

Critical analysis of a published article essay



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Assignment 1: Critical analysis of a published article (1000 words) Saturday

10th October 2009 By Joana Wong This critical analysis is about an article that argues whether drugs should be legalized or not. It was published in The Observer, on Sunday the 6th of September 2009 and it is entitled " Latin America's backlash against US war on drugs" by Ed Vulliamy in Tijuana, Rory Carroll in Caracas, Annie Kelly in Buenos Aires and Tom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro. It is a lengthy article, written in a Sunday newspaper for a well-educated and informed audience. It is evident that the reporter has researched the subject well, for example he starts the article with an interview of a 40 year old web designer (among others), he gives us various statistics and also an overview of what has been happening in the last few decades all over Latin America.

The main purpose is to enlighten people about the decriminalisation of drugs and its benefits. On the other hand, it also points out different dangers that come with it. My interest regarding this particular article is related to the fact that I sometimes enjoy smoking cannabis, making this a matter that concerns me directly. Moreover, Washington's meddling all over the world is an issue that calls my attention, so the title of the article immediately drew me to it. The author presents the argument that the problem of drugs has to be debated in different ways instead of revolving in being more or less repressive.

One of his main arguments is that decriminalisation will help the state to focus on catching major traffickers and arresting them in the place of petty addicts. He also shows us why some politicians, researchers and activists

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are against the US war on drugs. Quoting ; “ for South American countries, the ‘ harm’ from drugs comes less from drug use than the war against producers and traffickers”, Benjamin Lessing, a University of California researcher. Furthermore “ As long as the debate about drugs revolves around being more or less repressive, we will continue to lose thousands of young lives each year”, Eduardo Machado, an activist from the PE Body Count group.

He states that South America is demanding a partnership instead of the subjugation that hallmarked former US presidencies, saying that not only is their interdiction policy failing, but it is also a pretext for Washington interference. At the same time he highlights reasons for scepticism such as: some drugs are addictive after one single hit; if possession is legal, it will enhance the domestic market, and above all, drugs kill and destroy lives and legalizing them will make them more accessible to people. I was impressed by this article mainly because of the emotive terminology used throughout by the author such as “ murderers”, “ serious heroin and crack users”, “ destroyed”, incarcerated”, “ brutal”, “ catastrophic”, “ bloodshed”, etc.

, secondly, the factual content is indisputable drawing on a wide range of examples of escalating violence in different countries in Latin America, like the “ killing of 40 people over three days in Juarez,... take the death toll to about 1, 400 this year” and “ thousands of people die every year in Rio de Janeiro in clashes between police and traffickers. He also mentions that the use of “ paco” cocaine paste increased by more than 200% between 2001 and 2005, which proves US policy of prohibition is not working. The article seems to be biased pointing out many reasons for the decriminalisation of

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drugs in particular cannabis. While writing this critical analysis I did some research on the topic and found a related article that gave me further insight into the subject.

The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (SFOPH) commissioned three international experts to provide a critical assessment of the experience gained in other countries with decriminalisation of cannabis use. The reports include a European comparative study, an overview of research conducted in the US and Australia, and an historical evaluation of drug policy in Italy. The three expert reports suggest that no systematic relationship between drug policies and prevalence rates of cannabis use or illicit drug use in general can be detected. However, the social costs of drug enforcement and the negative consequences for criminalised use can be reduced by decriminalisation measures. Also through having read Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former president of Brazil's commentary I felt even more strongly in favor of the decriminalisation of cannabis as an effective way of dealing with the global drug problem. Furthermore, I was led to consider related issues such as poverty, corruption, extortion, exploitation, trafficking, prostitution, all of which should be taken into consideration when discussing the drug dilemma. This article features in a left-leaning broadsheet whose readers are generally interested in social and political issues. He uses different examples of opinions from a broad range of people, for instance, it quotes Kristin Daley, projects director for Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, " Today, drugs are illegal, they are out of control, and they are everywhere.

If they were managed in the way alcohol is, they would be under control. Instead of criminal getting richer, violence escalating and drug-related

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deaths on the rise, we would live under a system of established pricing, peaceful purchase and a regulated labelling system. ” He also quotes an evangelical pastor and counsellor saying “ Drugs are the scourge of our society. All this can do would be to limit killing between small-time gangsters street-corner turf, allowing the army to go after kingpins and middle men.

The danger is that kingpins will accelerate the domestic market if possession is legal and smuggling into the US more difficult. ” It can be argued that one of the weaknesses of this article is that it doesn’t go deeply enough into the negative impacts that the decriminalisation of drugs can bring, nor does it address the serious risks associated with the use of marijuana. During my research I came across an article entitled “ Demolishing 15 key arguments for the decriminalisation of Cannabis” written by Simon Calvert, from The Christian Institute, in June 2002. Of the many points mentioned, number 13 is closely related to one of the main arguments discussed by Ed Vulliamy which is that “ Legalising cannabis would release the police to deal with more serious crimes and it would free up the courts and prisons. It would concentrate resources on the ‘ real’ problem of hard drug dealers. It outlines strong evidence against it, such as “ Weakening the law worsens the problem”, that is to say that making it legal would lead to more people consuming it, and taking into consideration that cannabis is a gateway to harder drugs, this would ultimately mean more work for the police. In addition, point number 2 states that “ there is an established link between schizophrenia and cannabis. ” Smoking cannabis can cause hallucinations and delirium leading to disorientation and a distorted reality.

Through my own experience I know this is true, and it makes me think this matter cannot be taken so lightly. Nonetheless, I still believe that decriminalisation is better than repression because each person as an individual should have the right to choose how they want to live. I do not see myself as a criminal nor do I feel that others should think of me as such. I, as an informed person, don't think it's right that the government or police should interfere in my life, as long as I am acting responsibly and not causing harm to others. To conclude, after careful consideration, much research and analysis, I am pro the decriminalisation of cannabis.