



Written by [John Larabell](#) on October 23, 2012

Book Review: The War on Drugs Is a War on Freedom

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, and explains why, in his view, the war on drugs is unconstitutional and should be ended immediately.

When it comes to substances that are smoked, injected, snorted, inhaled, or otherwise ingested into one's body, Americans, and conservatives in particular, are very inconsistent, according to Vance.

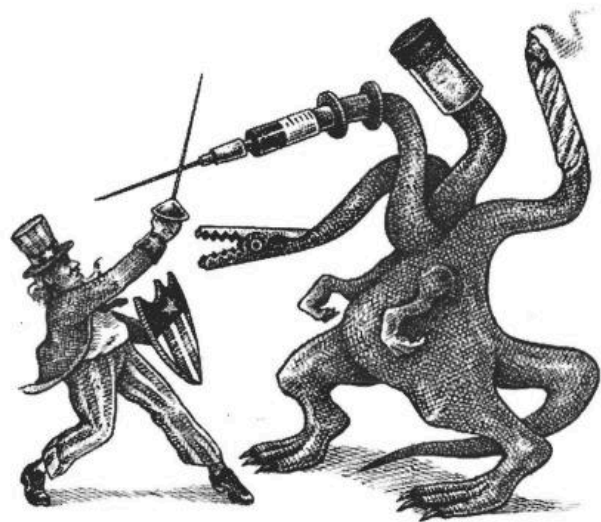
The book is a collection of 19 of Vance's essays written from 2009-2011 on the subject of the drug war from what Vance calls his "conservative Christian libertarian" perspective. Accordingly, there is a good deal of overlap from chapter to chapter (which Vance admits to). Most of the essays were originally written for [The Future of Freedom Foundation](#), a Virginia-based nonprofit libertarian advocacy group.

As he says in the book's introduction,

This is not a book about the benefits of drugs; this is a book about the benefits of freedom. I neither use illegal drugs nor recommend their use to anyone else. I am even skeptical about the health benefits of most legal drugs. So why this book? Because I believe in freedom. I believe in individual liberty, private property, personal responsibility, a free market, a free society, and a government as absolutely limited as possible. I also believe that my perspective on this subject is unique.

Vance's position is rather unique. He believes that drug, alcohol, and tobacco use is immoral and does not advocate that anyone engage in these activities. However, he does not feel that it is the government's job to prevent people from engaging in any activity that does not harm another person or another person's property. While this position may seem logical to "conservative Christian libertarians," many modern conservatives will likely find his positions controversial.

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LAURENCE M. VANCE



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In light of this, Vance points out the apparent hypocrisy of many conservatives who see no problem with keeping alcohol and tobacco products legal, yet wish to keep all narcotics illegal and spend billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to stop people from using them. He feels that it is the job of families, churches, support groups, etc. to influence society away from vices such as drug abuse. Yet too often these very groups want the government to do their work for them and attempt to force people into moral "correctness."

He mentions the fact that the federal "War on Drugs," while costing an astonishing \$40 billion or more per year, has been a colossal failure. It has not reduced drug use and has crowded prisons with huge numbers of nonviolent offenders, often turning them into hardened criminals. In other words, the war on drugs is essentially a massive money drain that hurts the very people it is supposed to help. In chapter 12, an essay written for *The New American* in 2011, Vance states:

Aside from U.S. military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and now Uganda, there is currently raging another destructive and unconstitutional war at home. And this war has been going on for over 40 years.

It was just over 40 years ago that President Richard Nixon began the federal war on drugs. Said Nixon: "In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive." The President declared drug abuse to be "America's public enemy number one" and "a national emergency."...

None of this means that the federal government didn't fight against drugs and drug abuse before Nixon. Although all drugs in the United States were legal up until the 20th century, the federal government began introducing anti-narcotics laws in 1905....

But what has the decades-long federal war on drugs actually accomplished? How much has it cost? Has it curtailed drug abuse? Has it, in fact, been any more successful at curtailing drug abuse than Prohibition was at curtailing alcohol abuse? Why, unlike Prohibition, was it imposed without a constitutional amendment granting the government the power to do what it is doing? And should the power even be granted through the amendment process, or should the federal war on drugs be ended?

In one of his essays, entitled "Cui Bono?" Vance reveals the true beneficiaries of the U.S. government's war on drugs: drug cartels, drug dealers, various law enforcement agencies, and even pharmaceutical companies. Demonstrating this, he quotes Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera, the head of the Mexican Sinaloa drug cartel:

I couldn't have gotten so stinking rich without George Bush, George Bush Jr., Ronald Reagan and even El Presidente Obama, none of them have the cojones to stand up to all of the big money that wants to keep this stuff illegal. From the bottom of my heart, I want to say "Gracias Amigos" I owe my whole empire to you.

Keeping drugs illegal keeps them expensive and keeps people employed trying to keep them off the market. It also keeps competition away from the "legal" drugs sold by big pharmaceutical corporations.

Vance notes correctly that the U.S. Constitution does not grant the federal government the authority to regulate the growing, selling, or ingesting of any material, drugs or not. The federal war on drugs is therefore unconstitutional, and should be ended immediately. He also notes that the Constitution does in theory give the states the power to regulate drugs, so states could, in effect, enact their own "drug wars" and be within constitutional boundaries. Vance, however, advocates total drug freedom as far as



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government intervention is concerned. He rightly mentions that employers, associations, clubs, and any other private entity have the authority to set their own rules in regard to drug use. For instance, an employer could have a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol, tobacco, and drugs and be fully constitutional because they are dictating conduct on their private property.

Vance also accurately illustrates the inconsistency of punishing as a crime something that is a vice. In other words, an action that may harm the individual committing it (drug use) is made illegal and punished in the same manner as an action that harms another individual or individuals. After all, crimes such as murder, rape, physical abuse, assault, theft, fraud, etc. harm other people. Drug use, along with drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, an unhealthy diet, bungee jumping, skydiving, etc., can only harm the individual himself and are therefore, except for drug use, not crimes. Of course, individuals can commit crimes under the influence of drugs or alcohol, but in such cases they should be held accountable for the crimes they did commit.

Most importantly, Vance's book forces the reader to think critically about the issue of the federal government's "war on drugs." Many conservatives who favor liberty and a limited government are also morally opposed to drug use. But does this mean that the federal government must make laws restricting drug use? Do we really want the government telling us that we can't engage in an activity simply because it is "immoral" or "dangerous"? If government can dictate what we can put into our bodies, where does it stop? For example, the federal Nanny State has already declared war on raw milk. According to Vance, it is an issue of freedom.



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