The Issue Of Drug Addiction in America

Drugs and illegal substances are the cancer killing the United States as we know it. It has become more common to have a drug related encounter during the happening of our daily life, from an intoxicated individual on the streets, to school lockdowns and shootings related to illegal substances. The production of these substances, their use, and their trading are events happening all throughout America. Today, drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, and opioids are just some of the products Americans consume on the daily, in some states the decriminalization of marijuana was already approved, and right now, in the United States, there is also a bill waiting for approval so it can be decriminalized at a federal level, even though the War on Drugs is still an ongoing operation within this government.

Although its normal to see these kind of actions and law implementations in today's society, it wasn't always like this. Once upon a time, kids could go out to the streets and play, they would attend school and walk home without their parents worrying about the drug exposure on the streets regardless if it was a border town or not. The drug business and consumption in the States started spreading after their production and trafficking became the main goal of different mafias, cartels and crime organizations on Latin America countries such as Colombia, Mexico and Brazil among others. Names like Joaquin ‘El Chapo’ Guzman and Pablo Escobar are just some of the names of the drug lords responsible for the vast majority of the trafficking of drugs into the U.S. at some point in time, and have now become more popular because of documentaries, series and even movies based on their life. The so called ‘masterminds’ operate operations which goal was to smuggle drugs into the United States.

It can be said that the war on drugs in the United States was started by one man with a huge ambition that at some point in time was able to make over $100 million dollars in drugs profits per day. His name, Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria, born in Rionegro, Colombia on December 1st, 1949. Escobar started his lifestyle as a criminal during his teen years after his family had moved to Medellin, Colombia. At the start of his criminal career he would steal tombstones and smuggle car stereos to sell. Since during the 1960’s the growing and trafficking of cocaine was a growing industry in different countries in Latin America such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, Escobar decided to get involved in drug smuggling and later became one of the founders for a criminal the criminal organization known as the Medellin Cartel in the mid-1970’s alongside three other individuals, the Ochoa Vasquez brothers, Jorge Luis, Fabio and Juan David. Less than ten years later, the Medellin Cartel was the cartel with the most power and dominance in the cocaine industry and was responsible for about eighty percent of the cocaine smuggled into the United States, by the use of boats through the Gulf of Mexico but he was better known for using airplanes that would fly to major cities in the U.S. for the product to be distributed shortly after. Pablo was not the person to mess with, if someone would get in the way between him and achieving what he wanted to do he would eliminate the individual regardless of who they were or their social status. His unique way of dealing with his enemies lead him to be known by the words “plata o plomo” which would translate to silver or lead, he would first try to give them money to let him do what he had in mind and if that didn’t work he would simply order their death. Besides Escobar’s ambition to be the greatest in the business, the fact that his cartel was well structured, with high influences all over the world and could corrupt almost anyone, were some of the reasons how the Medellin Cartel was now responsible for not only over ninety-

five percent of the cocaine trafficked into the U.S. but also for controlling over ninety percent of the cocaine market all around the world. In the United States alone, an estimated of over fifteen tons of product was brought in to the country every day. The cartel would do so by flying small biplanes and one of the known routes would fly over the Bahamas and would deliver the shipment in South Florida where it would be distributed. Once he invited his cousin to join the cartel, they created alternative measures to cross drugs over the border such as hiding the drugs in shipments of legal objects like televisions and other appliances and they even found a way to introduce the drugs into the pulp of different fruits, clothing and cocoa powder.

At this point in time, Escobar had already come in contact and had an agreement with one of the drug lords in our southern border, Mexico, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, who was also a key factor in the trafficking of drugs and other illegal substances into the United States with almost two-thousand miles of border between these two countries. As in 2017, the Sinaloa Cartel was the most active cartel when talking about trafficking illicit drugs into the U.S. Cartel which was founded and known for Joaquin Archivaldo Guzman Loera also known as ‘El Chapo.” Guzman, just like Escobar, began his criminal history during his teen years and started showing his ambition since the early start (1960’s). This is the time when he started doing jobs for people around Culiacan, and slowly started forming his own business and network. Soon after he started trafficking cocaine into the U.S. for cartels in Colombia, working alongside the Guadalajara cartel. Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo was head of the most important cartel in Mexico at the time, the Guadalajara Cartel. Gallardo was the first person to see El Chapo as a legitimate business person and promoted him to the top of the cartel.

By the late 1980’s the boy raised in poverty was in charge of supervising multi-million dollar cartel shipments into the U.S. He was considered a logistics “genius” operating across the border. As a response to this trafficking, the DEA build a force to strike back to fight back this problem. The feds made the dangerous move to send one of their own to infiltrate the cartel and do undercover work, that person being Enrique “Kiki” Camarena. Thanks to him and his intel, the Mexican military was able to destroy the cartel’s largest marijuana plantation (2 billion dollars worth). On February 7, 1985, the cartel hits back by kidnapping, torturing and eventually killing Camarena. In response the DEA starts a hunt for the man responsible for Camarena’s death and a little over 4 years later (April 8th, 1989) the arrest Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. After the arrest of Gallardo, El Chapo stepped up to take the vacant and started making up a name for himself.

Although, the Sinaloa Cartel operates in over half of the states in Mexico, one could say Sinaloa is their home, because that is where their marijuana and opium plantations are located. During the 1990’s, the trafficking of goods into the U.S. from Colombia was rapidly declining because government agencies, such as ICE, where locating different transport routes of cocaine coming from the Carribbean and Colombia, to America. The death of the Colombian cartel’s leader was one of the biggest stepping stones for “El Chapo,” which gave him a great advantage of expanding his cartel and its operations. Loera, became well known for his unique way to smuggle drugs across the border by the use of tunnels, the first one was found in Arizona in 1990 which was over 300 feet long. These tunnels were counted with an electrical system, to make their way visible regardless of the time of the day, and rails for a small motorized vehicles.

In the 2000’s, U.S. agencies worked hand-in-hand with Colombian agencies to seize and burn cocaine crops and clandestine labs located in the mountains of Colombia. The trade routes from the Caribbean and Colombia, quickly switched from Mexico to the U.S. The coca plant was

mostly grown in the Indies Mountains, which made the cartels find new ways to get cocaine into America but at this time, the Sinaloa Cartel had found what they considered a good area within Sinaloa to start growing marijuana and opium poppy plants. Cocaine is usually packed in small portions, and is somewhat easy to transport and be undetected by border patrol agents because it's also odorless. Traffickers throughout the border are often known to be transporting kilos of cocaine hidden in different parts of vehicles such as car tires, gas tanks, and other unexpected objects which tended to be really clever at times, and even parts of their bodies, women have been caught having these small bags inside their female genitalia, under their breast and it is more common to see men use condoms to insert these bags in their rectum and sometimes even swallow them after tying the knot on their tongue or teeth to facilitate the extraction. On the other hand, marijuana is bulky, has a strong smell, and are more commonly tracked by canines because of such reasons therefore the Mexican cartels had to find new ways to transport large amounts of drugs to the U.S. That's when, "El Chapo" and the Sinaloa cartel created the now infamous tunnels. In 2008, some of the Sinaloa cartel branched off and turned on them creating a lot of violence in Mexico. The cartels used to just kill former members or enemies, but at this time, the cartels started killing innocent bystanders along with the people they were after.

In 2010, a tunnel was found in Otay Mesa, California. It had ventilation, a rail system, and lighting, this is the time enforcement agencies realized that these were not the traditional drug smugglers they were used to, but these individuals had adapted and found resolutions to the obstacles given to them from law enforcement. Some of the reasons why Otay Mesa was one of their hotspots is because Otay Mesa is located its a border town located between San Diego, California and Tijuana, Baja California, right next to the Pacific Ocean location which provided them with the perfect to the point where they were able to dig by hand, but at the same time the soil was strong enough to support the tunnel which would make it easier for them to transport drugs into the U.S. to then be distributed to other cities. To top all this off, this specific location was also an industrial area, which had an airport at close distance, meaning there would always be a steady flow of noise, and the transportation of drugs through such tunnels would also be almost impossible to detect.

Over the years, law enforcement agencies have been finding more tunnels throughout the border, and each one of them more sophisticated than the one before. Even after the death of Pablo Escobar, the third arrest and extradition to the United States of Joaquin Guzman Loera and the discovery of the tunnels and other transportation routes, drugs are still getting into the U.S. This business not only takes advantage of the desserts and soil of these frontiers but also of technology. As shown in some of the television series and movies based on real life happenings of drug trafficking, it is more common now to see the use of drones and although many individuals consider this to just be cinematic fiction, some incidents have been reported on the news and local newspapers that prove this is the reality of things.

Meanwhile, in the United States, there are now over twenty different states that have legalized the consumption of marijuana. In many of these states only for recreational use, which requires to be registered to be able to consume it at the same time it requires a prescription, which implies that the only people that consume it have some type of disease like cancer which helps patients make their chemotherapy less painful, or disorder such as anxiety which helps them relax their nervous system. On these states is very common to see different foods with cannabis infused on them which are often known as "eatables," snacks we see in our daily like chips, gummies, brownies, cookies and even hamburgers and pizza which are sometimes sold in

restaurants and food trucks in these states.

In the rest of the United States where cannabis is not legal yet, there are many alternative drugs for individuals with the same diseases or disorders, such as the ones mentioned before, but the one that is not only most commonly seen but also it could become really addictive is opioids. This drug is not only addictive but also responsible for the opioids crisis the U.S. is facing today, where over six times the people that died during 9/11 and the Afghanistan war caused by the terrorist attack have died in the States alone due to opioids. Either an overdose, withdrawal symptoms or the use of synthetic opioids, all these deaths have led us to the crisis we are living in today, many of these individuals were drug-free before starting to consume medication that was provided by their doctors. In many of these cases, women that are addicted to opioids and pregnant not only run the risk of a miscarriage or other pregnancy problems but also their baby could be born with the same addiction. An adult is able to make a decision weather to consume these substances or not, but these babies are being brought into this world without such right, this decision has already been made for them because of their parents actions.

Unfortunately, the United States as we know it is about to change, and possibly not in a good manner. With the legalization of all these drugs and substances, all they are really doing is making it more accessible for the people and simultaneously letting the government benefit from being able to tax the products and spend less on anti-drug operations. This is the reality, this is something that the news or other media don’t usually mention, this is the America we are living in today. These drugs are not only affecting the people of this beautiful country but the government is letting it happen. Some of the countries in South America have had a huge influence in the fact that they are the main providers for these drugs but as long as there is a consumer, there will be a provider. This leads us to the question, what is the U.S. going to do about the situation? Is the government going to provide a solution to these addictions? Are they going to become the provider for their people? Or will the United States of America continue to be the #1 drug consumer in the world?