Prison-Industrial Complex

The August 8, 2005, cover of Newsweek blared “The Meth Epidemic: Inside America’s New Drug Crisis.” The headline was imposed over the shadowy silhouette of a young man, baseball cap turned slightly to the right, who held a glass pipe to his lips as an orange flame cooked the end of the pipe and a single billow of smoke rose up. Inside the magazine, a collection of stories focused on the personal narratives of “lives destroyed” by methamphetamine, the institutional responses to “combat” this enemy, and the societal fears of the meth “plague” and its “widing path of destruction.” While the ominous image on the front cover and the use of terminology like “war” and “epidemic” in the magazine are of keen interest, for the purpose of this chapter, the choice of “new” on the cover provides an entrance into my argument. For a critical component of the history of the drug war is this question of its recurrent “newness”: as each fresh decade finds the nation overrun by a “new” drug menace (marijuana and psychedelics in the 1960s, heroin and speed in the 1970s, cocaine powder and crack-cocaine in the 1980s, and methamphetamine in the 1990s and beyond), so the nation succumbs to an imposed cultural amnesia and aggressively forgets the past as it succumbs to the “new” menace. In contrast to this habitual forgetting, this chapter will recount the rhetorical history of the drug war, which, throughout the generations, has depended on what I have called dismissive rhetoric and also an impregnable rhetoric, whereby the nation is constructed
as a homogeneous entity whose boundaries must be defended against alien invaders. Indeed, drugs and their users have been constructed as much-loathed Others and as threats to national security, hence justifying both mass incarceration and more militaristic responses. Marshaling both dismissive rhetoric and impregnable rhetoric, each new generation of drug warriors has used the war on drugs to define alliances, recruit partisans, unite interests, and establish enemies to be either imprisoned or eliminated.6

In fact, over the past thirty years the drug war has become one of the major routes for building what can only be considered a parallel government, a shadow world where fighting drugs and drug users serves as an avenue for amassing governmental power. For example, ever since the most recent version of the war on drugs was instigated by the Nixon administration, this shadow world has relentlessly picked up momentum, enabling new generations of drug warriors to tap into an ever-increasing pool of federal money. Consider the growth of the National Drug Control budgets over the last thirty years: the Nixon administration spent $43 million in 1969, the Ford administration spent $382 million in 1977, the Carter administration spent $855 million in 1981, the Reagan administration spent $1.65 billion in 1982, the Clinton administration spent more than $17.9 billion in 2000, and the Bush administration spent more than $20 billion in 2004. When combined with state and local monies, the 2006 expenditures for the drug war exceeded $40 billion—that is $40,000,000,000.7

These ballooning budgets correlate with a population explosion in our local, state, and federal penal institutions. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, between 1982 and 1999 the percentage of defendants in U.S. district courts who were charged with a drug offense almost doubled, increasing from 18 to 32 percent. During this same time, and empowered by the passage of the Sentencing Reform Act in 1984, the proportion of time spent in prison for a federal drug offender rose from 47 percent of his or her sentence if convicted in 1982 to 87 percent in 1999. Likewise, the enactment of the Anti-Narcotic Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 established mandatory minimum sentences for drug traffickers, hence removing judicial oversight, raising critical questions of constitutionality, and institutionalizing longer prison terms. Because of this increase in drug prosecutions and longer federally mandated prison terms, the state and federal prison population leapt from 400,000 in 1982 to nearly 2.3 million by 2008. This unprecedented explosion in the penal population was accompanied by the opening of more than 650 state and at least 54 federal correctional facilities. The number of local jail inmates also tripled, rocketing from approximately 200,000 in 1982 to 600,000 in 1999, while the number of adults on probation increased from more than 1.3 million to nearly 5 million persons. This explosion in the number of prisoners has been good for business, especially for private companies like Corrections Corporation, which manages more than 60 state and federal detention centers in 19 states. “It’s as if they run high-occupancy hotels where people can check in but they can’t check out,” cracked Paul J. Rasplika, manager of the AIM Capital Development Fund, which first added the stock to its portfolio in 2003. “State and federal governments’ need exceeds available beds,” Rasplika cooed, “and [this] company has them.” Although levels of violent crime and property crime remained the same over the last twenty-five years (and in some cases even decreased), the prison population and the industry that maintains it grew at an alarming pace—and the imprisonment of drug users and traffickers makes up a significant portion of this growing population. Indeed, the systematic intensification of the drug war has contributed mightily to building a nightmare scenario in which 7 million citizens are under the direct supervision or surveillance of state and federal law-enforcement agencies. In short, the prison-industrial complex is fueled largely by the drug war.8

From its central role in filling the cells of the prison-industrial complex, citizens might at least expect the drug war to have produced some discernable benefits for the health of the nation. For a heavily funded, government-sanctioned, military-planned operation of such massive scale—costing $40 billion a year—should produce a reduction in the availability of drugs and their rate of usage, eventually leading to a diminished need for imprisonment. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of families are in peril because of an ever-expanding (and ever-shifting) network of drug manufacturers and dealers. Eradication, interdiction, and elimination have been a stated goal of the U.S. government since Anslinger, yet illegal drugs are still readily available to meet consumer demand. Indeed, on the premise that any social policy should be evaluated based on its effectiveness, we can conclude that our national drug war is a failure. No less than the father of modern neo-conservatism, Milton Friedman, concurs in this conclusion; in a recent editorial about the drug war, he asked the following hard question: “can any policy, however high-minded, be moral if it leads to widespread corruption, imprisons so many, has so racist an effect, destroys our inner cities, wreaks havoc on misguided and vulnerable individuals and brings death and destruction to so many countries?” After decades of zero-tolerance policies and increasingly harsh criminal penalties, we have more than half a million people behind bars on drug charges—more than the total prison population in all Western Europe—yet drug use continues unabated. We are spending billions
of dollars to keep fellow citizens locked up, and more billions militarizing the drug war effort at home and abroad, yet the federal government’s own research demonstrates that drugs are now purer and more readily available than before the escalation of the drug war. Radicals, liberals, and even (some fiscally responsible) neconservatives agree: the drug war is a catastrophe.8

Nonetheless, while the drug war is a failure in terms of stemming drug usage, it has become a profound success in terms of offering politicians a series of rhetorical tools for preempting discussions about alternative modes of public health. Thus, the ease with which questions of hospital rehabilitation for imprisoned users, decriminalization of narcotic use, or even legalization are pilloried in Washington as repudiations, according to President Reagan, of “everything America is.” The vast totality of that statement indicates how the drug war’s meanings are elastic enough to come to stand as metonymic condensations of America itself: to fight drugs is, simply, American; to think otherwise is, simply, un-American. Such simplistic generalizations dovetail with the purported national security implications of drugs, thus enabling drug warriors to speak, like former Cold Warriors, in a warlike, siege vocabulary, invoking precisely the everything-we-believe-in-is-under-attack hysteria that has enabled leaders since Nixon to speak of a drug war. Writing about our longstanding national need for enemies, Bob Ivie has argued that “the image of a threatening Other [waiting] for a chance to destroy America’s freedom and democratic form of government” has always served useful political functions for those who want to govern through fear. As Ivie observes, such enemies fuel “a polarizing rhetoric of political demonization, which reduces difference to deviance and evil.” Thus, although a failure in terms of public health, the drug war has proven rhetorically productive for those who find “a polarizing rhetoric of political demonization” useful for distorting the masses and justifying extreme governmental actions. The drug war is therefore less about ending America’s longstanding addiction to various drugs than about providing political, military, and penal elites a useful set of terrifying images and loathed Others for governing through fear.10

From Temperance to War:
The Scapegoating of Drugs and Their Users
From as early as the antebellum period of U.S. history, when temperance activists advocated against the deleterious effects of the “demon rum,” hence driving what came to be known as the “cold water frenzy,” Americans have been worried, even obsessed, with the powers of alcohol and drugs. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared in 1852 that alcohol was “the unclean thing . . . to taste, see, smell or touch it, polluted female virtue.” In his 1882 Opium-Smoking in America and China, Dr. H. H. Kane noted that “smokers coming East were constantly making converts, so that in a few months’ time small and large towns, like Carson, Reno and many others, each had their smoking dens and their regular customers. Each new convert seemed to take a morbid delight in converting others, and thus a standing army was daily swelled by recruits.” A 1902 pamphlet from the American Federation of Labor warned “there are hundreds, ay thousands, of our American boys and girls who have acquired the deathly habit and are doomed, hopelessly doomed.” Speaking of cocaine in 1910, U.S. diplomat Dr. Hamilton Wright, one of the leading advocates for the passage of the forthcoming Harrison Act, declared “this new vice, the cocaine vice, the most serious to be dealt with, has proved to be a creator of criminals and unusual forms of violence, and it has been a potent incentive in driving the humbler negroes all over the country to abnormal crimes.” Late twentieth and early twenty-first century constructions of the threat posed by drugs and its addicts appropriated and refigured these early flourishes to produce an amalgamated monster consisting of both individual corruption (“the unclean thing”) and collective threats to national security (“a standing army”). Within such constructions, the infected self and an allegedly treacherous anti-society of users are drawn toward dangerous forms of deviance (“unusual forms of violence” and “abnormal crimes”). Finally, such portrayals depict all drug users as beyond care (they are “hopelessly doomed”) and as racialized (as “humbler negroes” gone wrong).11

While the nation has thus been haunted by various manifestations of drugs and drug users since its inception, the United States had no significant federal control of drugs until the Harrison Anti-Narcotic Act of 1914. Upon acquisition of the Philippines in 1898, at the end of the Spanish-American war, the United States took a keen interest in controlling the burgeoning opium traffic out of the Philippines. Much as drug use among soldiers in and veterans of Vietnam became a lightning rod in the late 1960s, so drug-using troops and merchants returning from the conquest of the Philippines helped fuel a growing awareness that Americans were importing and using opiates. Thus wrapped up in one of the early moments of U.S. imperialism, the Harrison Act generated revenue by requiring anyone dealing in opiates or cocaine to register with the government, purchase tax stamps, and keep records of all transactions. As the act stated, “It shall be unlawful for any person required to register under the terms of this Act to produce, import, manufacture, compound, deal in, dispense, sell, or distribute, any of the aforesaid drugs without having reg-
istered and paid the special tax provided for in this section.” At this stage of
U.S. history, then, the concern was not in eradicating drugs and criminalizing
drug users, but in taxing them. This question of taxation recalls the Whiskey
Act of 1791 and the subsequent Whiskey Rebellion, which prodded Secretary
of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton to describe the protested legislation “as
a measure of social discipline” deployed, as Michael J. Graetz and Deborah H.
Schenk noted, “to advance and secure the power of the new federal
government.” From its earliest moments, then, the U.S. government’s claims for
enforced moral righteousness and its attempts to legislate against vice have been
entwined with the deeper motives of managing taxes, controlling commodities,
and thus consolidating state power. While the Harrison Act neither outlawed
the habitual use of opiates nor mentioned addicts, and while it avoided the
mass opposition that followed the Whiskey Act, it aimed to limit users’ access
to drugs, for it was assumed that by applying a tax on users, thus raising the
cost of a fix, recreational use would be curbed. If its terms were violated, the
act called for a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment. Hardly the
opening shot in a “war” against drugs, the Harrison Act seems in retrospect
to be less about eradication than about management.12

In fact, soon after its passage, a number of cities, including New York, New
Orleans, and Atlanta, opened narcotics clinics to monitor users, manage their
habits, and wean addicts off their habit. This medically driven response out-
raged the Treasury Department, which interpreted the Harrison Act as trying
to prevent this type of drug maintenance for the user; and so revenue agents
of the Narcotic Division of the Prohibition Unit launched “visits” to
these clinics and even began arresting doctors and druggists. The years fol-
lowing passage of the Harrison Act were thus witness to a rigorous argument
among physicians, state health departments, and Treasury agents, often held
before judges, over whether physicians had the right to prescribe opiates for
addiction recovery and maintenance. In the midst of this confusion, Dr. Jin
Fuey Moy of Pittsburgh was arrested for “supplying one addicted to the use
of opium.” Initially, a federal district judge agreed with the doctor, as did the
Supreme Court in U.S. v. Jin Fuey Moy (1916), where Justice Oliver Wendell
Holmes noted that “if opium is produced in any of the States[,] obviously
the gravest question of power would be raised by an attempt of Congress to
make possession of such opium a crime.” Thus, the Supreme Court disagreed
with the government’s assertion that possession of a narcotic was evidence
of a violation of the Harrison Act. For a moment, then, America seemed to
understand that addiction was a medical issue best handled by doctors and
clinics, not police and prisons.13

By 1920, as war hawks used World War I to trigger a new round of national
security hysteria, the Harrison Act was interpreted from a much less progres-
sive perspective. Indeed, federal powers on surveillance and punishment were
enhanced by the wartime 1917 Espionage Act and the 1918 Sedition Act,
which together gave the government unlimited authority to prosecute those
who present a “clear and present danger that will bring about the substan-
tive evils that Congress has a right to prevent.” In U.S. v. Doremus (1919),
the Supreme Court modified its 1916 opinion by ruling that “Congress, with
full power over the subject [drugs, drug users, and responses to them], short
of arbitrary and unreasonable action which is not to be assumed, inserted
these provisions in an act specifically providing for the raising of revenue.
Considered of themselves, we think they tend to keep the traffic aboveboard
and subject to inspection by those authorized to collect the revenue.” In the
same year, the Court went on to note in Webb v. United States that prescrib-
ing narcotics solely for maintaining a patient’s habit and avoiding withdrawal
was not within the scope of legitimate medical practice and was therefore a
violation of the law. The Court noted that “to call such an order for the use
of morphine a physician’s prescription would be so plain a perversion of meaning
that no discussion of the subject is required.” The notion that “no discus-
sion is required” indicates an accelerating trend toward what I have called a
rhetoric of dismissal, where certain subjects, in this case how to respond to
drug users, are framed as beyond the pale of enlightened debate. Informed
give-and-take, the foundation of democracy, is here replaced by dismissal and
the creation of an abject Other worthy only of prosecution. Moreover, while
the Webb v. U.S. decision maintained the revenue-raising powers of the Har-
risson Act, thus maintaining provisional market control over drugs, it also,
for the first time, appropriated the power to pass judgment upon the medi-
cal questions of addiction—henceforward, addiction would be handled not
by doctors but by police. These paradigm-shifting decisions led to the clos-
ing of legal narcotics clinics, which in turn led to an expanded black market
for the now illegal substances. Thus, by criminalizing addicts and their fixes,
these World War I-era decisions produced a new underworld of criminal drug
dealers, middlemen, and users.14

These unfortunate legal decisions were matched by a rising culture of fear
over the allegedly swelling ranks of addicts. These fears were triggered in large
part by widely circulated government reports in 1918 and 1919 (both relying
on imprecise data and fabricated World War I draft statistics) claiming that
the addict population stood between 750,000 and 1,500,000 (a 1924 report
would more accurately place the addict population at 110,000). Although A. G.
DuMee, the primary author of these reports and the chief expert for the U.S. Public Health Service, soon acknowledged that his numbers were erroneous, his inflated figures were nonetheless quoted routinely by both politicians and reformers like Captain Richmond F. Hobson, president of the International Narcotic Education Association and the World Narcotic Defense Association. Relying on the outrageous numbers of DuMez, Hobson delivered a now infamous address on the evening of March 1, 1928, via NBC's radio network, wherein he warned listeners that “upon the [drug] issue hangs the perpetuation of civilization, the destiny of the world and the future of the human race.” Hobson described America’s exploitation by dealers who would profit from this deadly, viral drug traffic, and he portrayed the effects of addiction in terms that sound straight out of a science fiction film: “so hopeless is the victim and so pitiless the master,” intoned Hobson, “that heroin addicts are known as the Living Dead.” Like later drug warriors, Hobson imagined the living dead as criminals “who constitute the primary cause of our alarming crime wave.” Hobson drew upon medical terminology as well, arguing that the problem of drug use was “lled to a contagion” that transformed addicts into a menace that was “marching to the capture and destruction of the whole world.” By the end of the radio broadcast, Hobson warned listeners that “narcotic drug addiction has become one of the major factors endangering the public health,” and that the United States was “in the midst of a life and death struggle with the deadliest foe that has ever menaced its future.”

The threat was so dire, in fact, that Hobson saw it endangering “all the continents.” the welfare of the peoples of today and the survival of generations unborn.” Hobson thus expands what I have called the rhetoric of proximity, wherein drugs are portrayed as omnipresent and local, to include a now universal claim, “all the continents,” thus globalizing the threat. Moreover, he expands the threat of drugs from the temporal present into the indefinite future—the destiny of the world and the future of the human race—thus, like President Bush’s Global War on Terrorism, opening the door to an infinite struggle, to what one critic has called “the forever war.”

Hobson’s hysterics provided a blueprint—including viral metaphors, claims of both proximity and global consequences, indefinite warfare, and national security threats—still in use for the rhetorical construction of the drug problem and the drug user. His pathos-laden hyperbole was constructed in large part by employing that cornerstone of all appeals in moral politics: the false dilemma. Richard Lanham notes that this rhetorical device of division provides the appearance of choice, yet the choice is a stark binary where the alternative is unacceptable. Following the logic of this rhetorical fallacy, we are left with one choice, Hobson’s choice, to fight for good in this “death struggle with the deadliest foe that has ever menaced [our future]; to not fight this struggle, and to not fight it on Hobson’s terms, thus amounts to treason. You are either with him or against him. Such argument strategies make appeals, then, not to informed discussion and deliberation but to governing through fear and intimidation. Indeed, like similar charges that faced the French in 1798 during the “half-war” with the United States, or that harassed socialists during the Great War, Hobson both creates an enemy/Other and attempts to scare his listeners into unquestioning compliance. Moreover, Hobson draws upon viral metaphors of contagion to portray an enemy that is infectious, most often attacking teenagers, especially young girls. The chronic repetition of this argumentative pattern—false dilemmas plus hyperbolic fear plus viral assault—escalated the national mood to dangerous and irrational heights, where the production of fear, rather than reasoned discourse, dominated the conversation. In fact, Hobson’s fear-mongering was so persuasive that after his speech various new citizens’ groups were formed and existing civic organizations were mobilized to help combat this “evil.” These groups were active throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Then, in the wake of Hobson-like reports linking marijuana use with crime in the early thirties (mostly among Mexican and black youths in the south and southwest), there was renewed agitation for the regulation of marijuana. By 1935 marijuana was called America’s newest drug menace; the Marihuana Tax Act was then passed in 1937, with restrictions and penalties modeled on the Harrison Act. The state surveillance and punishment of those miscreants Hobson called the living dead was thus expanding in lockstep with new cultural discourses that justified increasingly harsh, even military, responses to drugs and their users.15

Indeed, part of Hobson’s and other antidrug reformers’ successes stemmed from their ability to modernize the language of earlier temperance movements, calling upon longstanding images and narratives in the national memory and redepicting them to fit changed historical circumstances. Within the temperance tradition, dating from as early as the American Revolution, one of the most effective tools of persuasion was the memoir or testimony, which often told heartbreaking tales of drug- or alcohol-induced declines into ruin followed by heroic struggles to break the habit. Beginning with Dr. Benjamin Rush in the early Federalist era, these firsthand stories of addiction, often rendered in deeply religious tones, were supplemented by medical tracts wherein physicians noted that drunks and addicts tended to conceal their habits and would lie or steal to support them if necessary. By the late 1800s, morphine and laudanum addicts were characterized as contemptible as a consequence of their addiction.
Opium smokers, including many Chinese immigrants, had a darker reputation of vice and decadence and aroused hostility precisely as they entered the new labor markets of the rapidly industrializing West. By 1910, several accounts, both testimonial and medical, began linking “cocaine mania” to delinquency and crime perpetrated by urban youth. As David Courtwright demonstrates, by 1890 drug usage changed demographically, moving away from an addict population of middle-class medicinal users to lower-class and recreational users. With this shift, the connection between drug use, vice, crime, and particular populations circulated more potently in the public sphere. Thus, whereas the national narrative of addiction began around the time of the Revolution as a deeply religious script about sin and redemption, by the early twentieth century it had morphed into a discourse primarily about racial fear, economic uncertainty, and threatened national security.17

These longstanding national narratives and the World War I-era work of Hobson and others would crystallize under the leadership of Harry J. Anslinger, whom many consider the first federal drug czar of the United States. With the end of Prohibition, young Anslinger was out of a job as assistant commissioner of Prohibition, but he found his new crusade in 1930 with the formation of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. An astute student of the national mood, Anslinger updated temperance story lines for the twentieth century by shifting their weight from religious concerns to racialized fears of uncontrollable youth expressed in mass-media-friendly scenes of carnage. For example, in an editorial run in American Magazine soon after his appointment, Anslinger shared stories from his “gore file,” a collection of police-blotter narratives—most with little or no substantiation—causally linking marijuana usage with graphic violence:

An entire family was murdered by a youthful addict in Florida. When officers arrived at the home, they found the youth staggering about in a human slaughterhouse. With an axe he had killed his father, mother, two brothers, and a sister. He seemed to be in a daze. . . . He had no recollection of having committed the multiple crimes. The officers knew him ordinarily as a sane, rather quiet young man; now he was pitifully crazed. They sought the reason. The boy said that he had been in the habit of smoking something which youthful friends called “muggles,” a childish name for marijuana.18

Anslinger’s sensational rhetoric strives to create hysteria with the rhetorical trope of exemplum, where a single startling anecdote represents a larger social dilemma; in this case, the graphic illustration of one allegedly drug-caused scene of violence works to generate an omnipresent fear of a lurking drug menace. The story is therefore not exceptional, a case of extreme behavior, but representative, an index of widespread danger. Moreover, in describing how the young man is possessed by the demon “muggles,” thus converting him into a dazed killing monster, the story eschews any sense of tragedy, or sympathy for the victims, instead creating an anger-driven froth of retribution—readers are meant, then, to respond not with concern or caring but with righteous violence, or at least with enthusiastic support for heightened government intervention.

Anslinger’s nationwide campaign of gory spectacles produced both the national prominence he had long coveted and created widespread panic about a new villain: the drug-addled young male running rampant through the streets of the country. In most instances, this enemy was colored by the racism of the day. For example, in 1937, in testimony before the Senate, Anslinger declared that “those who are habitually accustomed to the use of the drug are said to develop a delirious rage after its administration, during which they are temporarily irresponsible and liable to commit violent crimes. This narcotic is said to produce mental deterioration. Among some people the dreams produced are usually of an erotic character, [the drug] operates to destroy the will . . . its use frequently leads to insanity.” For Anslinger’s “gore file,” this user, this destroyer, was often characterized by his dark skin (whether black, Chinese, or Latino), by his listening to jazz, and by his nefarious attempts to corrupt innocent white girls. Anslinger also introduced a scapegoat that would last for decades: popular culture (in this instance, it is the “satanic music” of jazz, in the future it will be heavy metal, rap music, and R-rated movies). As Thomas Szas has noted, a scapegoat is similar to the Greek pharmakos (which described the person sacrificed in certain state rituals and ceremonies); on the scapegoat “all evil is loaded, [and] instead of being let loose and driven into the desert, is completely destroyed, together with its evil burden.” Szasz continued, the pharmakos is an “expendable person, an object or thing: he or she was an effigy or symbol—the scapegoat—in a purification ceremony.” The modern American pharmacological scapegoat, according to Szasz, shares this trait with the Greeks, but is also “an agent, participant in a counter-ceremony celebrating a substance tabooed by society’s dominant ethic.” Even as jazz was revitalizing American culture, building one of the great lasting traditions of our national heritage, Anslinger was depicting it as a hotbed of drug-spawned vice and miscegenation. It stands as a startling testament to our national addiction to racism that Anslinger’s peers found such absurd claims persuasive—as if jazz and grass produce “human slaughterhouses” filled with “delirious rage”—yet his scapegoating tactics were well received by his contemporaries. In fact, Anslinger’s unrelenting narrative of racialized fear led to a series of laws, including the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 (which
continued the revenue principle and punishments established via the Harrison Act, while also classifying marijuana as no different from cocaine or heroin), the Boggs Amendment of 1951 (which increased the punishments outlined in 1937 four times over, while establishing mandatory minimum sentencing), and the Narcotics Control Act of 1956 (which increased the punishments established in 1951 eight times over and included a separate penalty of ten to forty years for distribution to a minor, and from ten years to life, or death when a jury so recommended, if the drug was heroin)—these Anslinger-driven acts built the groundwork for the drug war-fueled prison boom that would soon follow.19

Ever attuned to the interweaving of legislation and culture, Anslinger capped his thirty-year-long career as director of the FBI and chief architect of U.S. drug policy for the first half of the twentieth century by publishing his 1961 memoir, The Murderers: The Story of the Narcotic Gangs. The book introduced Frank Gin, a fantastic and diabolical character who stood as the symbolic condensation of the drug-induced evils Anslinger had committed his career to eradicating. An embodiment of “the living dead,” the super-addict Gin was characterized as “wily, crafty, evil, and beyond redemption,” a wayward Asian hurtling down the drug spiral and culminating in uncontrolled violence and ultimately homicide. Anslinger argued that the death penalty was the only reasonable response to Gin’s crimes. Indeed, in The Murderers Anslinger concluded a career dedicated to the conviction that drug use was an act of both moral repugnance and political subversion; Gin and his kind required an un forgiving response, one that would, beginning with the presidency of Richard Nixon, soon be referred to as a war.20

Nixon’s Declaration of War

Following the Anslinger precedent, President Richard Nixon arrived in the White House in 1969 intent on stomping out those who were “wily, crafty, evil, and beyond redemption.” In response to the turbulent 1960s, which witnessed the dismantling “of a national order by the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements” and widespread drug use among multiple populations, Nixon and his followers boasted that they would reestablish law and order. With the nation reeling from the tumult of the decade, and with public discourse dominated by the language of war, Nixon used the occasion to transform crime control from a local issue addressed by traditional police into a national campaign that would be waged by new and increasingly militarized forces. And so, six months into his first term, Nixon announced his war on drugs by identifying drug trafficking as “public enemy number one.” Nixon told Congress that “within the last decade, the abuse of drugs has grown from essentially a local police problem into a serious national threat to the personal health and safety of millions of Americans. . . A national awareness of the gravity of the situation is needed; a new urgency and concerted national policy are needed at the federal level to begin to cope with this growing menace to the general welfare of the United States.” While speaking of national security, and hence implicitly linking the war against drugs to the fight in Vietnam, White House tapes reveal that Nixon understood the “abuse of drugs” in more domestic terms; in fact, one Nixon White House insider later reported that for the president, this “whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.” Nixon thus launched a drug war by appropriating Vietnam-era concerns over national security, by playing to a post-Summer of Love backlash politics that viewed American culture as spinning out of control, and by believing in private, although not saying so publicly, that the root of the problem was African Americans. Militarism, fear, and racism would thus drive the drug war for years to come. As Bob Ivie has noted, presidential war rhetoric “perceives [the] situation as a moral crisis, a challenge to American ideals”; indeed, by alluding to the Constitution (“the general welfare of the United States”), President Nixon argued that drugs and their users—especially “the blacks,” now empowered by the Civil Rights movement—challenge the very foundations of America and thus require a military response.21

The legislative buttress for Nixon’s war would come in 1970, first with the passage of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act, which included $220 million for enforcement, scheduled drugs into five rankings, and granted police the right to “no-knock” searches. The second plank in this new offensive was the Racketeering Influence and Corrupt Organizations Act, which produced the first secret “special grand juries” and relaxed the regulations for using illegally attained evidence for prosecutors. The same year, Congress doled out $3.55 billion to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to support state agencies with their drug efforts; as addressed by Julilly Kohler-Hausmann in this volume (see chapter 2), these funds encouraged the use of military expertise and hardware in the domestic fight against drugs. Three years later, the Rockefeller drug laws, named after then-governor Nelson Rockefeller, and signed on May 8, 1973, outlined a drastic increase in the penalties for selling two ounces or more of heroin, morphine, “raw or prepared opium,” cocaine, or cannabis, including marijuana, or for possessing four or more ounces of the same substances. These acts made punishments for
said drugs were the number-one problem facing the country. The same month, ABC released its own poll that found 80 percent of respondents believed the U.S. faced a national drug crisis. Despite this hysteria, crack use was primarily isolated to just a few metropolitan areas, like Los Angeles and New York. Still, the message from the media and the White House screamed of a crack tide flooding across the shores of the United States. Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell have studied this period of media bombardment, concluding that it produced a “sieve paradigm” in which the drug user was “treated as an alien Other on the order of a space invader.” This otherworldly invader was of course made proximate by drawing upon longstanding racial stereotypes, thus producing a “color-coded mob of dehumanized inner-city criminals threaten[ing] the suburbs, small towns, schools, families, status, and authority of middle America.” From Hobson’s and Anslinger’s theatrics to Nixon’s “total offensive” to Presidents Reagan’s and Bush’s White House pronouncements to the mass-mediated fantasies of the 1980s, the drug war thus merged fears of national security with longstanding racial hatreds.23

Presidents Reagan and Bush did not leave it up to the media to monitor their war, as key pieces of legislation at home, and covert action abroad, escalated the stakes once again. With the nation symbolically under siege, Reagan imposed greater authority for Executive Branch regulations by establishing thirteen federal task forces from 1982 to 1984. These task forces marshaled the resources of countless assistant district attorneys and agents from, among others, the DEA, U.S. Customs, the FBI, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, the Internal Revenue Service, the Coast Guard, and the U.S. Marshals Service. At a special gathering in the White House for representatives of these task forces on June 24, 1982, President Reagan boldly declared that “we’re rejecting the helpless attitude that drug use is so rampant that we’re defenseless to do anything about it. We’re taking down the surrender flag that has flown over so many drug efforts. We’re running about the battle flag. We can fight the drug problem, and we can win.” To win this battle, Reagan’s signature legislation was passed, the Anti–Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which once again intensified the governmental response to drugs, most notably by instituting the formal classification of drugs as a national security problem, which in turn gave greater latitude to the use of military power. In addition, for the first time, a mandatory minimum sentence was assigned for a federal conviction for simple possession of any scheduled narcotic, thus aligning federal mandatory minimum sentencing policies with existing state policies and so again legislating longer prison terms. Two years later, a new cabinet position was created by the passage of the Anti–Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which also...
established a governmental epicenter for drug policy, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). Its primary objective was to “restore order and security to American neighborhoods, to dismantle drug trafficking organizations, to help people break the habit of drug use, and to prevent those who have never used illegal drugs from starting.” These government initiatives were matched on a local scale by the growing neighborhood crime watch movement; at the same time, a major educational push was made in public schools to “D.A.R.E.” kids to stay off drugs. And so, by 1988, drug warriors wielded a formal seat in the president’s cabinet, a massive institutional apparatus of support, a series of legislative victories, a growing network of military and policing task forces, and an increasingly vitriolic public relations arm.

By the summer of 1989, the newly sworn-in President George H. W. Bush was ready to deploy these new tools in the ever-expanding drug war. In his September 5 address to the nation, he proposed that “we enlarge our criminal justice system across the board [and] when requested, we will for the first time make available the appropriate resources of America’s armed forces.” Defense Secretary Dick Cheney soon ordered the military to develop plans for “operational support” to ensure a “more aggressive and robust” U.S. presence in Latin America. The dramatic arrest of General Manuel Noriega, during the invasion of Panama at the end of the year, clearly demonstrated the “more aggressive and robust” nature of U.S. interdiction efforts, in which protecting imperial interests and fighting drugs were now linked. At home, President Bush warned that “American cocaine users need to understand that our nation has a zero tolerance for casual drug use. . . . [W]e must face this evil as a nation united, victory over drugs is our cause, a just cause.” The president’s first “drug czar” of the ONDCP, William Bennett, knew where to locate this evil: in the “criminogenic communities”—where the social forces that create predatory criminals are far more numerous and stronger than the social forces that create decent, law-abiding citizens.” Even while President Bush waged his drug war by invading foreign nations and threatening Americans who broke the law, and even while the newly formed ONDCP was weaving together private corporations, research institutes, and government officials into a massive new institutional apparatus for fighting drugs, so the drug czar invoked nineteenth-century notions of biological determinism to explain how some communities were genetically incapable of producing the right kinds of citizens—like Noriega, the monsters populating these “criminogenic communities” would need to be locked up in the name of protecting the nation and fighting drugs.

Conclusion: Taking the Fight to the Enemy by Militarizing the Drug War

On September 20, 2002, the sounds of teenage laughter and the flash of video game guns and lasers in an arcade in Soacha, a town outside Bogotá, Colombia, were interrupted as seven masked men stormed in and announced the commencement of a “cleansing operation.” Brandishing handguns and Uzis, the men opened fire, killing Andres Salazar (13), Fabio Bayona (16), and brothers Hernán (19) and Henry González (22). As the men cavalierly walked out of town, they shot up several homes and promised more death if silence was not maintained. Although the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the leading right-wing paramilitary group of Colombia, officially denied responsibility, several of the shooters were later identified as members of the AUC. To date, no arrests have been made, and many Soacha residents, following a steady stream of Colombians over the last ten years, have packed up their belongings and fled their homeland. This tragic event demonstrates one of the many paradoxes of the U.S. drug war: in the name of defending democracy at home by targeting drug dealers abroad, the United States has funneled billions of dollars to the Colombian government, which has (depending on your sources) either armed or turned a blind eye to the murderous actions of paramilitary outfits like the AUC. Alongside these legal federal subsidies for carnage in Colombia, American dollars that go to the purchase of cocaine and crack return to Colombia as support for both the right-wing paramilitaries, like the AUC, and their enemies, who include equally murderous leftist guerrillas such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). No one knows how many illegal drug-derived dollars have flowed south, but since 2000 the total U.S. aid to the Colombian government has exceeded $6 billion, making Colombia the fifth-largest consumer of U.S. aid (behind only Israel, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan). Thus, as both drug consumers and drug warriors, Americans are funding a decades-long civil war in Colombia. And while neither the United States-led drug war nor the Colombian civil war has seemed to slow the flow of drugs into consumers’ hands, the murdered youth of Soacha testify that U.S. interdiction efforts are failures, for in this war, as in all others, the victims are drawn largely from the innocent.

The botched U.S. engagements in Colombia flow from Plan Colombia, a ten point agenda signed into law on July 13, 2000 (P.L. 106-246). The plan was meant to end Colombia’s civil war be reviving its economy, streamlining its fiscal situation, modernizing its military, supporting its counter-narcotics efforts, advancing respect for human rights, seeking alternative modes of
economic development, increasing social participation, accelerating human development, pursuing domestic peace, and linking these goals to larger, international initiatives. Since its passage, however, the military has received most of the U.S. aid sent to Colombia, and the economic and fiscal stimulants not tied to the military have been managed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to coincide with U.S. economic interests. Less of a Marshall Plan than a military agreement, Plan Colombia has thus outraged critics both in the United States and abroad. Consider how the money is spent: in its first year, the Plan Colombia aid package totaled $1.3 billion, of which $860.3 million was marked for Colombia, $180 million went to neighboring countries' counter-narcotic efforts, $293.5 million was used to increase budgets at various U.S. agencies, and the remaining $55.3 million was classified. Of the hundreds of millions of dollars sent to Colombia, more than 80 percent was earmarked for an upgrade of military resources, including the purchase of 16 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters at a total cost of $208 million, 30 UH-1H Super-Huey II helicopters at a total of $40 million, 18 UH-1H Huey II helicopters for the Colombian National Police at a total of $40 million, and support and maintenance for the new helicopter fleet at $40 million. Plan Colombia thus included a widening list of social goals, with fighting drugs and revitalizing local democratic practices standing as leading parts of the proposal, yet its implementation has led to one major result: the further militarization of the region with hardware purchased from U.S. weapons manufacturers.27

Officially, the plan's military aid is assigned for the eradication of Colombia's coca and poppy fields; unofficially, the weaponry destroys leftist guerrillas. By proxy, some of Plan Colombia's aid finds its way into the coffers of the AUC and other right-wing paramilitaries, who sometimes work under the direct supervision of the Colombian military. Senator Patrick Leahy concluded, "We give more aid to the military, and they give more aid to the paramilitaries." And, in a cruel historical irony, as reported by the RAND National Defense Research Institute, most of the more than 3 million illegal arms in Colombia are the recycled remains of U.S. Cold War-era weapons pilfered from stockpiles in Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador—the current civil war is thus fought both with new weapons purchased with U.S. tax dollars and used weapons that amount to the spoils of President Reagan's Iran-Contra Affair.28

The amnesia-fueled "new"-ness that greets each reinvention of the drug paradigm is not isolated inside the United States, as Plan Colombia has been repackaged as the Mérida Initiative, a 2007 agreement between the United States and Mexico that responds to issues escalated since the passage of NAFTA. For the free-trade promises of NAFTA, which is openly referred to as the North American Drug Trade Agreement by U.S. Customs and DEA agents, have largely backfired, as more than 50 percent of all illegal drugs cross the border on the free-trade highways between Mexico and the United States, and have produced an explosion of drug-related industry and mayhem at our southern border. In May 2008, Edgar Eusebio Millán Gómez, the public face of Mexico's response to illegal drugs, became the highest-ranking law enforcement official killed since the launch of Mexican president Felipe Calderón's renewed efforts to combat his country's drug cartels (he was not the first, however, for six other high-ranking law-enforcement officers were killed the week before Gómez's death). Many observers are concerned that this assassination will give renewed confidence to drug cartels blamed for 6,000 killings in the past two and a half years. "This could have a snowball effect, even leading to the risk of ungovernability," Luis Astorga, a Mexico City-based sociologist, said in an interview. "It indicates terrible things, a level of weakness in our institutions—they can't even protect themselves." In response to this escalating crisis, the Mérida Initiative called for the United States to provide an initial $500 million to Mexico over the first twelve months ($1.4 billion over three years) to provide training for the police and tools to dismantle drug cartels, including helicopters, surveillance planes, drug-sniffing dogs, and computer software to enhance surveillance and tracking capabilities. Secretary of Defense William Gates urged a reluctant Congress to see the big picture: "It has to do with counter-narcotics, but it also has to do with protecting national air space and maritime boundaries." And so, even while the drug war fails at home, in Colombia, and in Mexico, its supporters return again and again to the same solutions, the same rhetoric, and the same tragic results.29

In short, while Plan Colombia, the Andean Initiative, and now the Mérida Initiative are sold to the public in the name of fighting the drug war, their real goals are to protect the interests of U.S. weapons manufacturers and other global economic elites. Consider, for example, the staggering fact that multinational corporations control 80 percent of Colombia's economic activity, including its lucrative petroleum and mineral industries. Moreover, the Colombian army provides security for oil-drilling sites in return for cash, essentially turning the nation's armed forces into postmodern Pinkertons, hired guns charged with protecting the privileges of the rich. Meanwhile, the FARC rebels hold much of the south of Colombia, which may contain billions of barrels of oil beneath its farms and forests. Oil giants like BP and Occidental covet that oil, meaning it is difficult to discern whether efforts against the rebels are being launched in the name of fighting drugs, energizing the democratic process, or opening up new oilfields to multinational expropria-
tion. While the international political and economic stakes of the situation are both significant and confusing, it is clear that Plan Colombia, the Andean Initiative, and the Mérida Initiative amount to a form of drug-war-justified corporate welfare at home. For example, from the 2000 Plan Colombia budget, most of $750 million in military assistance was spent on contracts with U.S. corporations—it is called foreign aid, but the money ends up back on Wall Street. Private corporations join in the frenzy as well, by supplying the spray planes that spread tons of Monsanto’s Roundup (glyphosate) on suspected drug fields (devastating the surrounding ecosystems), and leasing surveillance planes that come bundled together with ongoing maintenance, logistics, and training contracts. Such dealings are so lucrative that at least six U.S. military specialty companies have set up operations in the region. Two Virginia-based companies, DynCorp and Military Professional Resources, Inc., or MPRI, are completing contracts related to logistical support and training of Colombian police and counterinsurgency forces. Like the boondoggles in Afghanistan and Iraq, then, where fighting terrorism justifies a wide range of corporate-enriching actions, so the drug war has produced a situation in which Colombia, and soon Mexico, has become a feeding trough for U.S. interests. The drugs continue to flow, but so do the contracts—thus, like that other “forever war,” the drug war has become a permanent funding channel for military contractors.30

Meanwhile, back at home, the political capital gained by the continued demonization of the drug user is employed by political elites of both parties to restrict civil liberties, to increase the state’s surveillance of the population, to ensure greater reliance upon the military-industrial complex for defense, to scapegoat the user as a spectacle useful for distracting attention from larger social issues, and to further expand the prison-industrial complex. Since interdiction efforts have proven to be failures ever since Anslinger’s time, why does the public continue to support these efforts? This chapter has sought to answer that question by showing how, for most of the twentieth century and now twenty-first century, illegal drugs and their users have been considered the enemy of a “war.” The critical purpose of the declaration of war is to sow fear, for this simple word eliminates nuance and context; environments of fear and danger, whether real or imagined, are not conducive to broad discussions of complicated crises and their possible solutions, instead leading the nation to engage, again and again, in the rhetoric of dismissal. Instead of neighbors in need of care, then, we are taught to see loathsome Others, “the living dead,” a veritable army of racialized monsters. Because these Others are beyond concern, and because the nation is supposedly under threat from them, Americans have been taught since Hobson and Anslinger that to speak out against the drug war is to risk being labeled a traitor. And so unity is maximized while dissent is minimized, marginalized, or even eliminated altogether. The effect of this drug-war-induced language of dismissal and fear and mandatory patriotism is to foster conformity, dispel dissent, and banish doubt. The stunning success of this strategy may be seen in the fact that the prison-industrial complex and drug war continue to grow, even while the war in Iraq garners increasing opposition. Indeed, as this chapter has demonstrated, it may well be the case that the “living dead” targeted by the drug war stand as our longest-running and most feared national enemy, albeit one we are not likely to defeat with mass incarceration or other military responses. In summary, if we hope to transform our punishing democracy by abolishing the prison-industrial complex, then one good starting place would be to begin questioning the drug war, America’s longest-running and most spectacular failure.

Notes

