

Curious Connections: Warfare and drug use

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Date: Submitted to KFx Website: 02.02 www.ixion.demon.co.uk

Key Words: Drug use, warfare, connections, patterns

Abstract

Modern warfare appears to have a "class action" effect on populations, resulting in large groups of alienated, often deeply scarred, people who turn to drugs for self-medication or, more rarely, recovery. At the same time, use of chemical and botanical products results in large numbers of people who may feel more ready to go to war, or at the least, to assign others to go to war. After all, life becomes cheaper. The Vietnam era was connected to the drug scene in many ways, some of which are becoming apparent only now, many years later.

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Spawned by the same vision of searching for a better world, encouraged by ardent activism and beliefs in doing, coupled with the new high technologies of machinery and pharmaceuticals, Vietnam and drug use were curiously intermixed, like chocolate ripple ice cream. The outcome of the combination included inner and outer adventures, blatant greed, abuse and pain, and furtive short-term pleasures. Historically, the curious connections of warfare and drug use have always intrigued and mystified. Just as cultural themes of cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, good guys and bad guys thrive and permute into ever new forms, so too do old and new wars, old and new drugs, weave a tangled web. We could and should ask why, and put more of our energy into analysis for today, the world is little different, perhaps only in the extremes. Indeed, we must ask about the ill-defined, poorly analysed, links now being brewed.

As a child, I recall the games of tag, turning into cowboys and Indians, and with the added technology of toy guns, cops and robbers. The good guys always won, didn't they? I remember all too well my uncle who upon return from World War II with shell shock, soon drank a bottle of wine daily, or twice daily, to alleviate his "pain". The connections between cultural themes splitting winners and losers, was neatly matched with the ability to "hold your liquor" and succumbing to drink. No, the good guys did not always win.

Later still, Vietnam created a vision for Americans, a picture of a "safe" world in which intervention against communism, sending a message to China, and turning the tide against the Soviet Union were given as rational reasons for killing. Drugs of course, also created a vision of another world, another reality, and the standard or emerging chemical trips enabled people to step outside of the private or public hells they inhabited to search for a new enchanting paradise. Given both Vietnam and drugs, American communities were sucked into a mess, an error of judgement, and a scandalous tragedy.

Community mental health was born at the same time, from the same stimuli, and created still another version of a healthy world, a world in which interventions in the lives and emotions of others would prevent tragedy, indeed, would promote positive 1950'ish utopias. Mental health, sad to say, turned a blind eye to its own past, ignored the medical institutions and electroshock therapy, painted positively the rising wealth of the prescriptive drug industry and the bureaucrats and clinicians, and the illusionary beliefs that all was well or that all could be made well.

On the other hand, the mental health movement, Vietnam, and drug use led to a potent mix of almost brainless adventures by adolescent boys and young men playing with new toys. All were intent on making the world a better place, through active intervention in boosting their own diminished self-esteem, in changing others who could be labelled deviant in some way, and even in tackling foreign cultures and countries in a crusade. The quite natural outcome was expertise in the creation of pain for losers. Vietnam and drug abuse led to the formation of long lasting inner nightmares and sad memories, the weaving of aggressive post experience adventures to be repeated over future years on the streets and byways of America and around the world. Too, that era witnessed the re-energizing of blatant greed resulting in new vested interests, the creation of futile, because temporary, searches for extra pleasures, and more.

The people, the places, the events, and one's own personal experiences blend together in memories, faded, or jaded, and now, strangely dated. Analyses and discussions add insights that in retrospect, yield at least glimmers of faint understanding. Perhaps these sparkles of ideas will be worthy, perhaps though, they are only cynical views.

Experiences

Experience 1

The last National Guard summer camp, at Fort D, was fun. We worked hard together, then we played even harder together. And, on the last day, Officer P and I from the enlisted men, teamed up to make the presentation. Our Sergeant Major served in World War II and then in Korea, and his thirty years were finally up. He was a big man physically and mentally and to us, he was an honest and very real hero.

"Sergeant, on behalf of the men assembled here, we hereby bestow on you this medal, this symbol of all that we stand for, this mighty chain that ties us together as loyal members of the National Guard," Officer P stated in his hearty voice. I dragged forth the chain of flipped tops from beer cans, linked together - a chain measuring over 100 yards in length. It weighed enough so that it was all I could do to drag one end to him, leaving the rest uncoiling behind me all the way back into the nearby tent.

"Thank you, Officer P and Specialist G." said the Sergeant. "This, my last year at camp, has certainly been one of the most productive. Just look at that chain," he exclaimed, and then as it continued and continued to unwind, added, "I'll be damned," and a little moisture began to trickle down his cheeks as I proceeded to drag forth yards and yards and yards of carefully wound together beer can flip tops. "Where in hell did you troops ever get so many blasted beer tops?" he summarized the scene!

"Sarge, don't you remember? We spent the past two weeks working towards this moment - it is a small token of our esteem for you," Officer P broke into laughter, "it was the least we could do - if only we had more time, we could have drunk up a lot more!"

Experience 2

"No, Sarge, there is no way I will stay with the Reserve or National Guard," I explained courteously to my boss, who doubled as our recruiting sergeant. "I am finishing my degree this summer and I want to go to work full time. I have put years into graduate school. I won't need the Guard to help me pay grad school expenses any more. The last summer camp is coming and that will be my last. I just won't do any more, no matter what."

"That's okay, I just wanted to give you the chance to stay in for another three. It is easy money, and you've been a member now for nearly 6 years," he said. "How about a beer later?"

"Okay," I replied.

When we sat together over a beer, Sarge explained that the Old Man wanted him to keep anyone who could stay in, kept in, if at all possible. "You know, I could have given you a double promotion if only you had said that you might consider staying in. Sorry I could not explain that, but them's the rules they set for me," he commiserated. "I have enjoyed working with you over the past two or three years in the Guard."

"Thanks, Sarge, I enjoyed working with you, but I can't quite get my head around the military. Funny, I used to be gung ho, but no more. I want to do something positive for me and for my country. But I'm just not into the Guard, nor the Army. No more for me," I concluded.

Experience 3

They were only soldiers

"Holy smoke, did you see what I just saw?" I sputtered with a curse. My driving partner remarked, "Yeah, those guys must be crazy."

A car passed us on the Interstate. We were exceeding the speed limit by a fair amount, but they, fools that they must have been, were literally flying. Driving cross-country, you see many sorrowful sights on the highway, although not usually much at two in the morning.

"Wake up, Bob," I heard next, maybe half an hour later. Rousing from a hypnotic road trance dream state, I was caught up in the midst of what seemed to be a huge Christmas tree, lights flashing, red, blue, yellow, blue, red, dozens of them.

"Don't know what happened, but I am gonna? pull off and see if we can help," the driver said, matter of fact, given that the road appeared totally closed ahead.

"Officer, anything we can do? I have some training in first aid," my friend remarked to the nearest of dozens of officers, ambulance drivers and fire engine personnel.

"Ah, no, thanks though. We have been piecing together what happened. Notice a dip in the road a way back? Well, as far as we can tell, a couple of soldiers came shooting through here at close to two hundred miles an hour. They became airborne after the dip, and their car flipped end over end about five times, then rolled over side ways a few times, and fell apart. The biggest part we found so far was a piece of the engine. We are looking for any bits left - but there is not much. Fortunately," he sighed, "they were only soldiers."

The officer continued, "Usually when they drink, most drivers slow down, but some speed up. We found at least a hundred beer cans, and some broken whisky bottles, and bits and pieces of the bloody soldiers scattered all up and down the highway. Serves them right, I am only glad that no one else was destroyed," he concluded.

Experience 4

Being a newcomer, I lacked the history, but being partially an observant and participatory anthropologist, I lacked the rigid moral code restraining others. And so, I joined up with C, mental health consultant, local politician, and reporter. While others regarded him as an ex-junkie and currently, a seducer of women, I saw him as a knowledgeable expert in a culture about which I knew little. As far as his relationships with women, back then I was envious, more envious than offended.

"Somebody got to do something about the problems in our community, how about coming along with me to XYZ church tonight. They are all worried about the drugs coming in, so I'm gonna do a rap. I'll pick you up at 6:30?" C asked, or insisted.

Not giving me a chance to reply, he was closing the door as I announced, "Sure C, just don't put me up on stage, but I will listen to you and give you some moral support."

Off we would go, to do yet another rap. Every group in town was worried, they heard of the scourge, the lure of drugs, and they wanted those fears quenched. Well, most of them wanted the fears quelled, a few wanted access to the drugs, and the freedom to try them out. They came to drug raps as part of their quest, their search, for better understanding of what was happening.

For interest, C would drag along his box of goodies from the police station. "See this one . . .?" He would ask, and then continue, "it will take your breath away, you will find yourself speeding, faster and faster, but it only lasts a short while . . .!" He would almost chant, as he got their attention.

"You know, I show you all these drugs, I can tell you all about them," but then he would add, flashing his blue eyes, "what's happening is not about drugs, its about people. There's got to be better ways for people to get along together," he would state firmly, the punch lines coming in like a lay preacher talking about morals. "Mental health is all about trying to help those who need help, but there are more people in this community - there are all of you in this audience - we have got to learn to talk with each other, and to and with our kids, and

with our neighbours kids . . . ?" For good measure, he would then switch to "We got to listen as well as talk."

Experience 5

If C was the guru, the father figure, then D was the eternal woman. Funny how when you first meet someone, it only takes an instant, and suddenly you know that here is someone who will make a difference in your life. Well, D was like that, working in another agency, a newcomer like many in that town too. Everything about her was askew, the bangles, the beads, the knowing smiles, the multi-coloured clothes that did not match up - a strange combination of Army brat and hippie. I knew she was not like anyone else I ever met. Sure enough, she was also partly Chicano, Mexican, mixed with who knows what, tempered over time by experiences about which I knew not.

It took a while, but eventually she shared that she had tripped at least a couple hundred times, in fact she knew as much as anyone about tripping. Her lifestyle was so different that I could not understand, but I made it a point to cross her path again soon. Curious about her experiences, I asked, "You are different, and I confess, I want to know, about you, about what you know, about why, you know that, don't you?" I said to her as casually as I could.

"Come by tonight, and meet my partner, and three or four friends," she invited. Her man, a soldier of fortune, shyly introduced himself, barefoot, faded blue jeans, and a strange tentative, 'sorta like walking on tip toes,' behaviour. "Come on in, we are just sitting around, near the fire." I entered, and D sat, smiling, welcoming, an earth mother figure. She quickly introduced me to the other people present. "The kid you will see is hiding under a table or bed over in the corner - he belongs to E and F. He is tripping, if you wonder why he hides, or acts like he does. He will be okay. Join us by the fireplace."

After sitting quietly and peacefully, the sergeant partner dug out a Dylan record, and pages of scripts. The music on, he followed the music, reading the script, word by word trying to keep time. Then after the song finished, he read each of the lines aloud, and each person began interpreting - what does this line mean? What does this line mean to you and your unique experiences of the world?

The walls had glowing in the dark posters, and a lava lamp stood tall in one corner. But the fireplace held sway, and we concentrated on the flames and the dancing light. We all took part in that séance, and then after a while, a small pipe appeared, with a brown resinous substance. Smoking freely, the members of the group eventually offered me a choice.

Experience 6

"Bob, you should try to get along with the neighbours more. You know Mrs. G? Well, she came over and asked after you - seems some of the neighbours were not happy that you wouldn't take part in the last party," my loving wife told me.

"Oh, yeah, I did not even crack a smile, when they were telling all their racist jokes," I countered.

"No, it wasn't that so much. It was that you didn't want to drink with them, and that you walked out when they put on the movie," she patiently explained. I think you should not be so rigid, sweet," she informed me courteously, but firmly. "We do need friends here, and I want to be part of the neighbourhood," she said. "Besides, a blue movie is not so bad."

Sure enough, the next day, Sergeant H approached me across the back fence, and announced, "Hi Bob, we are having a party Friday night. We all understood that you are a Yankee from the North. You can't help that. We know you aren't used to us cussing and cursing the black people. We can also understand that maybe you don't want to drink much, but you know, we are not bad people. Listen, Johnnie I got back last week, and he's got some great footage. We are going to show it down at his house tonight. You are invited. Surely you can't object to watching home movies of him shooting up gooks?"

Johnnie I., and others, had fixed Super 8 cameras to their automatic weapons while on tours. As they fired, the camera would automatically record their target and what happened. Upon return, they shared the films, to watch, to reminisce, to recreate the vivid memories so they could brag about marksmanship and then they would wash the memories away with alcohol. I was not out to appease the neighbourhood though, not with their attitudes, not their ugly behaviour.

Experience 7

Working at the new mental health centre in the Southeast was not always simple, for the disturbed and unhappy clients meant I had a lot to sort out, both their problems and after a while, my own emotions. Most of the time, I worked hard to help them make sense of sometimes chaotic, worlds. The nearby military post meant we saw women, whom we were quick to label, the "Vietnam Mamas." They and their Army brat children kept us busy, far too busy for our own good. Our staff was superb, but some of them had troubles from time to time too. So it was with A.

"He got his orders and now, I am worried," A confided in me, her voice seemed strangely calm, while her clenched knuckles gleamed white. "All he has to do is pass the final medical check, and that is in a couple days. If only I knew what to do?" she inquired, seeking guidance from me, colleague in the mental health system.

"As long as there is a chance he can fail the medical, there is hope. And yet, A., even if he does go, most do come back - it is only for a year," I tried to appease her worries.

"You don't really understand, do you?" she questioned rather sharply.

"Well, I sure don't want to go, I know that," I argued back.

The medical came all too soon.

"Bob, last night late, B. took a handful of blues, and reds, and yellows. He didn't even know what was in them. One of his buddies came by this morning to drive him in for the medical - and he dropped 4 tabs and then smoked a joint. He was glassy eyed, and staggering drunk," she added.

"I don't see how they could pass him with the behaviour that will create," I said.

"Oh Bob, what else can I do?" A asked a day or two later. "B showed me his orders. He told me he passed the medical, and will be moving out in just 2 days. He doesn't want to go, but he didn't dare self-mutilate. He did not want to give up citizenship and go to Canada. I am so worried. B told me that he did not remember anything during the exam or the whole day after. He was in terrible shape this morning. He said that the doctor poked him, checked his pulse, shook his head, but he doesn't even remember what questions were asked or what he said."

Three weeks later: "I got my first letter from B. last night. He has been over there, two weeks now. He wrote that he has already been out on patrol. I am so worried, I just don't know how to handle the fear. I love him so, and he is in danger. It is out of my control and all I can do is pray and write to him - cheery letters that tell him I love him . . ."

One week later: Two officers drove up A's driveway, and as soon as they knocked on the door, she saw them. A brigadier colonel and a major. She felt as if she had been hit with a sledgehammer. She sat right down, right there where she was standing, flat on the floor. Unable to talk, unable to scream, unable to move, her world ended, right there.

Turned out, they were looking for a neighbour to whom to give the death notice. B was still safe, for the time being.

A was not so safe, however. She lost the baby she was carrying, along with her trust of people, her belief in America, and her promised land.

Experience 8

"Hey, man, got a bag?" the slender young black man sidled up to me at his neighbourhood bar. "What do you mean?" I inquired, not understanding the accent or the intent. Unfamiliar with the racial barriers in the South, unfamiliar with the slang and the culture, I genuinely failed to understand. With that naive question, he turned and faded back into the crowd, obviously disappointed, wary that something wasn't quite right.

Another day, and I sat in a cafe, eating lunch. A young girl, whom I had counselled at the mental health centre, walked up, sat down, and apologized for interfering with my lunch. Then, she added, "I was going to do myself in, this morning, but I didn't. Here . . ." she handed over a large handful of yellow, pink, red, white, and blue capsules and pills. A few rolled across the table, as I stuffed most of them carefully into my own pocket.

Fearful that I would be seen and accused, I grabbed the others, stifling a desire to run, to panic, to yell at her for endangering me along with her own adolescent stupidity. "Tell me about it all," I asked. She went on for a half hour, explaining how being an Army brat was stressful, how being an adolescent was near impossible, and why she was close to suicide. There were so many like her, and more than a few did succeed in ending it all. I counselled and consoled.

But it was not just amphetamine, barbiturates, tranquillisers, and pot that mattered. The sudden explosion of injecting heroin began, overwhelming first the enlisted men, then spreading to the youth and people with problems throughout the community. Of course, heroin had been endemic in the black ghetto for many years. But of course, in America, they did not count.

Experience 9

"Hi, you have been sent by the court system for an evaluation," I stated clearly for the benefit of the young woman sitting at my desk. "Care to tell me why you think you are here?" I asked, politely.

"Yeah," she snarled, "you are part of the straight world, and you don't give a shit about us. That's why I am here, I was caught."

"Tell me more," I pleaded.

"You ever shoot shit?" she asked. "If you haven't, then you don't know nothing. No, not nothing. Zero. It ain't my job to teach you what it's all about. Why don't you try it before you pass judgement on us," she rasped out in her loud brassy voice.

Like a sow's ear, I thought, you can't make this one into a silk purse. But I resolved to try, for that was my job, and my role. "You were green to this world once upon a time, and someone taught you. Why don't you recognize that I am not here to hurt you - only to help you."

"Yeah, bullshit, tell me another, you are part of the same world as the pigs," she continued.

However, my continuing smile and encouragement must have appealed to her on some deeper level. Perhaps she recognized that I really was naive. Maybe she was maternal?

"Listen, if you really want to know about heroin, let me tell you straight. The first time you shoot up, it's like coming in out of a cold rain, out of a freezing cold wind that blows you around and chills you to the bone. It's like taking a warm shower, then sliding into a warm bed, sliding slowly down between silk sheets, and then laying there, all spread out, only with a full body orgasm that goes on and on and on and on. The first time, the very first time, is the best, but each and every time is good. So good, you can't imagine how good. You swear that you won't keep on, but there is no way you can stop. Smack is so very good to me," she smiled at her confession, suddenly not afraid of me, suddenly aware that I was fascinated by her story. She was now trying to turn me on, rather than keeping up the pretences of anger and distress.

"Well, I have never tried it, and I don't want to," I added, plaintively. "I am here though to help, and I have to do a report for the system - what can I put in about you that won't get you further in trouble?" I asked, trying to show her I would collude with her, at least not destroy her.

"Well, I have been on for four months now, more or less. I need help getting my habit down - I ain't gonna? get off, you can be sure of that," she announced firmly, yet then in a softer and kinder and more gentle voice, added "but it would help to cut back."

She paused for a minute, watching me intently, then continued, "Yeah, I had an old man - he was in Nam and came back with it. He brought enough back, and so naturally, I tried it. It was better than good. We hung together for a while. He's been in prison for the last couple of months though, and I had to go on the street. That's okay, I was able to keep up. If I had not been stupid, I wouldn't have been picked up. I won't be in for long."

Experience 10

"Bob, you always talk about music. I heard someone mention how you like listening to blue grass?" the young man inquired gently. I had never seen him before. He sidled up to me to initiate a conversation. I listened carefully, wondering what he might be seeking.

"Yeah, I enjoy most music. I have a friend in the mountains who plays blue grass. He said its not hard to learn . . . and it sure sounds good," I answered, as non-committed as I could.

"Well, I got a dulcimer, a really fine one, made up in the mountains in fact. I want to sell it, and I thought you might be interested," he suggested.

"Uh, I dunno about that, is it easy to play? I know dulcimer music is beautiful," I said.

Then I thought, "but I am not sure I could learn to play one. What does it sound like? I asked.

"A dulcimer is a classic. Lots easier to play than a guitar. You would never go wrong for this one," he continued.

"Well, how much do you want for it?" I inquired.

"It's worth at least \$200 dollars, but, for you, I could do with less," he tried his best to entice.

Suddenly suspicious, I asked, delicately but sharply, "Where did you get this dulcimer?"

"Ah well," he hesitated, "I inherited it from my uncle," he replied.

"What does that mean?" I asked again, more sharply.

"Well, I won't tell stories, I picked it up on the street."

"You mean, it's hot?" I asked.

"Ah, well, it's not hot, but maybe warm."

"What's your lowest offer," I inquired, just to see how desperate he was.

"I'll give it to you for \$20. I can't go lower than that."

"Aha, is that the going price for a bag today?" I replied, shaking my head no.

The impact of heroin from Vietnam in our local community was evident in that there were more than a dozen pawnshops operating between the post and the town. The junkies were ripping off anything and everything in the community, including each other. Of course, the police were infiltrating, then arresting a hundred or so young people at a time. The lawyers made out well, the police were getting law and order pay and equipment raises, and the prisons and warders grew fat. Unemployment went down, given the numbers in prison who no longer had to be counted. Everyone was prospering, except those unfortunate few who got caught.

Analysis

Gregory Bateson (1973, 1980, 1991) extolled the virtues of seeking "the pattern that connects." Various mentors have suggested and praised more analyses of experience. To be understood, experience must be followed by analysis to gain any significant sense of meaning and then subsequently, for sharing that understanding with others.

The big picture in any analysis of the drug scene and warfare is clear. Alcohol is endemic in American and Western society. Corporate excesses, the stress and strain of business and industry led people to increase their intake especially after the end of Prohibition, to adjust their bodies and minds to cope with unpleasant societal and economic pressures. The American military not only took advantage, but actively promoted the chemical fix, consciously and unconsciously, during and ever after World War II. The affinity of violence and alcohol was established, and today, that closeness remains powerful (DiJulio, 1996; Trauma Foundation, 1999, 2001, Roth, no date). Look in any newspaper, or in the learned professional literature. Look in legal, psychiatric, psychological, social, financial or other literature. Work at any pressured job in any corporation. The story is all there, in black and white, just as it was evident to me while serving in the National Guard, just as it continues today. Alcohol is as American as apple pie, and economically, socially, and politically, far more important. The rich use alcohol to get richer, the rest of us use alcohol to blot out our meagre existence.

The advent of "new" drugs in the 1960's however, added another dimension. Caught out initially, the vested interests and powers that be were unable to figure out what innovative youth were up to with emerging drugs, especially those with strange sounding chemical names. LSD, STP, DMT, peyote, marijuana, glue or benzene sniffing, and a dozen others appeared suddenly, circulated secretly from hand to hand, were used for experimentation and insight, for experience and fun, and even to try to keep out of the Army. An alternative to corporate America, to alcohol, was finally available.

But, the Army and the corporate powers that be could not say no, even to those who did not want to go to Vietnam. Patriots went with moral, religious, or political righteousness, and the T.V. educated, more brain dead than not, served as willing cannon fodder. The intelligent few who did not want to go were unheard. Their pleading and arguments against

the war were ignored by the vested powers that be, those who controlled the corporations, military, media and the wealth, and who needed and sought and created more than a few scapegoats.

Eventually, when the pain of the tragic mistake of Vietnam got worse and worse, human flesh previously soaked in alcohol, turned to more efficient pain-killers. The soldiers, now disillusioned, discovered heroin. The move of heroin from Vietnam to the streets of local communities was quick. These people, like the Blacks in ghettos have always been, were utterly disillusioned. The impact on people, and then on the economic and political and social life of the community was devastating. For those involved, "caught" or affected, the pain continued until death.

Corruption, and violence, and harm to others are all standard fare for minorities and the lower-class in America as the Millennium proceeds. The end of empire, of the golden era, of the age of freedom, of whatever dream one had, the slow death continues. Permutations take place every now and then, from heroin to cults, from ecstasy to suicide bombers, from patriotic to capitalistic, from hard working to poor and back again. The elite, the powerful and the wealthy manage, not only to maintain but to increase their situation on the backs of the rest of us, around the globe. Drugs are a fine way to make money and gain power, just like war, just like threat of war. Given the strength of the medical profession, and their tight organization as a profession, pharmaceutical firms have joined with alcohol, legal and expensive and a fine way to make money. Everything else though, has been made taboo. The 80's and 90's were characterized by the war on drugs, and by the cruel manipulations of the CIA to trade opiates for money to fund their ventures (Anonymous, no date).

Reflections

Casually accepted as a standard part of life in Western Civilization, alcohol dis-inhibits, numbs sensitivity, and lubricates social interactions. Used frequently and/or to excess, alcohol destroys brain cells, screws up connections between brain cells, then stimulates and promotes mindless behaviour, especially violence. Alcohol enables the corporate decision-makers to send their own youth off to idiotic assembly lines making weapons of death or plastic rubbish, or to the front lines of distant wars. Alcohol enables the expendable youth themselves, to sacrifice their lives, by making and using plastic junk, or by the actual using of death weapons to kill others or be killed in their turn, whether in Vietnam or the streets of Anytown, United States of America. Alcohol and the elite of America go together, hand in glove, while outlawing everything and everyone else, around the world and at home. The alternatives did not really work, not surprising in that climate.

Added sophisticated chemical hardware and technology, such as shooting up amphetamines, sniffing cocaine, dancing at raves, increases the rates at which the death wish takes over. Minds that fixate through religious conversions, through brain-washes, through agony in the far off deserts, can add still more dimensions. The sacredness of life, the wonder of beautiful environments, spiritual feelings of bonding with others, the magic of the universe, it all washes away in the bath of old and new chemicals, old and new perverted beliefs.

Mental health operated as one of the fulcrums between the aggressive actions in Vietnam, and drug use, drug abuse. Mental health did not work either. Nearly thirty years on, the

Vietnam War was just one of many protrusions of American capitalism into places and peoples seeking to maintain their own integrity, their own culture, their own alternative ways of life. We have watched wars in Korea, Southeast Asia, Iran, Iraq, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Columbia, and elsewhere, slowly turn into the war on drugs. And of course, the war on drugs has played big on the streets. Pharmaceuticals and alcohol are fine, but everything else is strictly forbidden.

Now, curiously enough, the line of demarcation between users of alcohol and militant followers of Islam, the Muslims, the users of hash, appear to be replacing the old line separating alcohol users from those engaged in LSD, pot, amphetamines, designer drugs, cocaine, and opiates. Does the war on drugs turn to become the war on hash, and vice versa so that the hash users war on the US?

More than thirty years on from the 1960's, drug abuse is just one of the many connections between American capitalism and alcoholism. Drug use was an alternative to alcohol that enabled people to explore, and more often than not, destroy their own integrity, their own culture, and their own lives. However, a fair minority tried, and "saw" alternatives. But for the majority, like those stuck in alcohol mode, both conspired to wreck the integrity, culture, and lives of themselves and therefore, others.

Next, we have terrorism coming up, a new chapter, but based on old models - where life is not worth living for some, cheap for others, and precious for the few. Nothing fundamental has changed. The elite can maintain and build their own personal fortunes for their entire lives. Fine for a few. But, we now have over six billion who are poor and getting poorer. Such problems can and probably will be dealt with by simply reducing the population. All that is needed is a continuation of the escalation of the rich-poor gap, and a continuation of the central themes of America. If we are among those destined to survive, all will be well, and we can continue to suck up to the power elite, the decision makers, the owners of the corporations and military and media and sports teams and so on and so on. If not, our lives did not matter, just like the lives of the Native Americans, the so-called robbers, the legendary bad guys, the hopeless prisoners, the tabooed drug experimenters and users, and so on.

Conclusions

America's original themes, cops and robbers and good guys against the bad guys, continue to play out in an ongoing set of chapters in a never ending saga. The impact on individual lives, the impact on the communities - the financial crush, and loss of resources and environments, the travesty is far from over. Drugs and Vietnam marked the end of the illusion that the United States was a superior nation, a dream state for all people, a magical kingdom in which even the poor, the huddled masses, could make successful careers.

Times change. It is time to get on with life in an increasingly hostile world climate, time to put away the memories, the dreams, and the illusions. It is time to get on with a life that is a bit less splendid than it would have been if there had been no Vietnam, no drug scene, no attack on the World Trade Centre, and no poor people scattered around the deserts of the world.

On the other hand, it just could be approaching time to question the original good guys and bad guys themes, the use and abuse of alcohol, and the extent and depth of the control over all of us by the power elite. The tentacles and threads that connect the elements, whether: war, capitalism, Southeast Asia, NSA, drugs, money, abuse, stocks, Afghanistan, dividends, surveillance, opium, CIA, bombs, Nicaragua, equity, computers, gold, attacks, Iraq, mindlessness, derivatives, starvation, DEA, hatred, Columbia, alcohol, Echelon, profit and so on, have yet to be drawn. But look around, the links are surely there, those links are virtually all around and even run right into and through us.

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Curious connections: Warfare and drug use

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