

American Drug Policy and the Executive Branch

I would like to research how American drug policy has been influenced and shaped by the executive branch (the President, the federal bureaucracy and the First Lady). I plan to start with President Lyndon Johnson's administration so as to establish the context within which Nixon declared the "war on drugs". I will then analyze the effectiveness of different techniques over time. From this, I plan to research how the executive perspective and approach to drug policy has trickled down to shape other facets of society and policy. Specifically, I would like to look at how executive, national policy has shaped public perspectives on drugs, as well as illegal immigrants, the homeless, and the criminal population. To complement my historical research, I would also analyze the potential of proposed alternative policies, such as legalization. The goal of my research would be to understand how the American "war on drugs" came to be, what it has entailed, where it is headed in the future, and which methods I think would be most effective to deal with drug use in the United States in the future. I would also be able to simultaneously study the workings of the executive branch and its role in policy-making and enforcement. Studying how drug policies established in the past have become embedded in government institutions and society and how the executive branch has shaped strategy will provide important insight regarding how drug policy can be successfully reformed in the future.

To fully understand the complexities of the American relation to drugs, I will do comparative research, which is a novel approach. I will look at England, which has a very different historical relation to drugs, having fought the Opium Wars in defense of the drug trade, and with the Netherlands, which has a drastically more liberal approach to drugs, and both which have different national government institutions than the United States. I will do archival research, read secondary sources, and conduct interviews to do this project.

This research is immensely interesting to me because it would allow me to study the workings of the government and a prominent social issue, as well as how the two connect. I am interested in becoming a policy maker professionally in order to help combat social problems in a meaningful way. I am qualified to do this research in part because of my experience with historical and analytical writing. I am an assistant editor for *Foundations*, the Johns Hopkins undergraduate historical journal. Through this position, I have read many historical and social scientific theses submitted from universities around the world, sifted through many rounds of submissions to pick the best works, and edited the final choices to be presentable for publication. To pick the final pieces, the *Foundations* board focuses on the strength and originality of the thesis, the strength of the sources and of the integration of sources in the paper, and the quality of the writing; judging so many papers on these features educated me in research presentation and taught me much about making historical research relevant.

I have a proven interest in the real-world aspect of social problems and a track record of complementing this interest with academic study, which will make my research on this topic strong and multidimensional. After taking an intersession class on homelessness in Baltimore, I co-founded the Hopkins Helping the Homeless club. Through work with the club, I am able to learn about the realities of homelessness and what measures best address issues of homelessness firsthand. I also have experience with original research: in Professor Hinderer's class "Baltimore History: Race and Community" I created a virtual exhibit on public housing in Baltimore based on research done at the Afro-American Newspaper's archives.

I am a curious, enthusiastic, hard-working student with a passion for the government and a desire to fix the social issues plaguing America, especially regarding the matter of drug use and the problems it causes.