Course Overview

This course explores the modern history of the United States’ counter-narcotics policy, or as it is commonly referred to, the “War on Drugs.” This course aims to examine both the domestic and international implications of the long-standing US prohibitionist policy, as well as the potential for change. We begin reviewing the history of the “War on Drugs,” what motivated various policy developments and how policy has shifted over time. Then we explore the domestic implications, particularly mass incarceration and police militarization. Next, we move on to look at the international implications of the drug war, including rising violence in Mexico and Central America, the US role in the region’s militarization as well as illegal arms trade, the consequences for nascent democracies in the region, and the often overlooked environmental damage that accompanies the drug trade. We then examine two “hot topics” in terms of drug policy – the shift towards legalizing marijuana and the opioid crisis in the US. For both these topics, we pay close attention to the role of lobbyists and also consider the international as well as domestic implications. Finally, we wrap-up by exploring the potential for changing drug policy, pulling together the entirety of the course material while considering both the domestic and international stake holders.
Grading
Participation 25%
Discussion Questions 10%
Response Papers 35%
Final Exam 30%

Discussion Questions
To demonstrate that you’re keeping up with the assigned readings and in order to foster interesting class discussions on the issues that most intrigue you, I will ask each of you to e-mail me 2 discussion questions that pertain to the readings before class (a minimum of 1 hour before class starts). I will use selections from these questions to guide our class discussions of the readings.

Response Papers
You will be required to write two response papers during the course. For both papers you will be asked to watch a documentary and connect it to the relevant course readings and materials. Papers should be written in size 12, Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins and be 5 - 6 pages double spaced. Both documentaries are available on Netflix and several other streaming services. For response paper 1 the documentary is Freeway: Crack in the System (2015) and for response paper 2 the documentary is Cartel Land (2015). Due dates are indicated in the course schedule.

Exam
Date of exam indicated on syllabus. Rescheduling of the final exam is only permitted due to a documented excused absence (e.g. jury duty, family death, health emergency). The exam will consist primarily of identifications. These will be pulled from a list of key terms which students will be provided with in advance as a study guide. Students will be expected to identify the term and write a few sentences on its significance.

Class Expectations
I expect students to come to class having done all of the reading assigned for that day and to be ready to participate in discussions. It is essential to attend classes. Unexcused absences or consistent late arrivals will impact participation grades. While I hope it doesn’t need to be stated explicitly, I expect students to be respectful of each other’s opinions and to foster an environment that is inclusive and encourages participation from all. Many topics covered are quite sensitive and I hope students will be respectful and cognizant of the fact that not all students come from the same background and experiences. I expect students to adhere to the BU honor policy and to avoid plagiarism (resources on these policies can be found here: Academic Code of Conduct).
Class and Reading Schedule

Wednesday, September 5: Introduction & Course Overview

Friday, September 7: The Origins of Prohibition


Monday, September 10: The Origins of Prohibition (Part 2)


Wednesday, September 12: The Crack Scare


Friday, September 14: The Cold War & The Drug War

Monday, September 17: The Cold War & The Drug War (Part 2)

Wednesday, September 19: Militarization in the Andes & The Panama Invasion


Friday, September 21: Plan Colombia

Monday, September 24: Plan Colombia (Part 2)


Wednesday, September 26: War on Drugs meets War on Terror


Friday, September 28: War on Drugs meets War on Terror (Part 2)

Monday, October 1: The Meth “Epidemic”


Wednesday, October 3: Mass Incarceration

Friday, October 5: CLASS CANCELED

Monday, October 8: Columbus Day Holiday (No Class)

Tuesday, October 9 (Substitute Monday Schedule of Classes): Mass Incarceration (Part 2)


Wednesday, October 10: Mass Incarceration (Part 3)
**Friday, October 12: Mandatory Minimums** (Guest Lecturer: Sarah Sklar)

**Monday, October 15: Civil Asset Forfeiture** (Guest Lecturer: Sarah Sklar)

**Wednesday, October 17: Militarization**

**Friday, October 19: Militarization (Part 2)**

**Monday, October 22: Mexico’s Drug War**
*Response Paper 1 Due*

**Wednesday, October 24: Drug Violence in Latin America**

**Friday, October 26: The Visibility of Violence & Measuring Violence**
**Monday, October 29: US Policy Responses: Merida, CARSI, etc.**


**Wednesday, October 31: Spillover Violence & The Border**


**Friday, November 2: Guns & Transnational Gangs**


**Monday, November 5: Guest Speaker - David Holiday** (Open Society Foundations Regional Manager for Central America)

*Reading TBD*

**Wednesday, November 7: The Political Consequences of Criminal Violence**


**Friday, November 9: Environmental Consequences and Narco-Deforestation**
*(Guest Lecturer: Laura Sauls)*


**Monday, November 12: Consequences of Militarization in Honduras**


**Wednesday, November 14: Vigilantes & Paramilitaries**


**Friday, November 16: Economics of Drug Trafficking & Criminal Violence**


**Monday, November 19: Drug War Capitalism**
*Response Paper 2 Due*


**Thanksgiving Break**

**Monday, November 26: The Opioid Crisis**
Wednesday, November 28: The Opioid Crisis (Part 2)


Friday, November 30: Changing Marijuana Laws

Monday, December 3: Changing Marijuana Laws (Part 2)


Wednesday, December 5: Alternatives to Prohibition


Friday, December 7: Alternatives to Prohibition (Part 2)

Caitlin Elizabeth Hughes, Alex Stevens. “What Can We Learn From The Portuguese Decriminalization of Illicit Drugs?” *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 50, Issue 6, 1 November 2010, Pages 999–1022.

Monday, December 10: Wrapping Up

Wednesday, December 12: Final Exam Review

Monday, December 17: FINAL EXAM from 12:30pm – 2:30pm