

ECONOMICS 053
Spring 2013
THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF THE DRUG WAR
Art Benavie

Among the questions explored will be the following:

United States policy criminalizes the use and sale of selected drugs. What impact does this policy have on the availability and price of illicit drugs? on drug abuse? on violence? on property crime? on civil liberties? on public health? on social cohesion? on our relationship with foreign countries? Should these drugs be decriminalized and if so, how? Should the different illicit drugs be treated differently? What is the evidence in other countries as to the effect of their drug control policy?

Course Format:

This class is a Seminar. (It's not a lecture course, as most of your other classes are.) A Seminar means that we all participate in a discussion about the material assigned for that session. So, TURN OFF ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING THE CLASS. At the beginning of each class I will ask you to spend 10 minutes writing your reflexions about the assignment. Your Reflexions should summarize the main arguments of the reading, and,

if relevant, critique the evidence supporting the arguments. These will be handed in and of course I will read them. No grades will be assigned, and they will not be returned, but I may email you comments. Should you miss a class, write up your Reflexions on that day's material at home and hand it in at the next class.

Since participating in a conversation is the essence of a seminar, missing a class for ANY reason (including athletic events or any other campus activities) except for a medical emergency is simply not acceptable. If you cannot commit to attending EVERY class, do not sign up for this course! An unexcused absence will lower your grade. PLEASE READ THIS PARAGRAPH AGAIN!

In addition to the assigned readings, there are 2 required projects:

1. You will interview someone who has had some involvement in the drug war, such as a police officer, a DA, a lawyer, a judge, a physician, a scientist, or even a friend or a relative. You will give an oral report to the class, including a typed handout to me summarizing the results of your interview. I will hand out a roster on who speaks when.

2. You will write a paper (between 5 and 10 double-spaced pages) researching any of the

questions dealt with in the course and will present your findings to the class in an oral report. I will hand out a roster of who speaks when.

The oral reports will take place on the following dates:

Interview reports: 3/19,3/21,3/26,3/28,and 4/2.

Research reports: 4/4,4/9,4/11,4/16, and 4/18.

I will assign the readings for the upcoming week every Thursday in class or by email.

Assigned readings will include (though not in the following order):

Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed and What We Can Do About It [Second Edition], by Judge James P. Gray.

Drugs: America's Holy War, by Arthur Benavie

The New Jim Crow, by Michelle Alexander.

Grading: Fifty percent of your grade will depend on your Reflexions and on your participation in class discussion. Thirty five percent on your paper and 15 percent on your interview. No final exam.

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