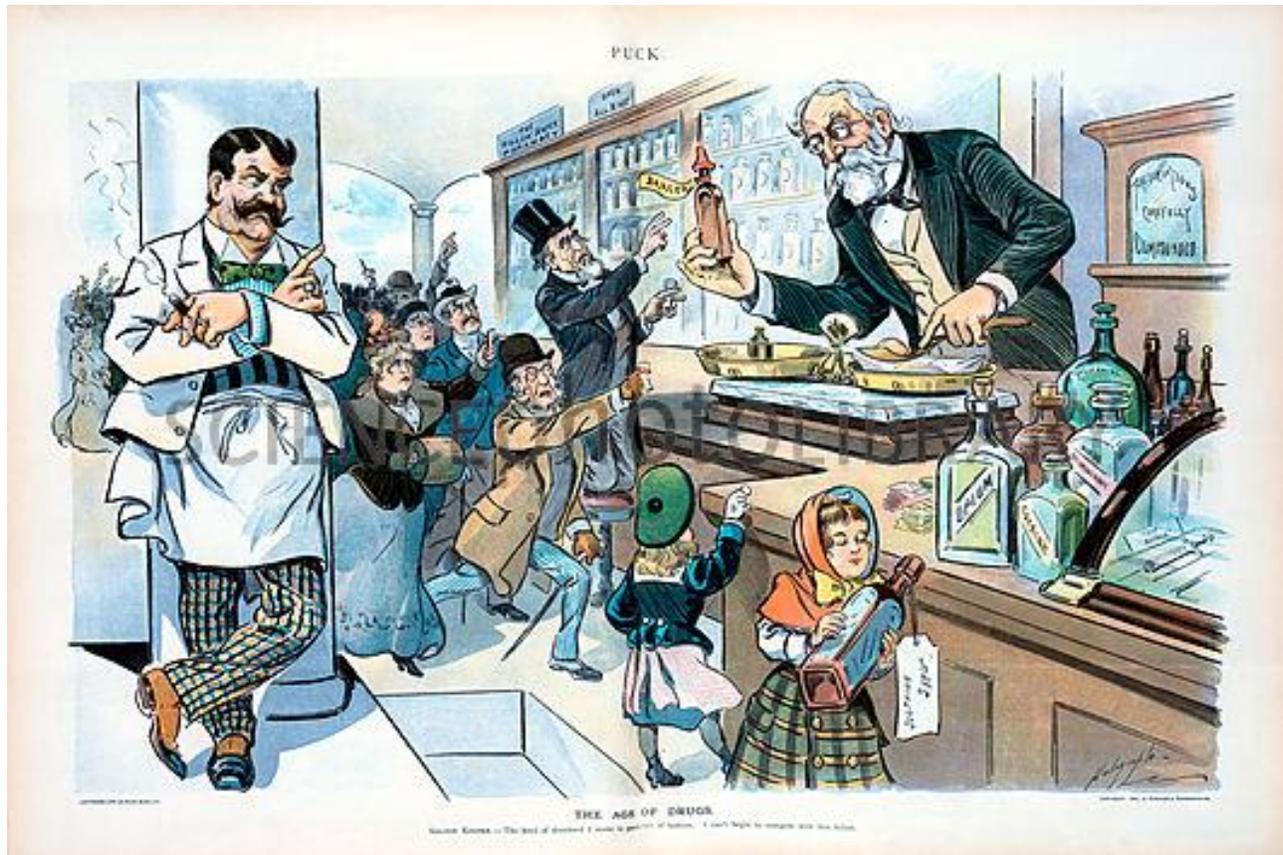


DRUG EPIDEMICS IN THE UNITED STATES

HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY BRIEFING PROGRAM NATIONAL HISTORY CENTER



"The Age of Drugs," 1900. Image Courtesy of Library of Congress.

[Institution]
[Course Name, Number]
[Instructor Name]
[Semester, Year]

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INTRODUCTION

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program is designed to show students how to bring historical perspectives to contemporary policy issues. It provides a curricular model that educators can apply to their existing history classes to better illuminate the myriad ways we can learn from the past.

Understanding history is essential to all policymaking. Every issue has a history and we make better policy decisions when we understand that history. Designed to be adaptable to many courses and teaching styles, the History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide for history educators to develop and host briefings about the historical dimensions of current policy questions.

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program Overview

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide to enable educators and students to craft a briefing on the historical background of a policy question at the local, state, or national level, following the National History Center's model.

At these briefings, students work as a team to (1) identify a specific issue relating to drug epidemics confronting policymakers at the local, state, or national level; (2) research the historical roots of the issue or some closely related issue that arose in the past; (3) prepare a briefing paper and presentation to an invited audience (from parents to local policymakers) that highlight the insights we can gain from an historical perspective on the present. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis as they investigate particular policy questions. They will also develop written and oral presentation skills as they prepare for and present the public briefing. Finally, they will deepen their civic knowledge and engagement as they grapple with the roots of issues that are relevant to their own lives.

The program is designed to be integrated by educators into existing history classes at the college or high school level. The policy briefings will not drive the course but rather will provide a fresh framework for addressing topics that already relate to the course material. Educators can integrate the program into their classrooms in several ways: from start to finish, it can serve as a capstone research project; broken into its component parts, it can be used to spur discussion or encourage student debate; if a wider audience is invited, it can be a way for student-historians to showcase the value of their history education.

Learning Outcomes

- Developing a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
- Exploring the complexity of the human experience by evaluating a variety of historical sources for their credibility and perspective.
- Learning to value the study of the past for its contribution to lifelong learning and critical habits of the mind that are essential for effective and engaged citizenship.
- Engaging a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion as students apply historical knowledge and analysis to contemporary policy conversations.
- Building and improving upon oral and written skills essential to academic success.

HISTORY OF DRUG EPIDEMICS IN THE UNITED STATES OVERVIEW

Summary

The history of drug addictions and epidemics in American history dates back to the Civil War, when morphine was introduced to soldiers as a painkiller. Regular, addictive usage of the drug quickly spread from war hospitals to the general public, and over 400,000 Americans suffered from morphine addiction during the war and postbellum era. It was also during this postwar period that the temperance and prohibition movement regained much of the momentum and public support for the restriction of alcohol consumption it had lost during the war. Temperance and prohibition organizations like the Prohibition Party, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and others grew in size and clout, influencing legislation and public sentiment across the country.

By the 1880s, cocaine was introduced in the United States for medicinal and anecdotal purposes, primarily to counter morphine addiction. Cocaine was sold in a variety of ways—in the form of cigarettes, tablets, powder, and even soda. As popularity increased, sellers began marketing cocaine as an appetite suppressant and mood-enhancing drug. Addiction led to the first major ban on cocaine consumption in Oregon in 1887, but consumption still continued across the country. Morphine, partially supplanted by cocaine, finally fell out of popularity in the late 1890s and early 1900s, after the Bayer drug company began selling heroin as an over-the-counter, “non-addictive” alternative to morphine.

By the 1910s, cocaine had become increasingly associated with criminality and race; more specifically, cocaine was reputed as a drug used by prostitutes and black workers. In the South, white employers forced black workers to use cocaine regularly in order to increase productivity, inevitably prompting addiction. By 1919, proponents of prohibition and temperance achieved hard-fought success with the ratification of the 18th Amendment prohibiting the production, transport, and sale of alcohol in the United States. One year later, the federal government criminalized cocaine use and possession with the passage of the Dangerous Drug Act of 1920. Four years later, heroin met the same fate, and any use of the heroin drug, medical or otherwise, was made illegal. Despite attempts to regulate drug use from the federal level, addictive drugs like heroin and cocaine were deeply entrenched in American culture and illegal trade and usage continued through the 1920s and 30s.

By 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the 18th and ended the prohibition of alcohol distribution. Partially influenced by the reckless climate of consumption in the 1920s, anti-substance activists focused their efforts on drug prohibition. The federal government met these demands with various drug tax acts, placing high taxes on marijuana and other recreational drugs in an effort to discourage consumption, particularly among young adults. Drug policy became a secondary issue during the second World War, and federal drug policies remained unreformed until the 1960s.

With the rise of counterculture came the rise of drug abuse. Cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and other criminalized drugs regained popularity, prompting the federal government to launch multiple anti-drug campaigns. In 1969, the Nixon Administration launched Operation Intercept in an attempt to control drug sales between Mexico and the southern United States. Congress quickly followed suit with the 1970 Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. The following year, the Nixon Administration announced the United States' War on Drugs and, two years after, established the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The War on Drugs continued into the Carter Administration, which launched a presidential commission on drugs in 1980. The same year, the Richard Pryor incident prompted public outcry over rampant cocaine abuse. A similar incident occurred in 1986, when basketball star Len Bias died of a cocaine overdose, again prompting criticism and concern. The same year, CBS aired its “48 Hours on Crack Street” program in an attempt to publicize rampant crack abuse. The simultaneously worsening crack and cocaine epidemics prompted the Reagan Administration to launch its Just Say No campaign, aimed at kids, teenagers, and young adults to refrain from engaging in drug use, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, and the federal government successfully carried out its first of several indictments against cocaine smugglers from the Medellin drug cartel. The late 80s and the escalation of the federal government’s War on Drugs also prompted a rise in racially biased drug laws and arrests.

Contemporary Application

Since the late 1990s, the federal government has redirected much of its efforts toward combatting the most recent major drug crisis in the United States, the opioid epidemic. From the federal to local level, governments across the country have attempted various initiatives to curb opioid addiction and use. After nearly two decades of the epidemic, however, local, state, and federal governments have failed to find a permanent solution. The purpose of this policy assignment is to identify historical similarities between the opioid crisis and past drug epidemics in American history, understand how and why the federal government succeeded or failed in combatting past epidemics, and apply these cues to today’s drug problem.

Historiographical objectives

The field of historical literature focusing on drug policy in the United States has largely been confined to reports and briefs centered around a specific policy objective. This briefing program is designed to help expand the historical scope of drug epidemics and policy in the United States and how previously overlooked and under-analyzed elements and trends of drug use may inform today’s debate over the opioid epidemic.

Historical Questions to Consider

How has federal drug policy shaped major moments or trends in American history (and vice versa)?

Where does the history of drug epidemics in the United States overlap with international political history?

How have drug epidemics and ensuing federal drug prevention policies and programs influenced social—and more specifically, racial—changes?

Additional Information

In May 2016, the Center hosted a congressional briefing on drug policy and addiction in the United States. Students may access the briefing [here](#) and use it for reference.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

This sample schedule, drawn from the NHC's [History and Policy Education Program Guidebook](#), can help instructors in creating a syllabus and schedule designed specifically for their own class(es).

UNIT 1 | Getting Started

Week 1

Familiarize students with National History Center's Congressional Briefing program. Have them watch one of the NHC's briefing videos and read a summary of the one of the NHC's briefings. Videos of NHC briefings can be found [here](#); summaries of NHC briefings can be found [here](#).

Weeks 2 – 3

Students may begin conducting individual research at local institutions to refine research approach. By the end of week 3, each student should refine their research to one or two subtopics.

UNIT 2 | Individual Research

Weeks 4 – 5

Have each student prepare and submit a **2-3 page paper** on the selected topic that outlines the history of some aspect of the issue.

Week 6

Have students research which committee or subcommittee of the legislature or municipal government has jurisdiction over the legislative issue the class is considering. Have them identify which legislators sit on the committee and make initial contact with those policymakers' offices. In addition, students should draw up a list of other interested parties, such as representatives of non-profit organizations and journalists, to invite to the briefing (see page 8-9 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)). If the instructor would like to hold the briefing in a room in a state legislative or municipal office building, the instructor and/or students should begin arranging for a room this week (see page 10 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)).

Students should also continue preparing for individual presentations on their subtopics to present to the class during weeks 7-8.

UNIT 3 | Individual Presentations

Week 7 – 8

Have students present on their individually researched subtopics. Presentations need not exceed five minutes. Students should be prepared to give a brief history of the subtopic and how it influences the larger legislative issue today.

UNIT 4 | Preparing for the Class Briefing

Weeks 9 – 10

Working collaboratively in small groups, students prepare for the formal briefing. The three presenters coordinate and hone their presentations with feedback from other students. Different groups work on: crafting a **one-page briefing handout** that offers a succinct synopsis of the history of the topic; crafting and issuing **formal invitations**; pursuing a **social media campaign** to promote the briefing; and **arranging logistics** such as videography and audio-video equipment as needed.

Week 11

Dress rehearsal for formal briefing. The three presenters practice their presentations to the class. The other students stand in as audience members, asking questions during the question-and-answer portion.

UNIT 5 | The Briefing

Week 12

Formal briefing to state or local policymakers, journalists, student leaders, etc.

UNIT 6 | Reflection and Follow-Up

Week 13

Students submit a **1-to 2-page reflection** on the questions audience members raised at the briefing. In considering the discussion at the briefing, they may draw on material from weeks 4 - 5 and 7 - 8 that was not presented at the formal briefing.

You may submit a video recording of the event and/or a blog post about your experience with the History and Public Policy Briefing Program for possible inclusion in the National History Center's or American Historical Association's online or print publications.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Finding Primary Sources

The United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) offers [fact sheets](#) for popular legal and illegal drugs popular in the United States today.

The [Drug Policy Alliance](#) also offers fact sheets, annual reports, legislative information, and other primary resources.

Sample Primary Sources

[Drug Overdose Epidemic](#), *Center for Disease Control*.

This comprehensive report on opioid abuse from the Center for Disease Control contains valuable information, data, and analysis of the opioid epidemic, as well as the roots of the epidemic and how opioid abuse has grown increasingly rampant over the last decade.

[National Institute on Drug Abuse, Resources and Data](#)

This site from NIDA contains valuable information and data relating to current and past drug abuse epidemics in the United States. The site is updated regularly with new reports from the CDC and other federal health, policy, and research organizations.

[Crack, Powder Cocaine, and Heroin: Drug Purchase and Use Patterns in Six U.S. Cities](#)

In this 1997 report from the National Institute of Justice and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the author synthesizes nearly two decades worth of research on crack, cocaine, and heroin use in six cities across the United States. The report is a useful source in identifying the intersections of urban development policy as well as race and socioeconomic status.

Jones, Charisse, [“Crack and Punishment: Is Race the Issue?”](#)

In this 1995 New York Times article, a Times journalist argues for a distinct connection between race and how governments administer punishment for crack-related crimes (possession, sale, etc.). Since the publication of this article, retrospective analyses of the crack epidemic have focused heavily on race and cite race as a major indicating factor in how punishment was distributed.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Finding Secondary Sources

The [Drug Policy Alliance](#) provides a wealth of free, online resource pertaining to the history of federal drug policy and various social, economic, and political repercussions of drug epidemics, regulating laws, and criminality.

There are multiple interdisciplinary academic journals devoted to drug policy and research, all of which can be accessed online:

- [Journal of Drug Policy Analysis](#)
 - [International Journal of Drug Policy](#)
 - [Drug Science, Policy and Law](#)
-

Sample Secondary Sources

Belenko, Steven. *Drugs and Drug Policy in America: A Documentary History*. Santa Barbara, CA and Westford, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000.

Courtwright, David. [Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Courtwright, David. [Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Courtwright, David, Herman Joseph, and Don Des Jarlais. [Addicts Who Survived: An Oral History of Narcotic Use in America](#). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2012.

Dunlap, Eloise, Andrew Golub, and Bruce D. Johnson. "The Severely Distressed African-American Family in the Crack Era: Empowerment is Not Enough." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 2006; 33(1): 115–139. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2565489/>.

Jenkins, Philip. [Synthetic Panics: The Symbolic Politics of Designer Drugs](#). New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999.

Lenson, David. [On Drugs](#). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Morgan, H. Wayne. *Drugs in America: A Social History, 1800-1980*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982.

Sacco, Lisa. ["Drug Enforcement in the United States: History, Policy, and Trends,"](#) *Congressional Research Service*. Published Oct. 2, 2014.

Tracy, Sarah and Caroline Acker. *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.

GRADING RUBRIC(S)

Final Presentation Rubric:

Mock Components	Excellent 4	Good 3	Fair 2	Poor 1	Students Score	Comments
Visual Aids						
Was the handout clear and concise?						
Was the PowerPoint (or other presentation aid) easy to follow?						
Presentation Delivery						
Did presenters organize and present information clearly and effectively?						
Did presenters speak clearly?						
Were speakers engaging?						
Historical Content						
Did the historical content help the audience understand the current issue?						
Question and Answer Session						
Did presenters answer questions clearly?						
Did presenters demonstrate knowledge about the history?						
Did presenters manage the session effectively?						