

*A Long Strange Trip*LATIN AMERICA'S CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD
DRUG CULTURE*Paul Gootenberg*

PERHAPS IT'S RISKY, EVEN FOOLHARDY, for a historian to suggest that drugs are one of Latin America's enduring contributions to world culture. Today, "drugs" mostly conjures up cocaine, meth, addiction, corruption, traffickers, DEA drug wars, and the unfathomably brutal bloodletting along the northern borders of Mexico. It also suggests the unfortunate tendency of (North) Americans to blame their intemperate desires for consuming drugs on evil foreigners, the Pablo Escobars and Chapo Guzmáns, or wily "cartels" (a term that makes specialists cringe). It also serves to sweep under the rug the complicity of our institutions and badly conceived drug laws and policies—namely, global drug prohibition—in igniting the kinds of mayhem that have afflicted places like Colombia, Peru, and Mexico in recent decades. So, here, I'd like to step back and suggest as a corrective a few less sensationalistic, less ahistorical, less U.S.-centric points: the richer, longer cornucopia of mind-altering goods the Americas have offered the world; some of the changing historical entanglements of these drugs with global culture; and, most recently, promising new shifts, coming from the Global "South," on how to rethink our bellicose current posture on illicit drugs. This long trip through hemispheric drugs is rich in historical ironies.

PSYCHEDELIC CIVILIZATIONS

Thousands of years ago, prehistoric Americans invented what the ethnobotanist Winston LaBarre termed the "American drug complex," the world's widest and wildest menu of psychotropic drugs. Four-fifths of known mind-altering plants come from what is today Latin America, mostly from hot

spots in Mesoamerica and western Amazonia.¹ They include well-known soft stimulants like coca leaf, mate, tobacco (the most all- and pan-American of intoxicants), and cacao, the active ingredient in chocolate. There were also scores of Native American ritual hallucinogenic plant-drugs such as peyote buttons (mescaline), “magic mushrooms” (usually psilocybin), *ololiuhqui* (Mexican blue morning-glory seed), *salvia divinorum*, ayahuasca (yajé or caapi), yopo and virolá snuffs, san pedro cactus (a South American mescaline), and the countless datura, brugmansia, and other nightshade species brewed by medicine men in the rain forests of today’s Colombia and Ecuador. Some peoples tapped toxins of brilliantly colored poison frogs for sacred ceremonies, ecstasy, and healing. This cornucopia was partly ecological accident: mind-bending alkaloids, which make us high, evolved as built-in plant insecticides against the voracious bugs on year-round tropics foliage. The rapid rise of American agriculture kept indigenous peoples, who likely trekked in mushroom cults from Siberia, foraging and discovering the New World’s wild diversity of plants. Alcohol was known—maize-based chicha beer, agave pulque (the oetli “wine” of the Aztecs)—but its low potency was unlikely to drown out knowledge of entheogenic drugs as occurred in ancient Europe and the Middle East.

When three thousand years ago state-led agrarian civilizations and empires arose in the Americas, Olmecs, Mayas, Mexicas (aka the Aztecs), and a kaleidoscope of pre-Incan states in the Andes, earlier drug cultures became subsumed and regulated by priestly castes. They amplified and remade in still unexplored ways shamanistic practices, visions, and beliefs as their sacred “Plants of the Gods.” The Aztec priesthood, for example, instituted the “Divine flesh” Teonanáctl and *ololiuhqui* (which contains LSD-like lysergic acids) in specific flower gods, Xochipilli, used for official divination and sacrificial rites and to steel their dominant military castes. The transcendent intellectualism of the Mayan nobility was energized by cacao, mushrooms, and trance states induced by a narcotic water lily (Dobkin del Rios 2009). Serious archaeology also suggests that the drug-motif obelisks of Chavín—the mother of Andean civilizations—relate to priestly control over remote Amazonian psychedelics. On the Pacific, the militarist power of the Moche state—mostly remembered today for the culture’s stunningly erotic pottery—also channeled the cosmic powers of drug plants.

In a way, then, today’s global fascination with the cosmological complexities and visionary aesthetics of ancient American peoples like the Mayans and Aztecs is, unwittingly, a fascination with their exotic drugs. And on the

margins of these civilizations, countless small mobile peoples conserved a world of religious and curative practices around drugs, such as northern Mexico's Huichol with their still central peyote cult. As intoxicants had medicinal values, even the early and often sickly Spaniards (who disdained most things native) showed an interest in superior herbal cures. The untapped diversity and intimate knowledge of plants has in our times drawn modern pharmaceutical giants into formal "bio-prospecting" contracts with rain forest tribes in Central America and the Amazon in search of the latest miracle drugs.

The original American drug cornucopia has passed through many acts and phases of suppression and rediscovery by the outer world. During colonial times (in a preview of today's drug prohibitions) Catholic Spanish authorities piously extirpated as pagan devil worship the most hallucinogenic of plants. They survived at jungle or desert margins or moved deeply underground, sometimes for centuries, in Mexican Indian communities. Mexican sources cryptically spoke of pre-Conquest *tzitzintlápatl* plants as a form of indigenous myth or madness. Early in the twentieth century, peyote spread north of the border, until then completely unknown, as a restoration cult among U.S. and Canadian Native Americans, now legally protected as religious practices of the Native American Church. In the 1940s and 1950s, anthropologists, bohemians like Allen Ginsberg, eminent ethnobotanists like Harvard's Richard Evans Schultes, and other seekers scoured Mexico and Amazonia for lost drug traces. In the more culturally open and indigenous-friendly 1960s, surviving drug practices began to come out in the open. In Mexico, the Mazatec shaman María Sabina, who knew a lot about psilocybin mushrooms, became a kind of global celebrity. Her remote village in the mountains of southern Oaxaca state, Huautla de Jiménez, turned into a kind of hippie tourist mecca. These psychedelic discoveries contributed in no small way to scientific study of such drugs and to the flowering of "drug cultures" among middle-class youth in the United States and Europe. One UCLA-trained anthropologist, Carlos Castañeda, earned a small fortune (and much professional chagrin) with his new-agey Don Juan book series, a how-to vision quest inspired by his encounters with a Yaqui *curandero* from Sonora. They likely sold more copies in English than all the García Márquez novels combined, in fact, some 28 million worldwide. New Agers, led by gurus like Timothy Leary and later Terrance McKenna, admired not only the intricate chemical knowledge of Indians, but the subtle craft and values of the guide, who could safely manage powerful mind drugs through time-honored social

rituals. Even today, the Native American drugs keep coming: the *salvia* craze a few years ago, which briefly panicked American parents, or as the *New York Times* recently reported, the new high-class New York fashion of introspective ayahuasca soirees, imbibing the juice of the Amazonian “vine of the soul” (widely popular as well with New Age Brazilians), which contains the nauseating and often disturbing DMT compound.

PSYCHOACTIVE COLONIALISM

The conquest and colonial exploitation of the Americas closely dovetailed with what the world historian of drugs David Courtwright (2001) dubs the “Psychoactive Revolution” of the seventeenth century. The influx of such novel “drug-foods” (a kindred concept of the food anthropologist Sidney Mintz) transformed European consciousness, capitalism, and culture. Mainly from Latin America, they stimulated the rise of global markets, bourgeois mentalities, and even some revolutionary political ideas. Select native intoxicants underwent complex transformations into major European trade goods and addictive Europeanized customs.² Tobacco leaf, that strange and pernicious fount of alkaloids, became one of the first true world commodities beyond precious coins, soon traded as far away as Africa and Asia. Its evolution from an indigenous medicine, hallucinogen, and meditative rite into the shockingly novel European habit of smoking (and snuffing) has long fascinated historians. Spain branded its top quality tobacco in Havana factories, though English rivals managed to smuggle strains to found the broad market and well-taxed Virginia tobacco industry. In reigning Galenic medicine, smoking was the “dry inebriant,” a recognition of nicotine’s drug qualities, and a fine way to dry out alcohol-drenched European people. Yet tobacco, both among aristocrats and the middle class, retained a subversive even indigenous spiritual edginess, a new history reveals, fostered by *converso* (Jewish) merchants and plebeian sailors plying it across the Atlantic for Spain (Norton 2008).

In contrast, coffee, like later cannabis, was a transplant to the Americas, native to East Africa, molded by Islam, but seeded by the enterprising Dutch in the seventeenth century into a colonial good (hence, its stubborn nicknames like mocha and java). However, by the mid-eighteenth century the epicenter of the coffee boom gravitated to the Caribbean, as an odd assort-

ment of European powers (even the Danes) seized potentially fertile tobacco and coffee islands. By 1750, the French raised most of the world's coffee crop in their infamously brutal and lucrative slave colony of Saint-Domingue (Haiti). As historians love to recount, coffee drinking, the great "soberer," jolted Europe into a modern bourgeois age. The institution of the coffee shop proved the key civilizing alternative to the raucous low-class beer tavern. Thousands dotted London and Paris by the eighteenth century. Coffee shops inculcated rising "Protestant" values: sobriety, intellectuality and communication, tolerance of foreigners, the public sphere, and a capitalist business ethos (Schivelbusch 1992). Coffee shops birthed gazettes and newspapers, and in one port, Lloyds of London transformed from a place to talk shipping news into the pioneer global insurance broker. Michelet famously attributed the outbreak of the 1789 French Revolution to rationalist plotters in the cafés of Paris, a stunning irony, for if true, such revolutionists were willfully dependent on slave-grown caffeine from the hellish French plantations of Haiti. The Rights of Man soon also bequeathed the monumental slave revolt known as the Haitian Revolution, whose fury against planters, in another irony, finally shifted coffee's bonanza south to nineteenth-century Brazil.

Other colonial stimulants played out quite differently. Mexican cacao, shed of prior Mayan and Aztec cosmology, became creolized by the seventeenth century into the warmed and sweetened-up Spanish Catholic chocolate beverage. If anything, historians stress its luxuriant, aristocratic, anti-Protestant roles, at least until the nineteenth century, when strict Protestants in Holland, England, Switzerland (and somewhat later, Hershey, PA) industrialized chocolate into cocoa powder and a sugar-laden solid candy for the masses. Spain also mined the medicinal drugs of the Americas, such as cinchona or Peru Bark, antimalarial quinine later whisked out by botanical spies and remade on a plantation scale to secure the insalubrious tropical realms of the British Empire. A vestige of this White Man's burden is the bitter tonic we call "quinine water." Also notable is coca, the "Sacred Leaf of the Incas." With its subversively alive Andean meanings, Spain could only tolerate its use as a salve to the Indians forced to harshly labor in the altiplano silver mines of Potosí, making coca into part of a pan-Andean commodity circuit, rather than an export good, and into a degrading Indian vice. However, indirectly, this means that "cocaine" (coca's most notorious alkaloid) helped stimulate the expansion of the early modern European world economy, fueled, as any economic historian knows, by the rich bounty of Peruvian silver.

THE DRUGS OF NATIONS

Latin America's independence in the 1820s ushered in a long if murky century of nascent national drug cultures. The divide widened between coveted legal world stimulants, national-identity drugs, and the first signs of submerging drug cultures. By 1900, coffee's exponential growth became practically synonymous with the free trade liberation of Latin America, a good remaking the new national economies and states of Brazil and Colombia and the mini-nations of Central America.³ Brazil's rise as a world caffeine "superpower"—by 1905, some 20 million bags a year, five times the rest of all world producers combined—was intimately linked to the rise of the mass-market all-American "cup of Joe," a new people's standardized coffee culture advanced by patriotism (British tea boycotts), frontier roasters and grocers, Civil War caffeine rations, and industrial "coffee breaks." By 1900, Americans gulped down half the world's coffee, a share that rose to its peak in the 1960s. In Brazil, slaves and then legions of immigrants, such as indentured Japanese, opened the vast hilly plantation hinterlands linked to São Paulo's port of Santos. Brazilian supply was so ample that by 1906 the country announced an OPEC-like monopoly price policy with the crop, "valorization," a revenue stability that was to help the country successfully transform into an industrial giant later in the century. In contrast, quality highland Arabica Colombian and Central American coffees mostly flowed to pickier and better-heeled European drinkers (Topik, Marichal, and Zephyr 2006). The smiling, well-kempt, fair-skinned "peasant" Juan Valdéz personified Colombian origins—at least until eclipsed by scary mug shots of Pablo Escobar in the 1980s. Latin America's contribution to global coffee culture proved decisive—a role eroding only in recent decades with the diversifying rise of high-end Yuppie Coffee (the coffee anthropologist Bill Roseberry's moniker) and the unprecedented post-1989 spread of coffee farming across the tropical peasant belts of Asia and Africa.

In contrast to coffee's lasting imprint is the curious case of coca. Denigrated by the Spaniards, the Andean stimulant's prestige soared with scientific fascination after 1850, including the 1860 German isolation of cocaine. This actually led—from 1860 to 1910 at least—to a legal boom of the dried leaf and coca syrups to Europe and the United States. The coca craze, a stimulant to combat elite and female nerve fatigue, began with French Vin Mariani, a classy and sexy Incan-inflected red wine coca beverage. Its innovative celebrity endorsement campaigns made Vin Mariani a sensation across Europe by

the 1870s. Less known is that American Coca-Cola actually began life as a frank yet dry imitation of Vin Mariani, concocted by the Atlanta pharmacist John Pemberton in 1887 as an invigorating and sexually healthy “soft” drink, and which conceals to this day a close but covert link between Andean coca and American mass culture (Gootenberg 2008). By 1910, however, the brief age of coca was cut short by exaggerated associations with the new drug menace, cocaine. Coca-Cola went on to become the American taste of the twentieth century, shorn of its Andean and French origins. Energy drinks remain an American obsession, including many now tapping import extracts of Amazonian guaraná fruit, the basis of exciting Brazilian national brand sodas like Guaraná Antartica.

This was also an age of regional identity and national drugs, exemplified by tequila and yerba mate. Tequila is one of dozens of age-old Mexican fermented agave cactus “mescals,” whose Jalisco roots elevated it to a national insignia of Mexicanidad. At first a hard drug associated with cheap Mexican drunks, then tipsy postwar tourists, Tequila has morphed since the 1980s into the ultimate high-end export, with a registered Mexican domain à la French champagne and artisanal \$200 bottles that hint at a druglike commune with ancient and earthy agave Mayahuel spirits. At the other end of the Americas is yerba mate, a Guaraní xanthine-rich tea that Jesuits traded from colonial Paraguay across the greater Río de la Plata. By the twentieth century, the popular gaucho ritual of mate from shared drinking gourds consolidated as the identifying Argentine national habit, and with only slightly less devotion in neighboring republics. However, in highly circuitous ways, mate is only now becoming a world drug. Druze laborers in Buenos Aires carried it back to the Middle East, dispersing it again after Lebanon’s modern civil wars. And a diaspora from Argentina’s anti-Semitic despots of the 1970s, small Israeli-Argentine entrepreneurs, are now spreading their scaled-up mate drinks worldwide, popping up in hipster Brooklyn cafés and the shelves of Whole Foods.

But in contrast to these successful legitimated drugs, regional and ethnic drug complexes were emerging that after 1900 become targets of growing class and racial taboo. Chinese minorities, as in the United States, were despised most everywhere and brought the respectability and legality of opium down with them. Cannabis, another import to the Americas, surfaced in a number of ways across the long nineteenth century. African slaves or sailors brought cannabis to Brazil (*maconha*) and to Colombia’s Caribbean coast (*marimba*); in British colonies like Jamaica and Trinidad it arrived as

ganja, a work and spiritual aid of indentured East Indian workers, the so-called ganja complex. A remarkable story is Mexico, a place that gringos reflexively imagine as weed's ancient Eden. A new history by Isaac Campos (2012) not only shows how new it was, gradually bred by rural folk into "marihuana" out of colonial Spanish hemp fields, its use as a drug noticeable by the mid-nineteenth century. By 1900, it was strongly associated with the feared "degenerative" underclasses—convicts, lunatics, conscripts, and, naturally, Indians—and orientalized as a spur to random violence and madness. Indeed, such mind associations, Campos subtly argues, may have indeed made Mexican weed a manic, hard, sometimes murderous drug. The hygienic and puritanical modernizers who arose out of the Mexican Revolution were thus in the 1920s among the first in the hemisphere to ban it. Campos even suggests that this Mexico backstory, not just the usual anti-Mexican racism, was the inspiration for the "Reefer Madness" panic used to push through our own marijuana prohibition in the late 1930s.

Now that American social mores are fast turning positive about cannabis (and, according to federal statistics, we are evolving into a pot nation) perhaps it's time to stop denigrating its hemispheric roots. During the 1960s, after crackdowns at home, proximate areas south of the border became the chief purveyors of quality marijuana and of marijuana culture—branded, as old-timers may recall, as Acapulco Gold, Oaxaqueño (a word that nicely rolled off the boomer tongue), Panama Red, and Colombian and Jamaican Golds. We can only speculate about one big historical riddle: the cultural transformation of manic reefer into our mellow weed. By the 1970s, long faded jazz-era referents to the drug ("tea"), or its European hashish mystique, were supplanted by colorful images of spiritual and resistant Bob Marley-style African-roots Rastafarians, or with a laidback borderlands culture—the stoners now called "Pachuco" or "Pacheco" by Mexicans—so infamously portrayed by those slapstick Southern Californians Cheech & Chong. A striking transitional figure here was Tucson-born Lalo Guerrero, the "Father of Chicano Music" (honored as such with a 1996 National Humanities Medal), whose all but forgotten bilingual 1949 "Marihuana Boogie," right off the zoot suit era, put a decidedly upbeat spin on the killer weed. How Jerry Garcia, of the essay title, the Ur-druggie of West Coast music, lost these Latin roots (along with his *apellido's* accent) is the mystery of marijuana's assimilation north with a hippy ethos. The 1960s makeover of a drug of dubious origins into a peaceful, dreadlocked people's herb is perhaps another Latin American addition to drug culture.

DRUG WARS AND DRUG PEACE?

After 1910, the United States began a century-long crusade to banish unwanted drugs, not just at home, but across the Americas, perceived from the start as a contaminating source of drugs. Among the many explanations, I like the drug historian David Musto's notion of "the American disease"—a kind of bipolar "love-hate" relationship with drugs that tells why we relish and consume them with unrivaled passion, yet expect our leaders to violate our cherished freedoms to puritanically punish users and periodically prohibit drugs (Musto 1973). We also like to mix our racial contempt with banned drugs, against distinctive user groups at home (Catholics in Prohibition, African Americans with early cocaine) or against entire browner continents as imagined global pushers. When international bans against narcotics and cocaine began after 1910, which was a new and progressive historical concept, U.S. authorities tried to convince our neighbors too. There was some push-back: Peruvians ignored us for decades to protect their tiny cocaine industry; Bolivian delegates at the League of Nations defended, in ironically racist terms, their Indians laboring needs for benign national coca leaf; Lázaro Cárdenas experimented with a social program of medical treatment for Mexican opiate addicts. However, deep-seated elite (and, in some cases, popular) fears and prejudices, for example, about marijuana and opium in Mexico, led after World War II to widespread compliance and complicity with U.S. prohibition and our aggressive drug interdiction ideals, sometimes offset by some foot-dragging of drug-enriched politicians. The Cold War helped too in this consensus, by magnifying U.S. strategic influence and by persuading Latin American governments and militaries that illicit drugs were basically a problem of subversion and national security. By the 1970s, the U.S. drug war was going hot in Latin America, in Operation Intercept, Operation Condor, and so many more to come. By then, Latin America was the closest and biggest source of drug trafficking, pot, some opiates, and a billowing stream of cocaine into a post-1960s drug-thirsty North America.

The rest, you might say, is history, though it still needs to be rigorously researched and written. The Latin American bonanza with illicit drugs, peaking in the 1980s–1990s age of Colombian cocaine, was surely one of history's largest and most notorious illicit trades. We call them "cartels" as if to cover the glaring fact that trafficking organizations are highly competitive capitalistic networks and that drugs are very hot commodities. The sensationalism of illicit drugs now overshadows and even erases our sense of Latin

America's longer established role in the commerce of acceptable stimulant goods. The Organization of American States (OAS) estimates the hemispheric revenues in illegal drugs today at \$150 billion yearly, though precious little (less than one percent) of that ever reaches the impoverished peasant growers at the far end of the profit chain. And despite the hype about drugs, coffee still employs many more people across the Americas, in a trail from highland campesinos to Starbucks baristas at the mall. Still, the spiral of militarized and institutionalized drug wars set off by Richard Nixon in 1970, ratcheted up and extended across the Andes by Ronald Reagan during the mid-1980s crack scare, has, in most expert opinion, utterly failed to stem U.S. drug use. At most, it may have changed our drug mix and geographies over the decades, and not as intended. It mostly led to a swelling flood of cheaper drugs flowing invisibly across our borders as traffickers and growers constantly outwit prohibitions with greater cropping, shifting routes and grow plots, and ever more able and ingenious smuggling organizations. Despite billions thrown at the problem, there have been few if any policy successes—"Plan Colombia" after 2005, perhaps, at quite a cost to U.S. taxpayers and to the Colombian people.

There's plenty of grassroots "agency" at work here, an always trendy term with academics, but it's a stretch even for me to turn this decades-long drug exporting boom into a shining Latin American achievement. Yes, places like Medellín and Sinaloa displayed an extraordinary burst of entrepreneurial verve and creativity in a Catholic culture that at least traditionally is regarded by outsiders as low in business acumen. Drugs were a predominantly "Latin" trade, still in local hands, manned by ambitious, often rustic, yet modernizing newcomers. Money-laundered profits have refashioned the architectural facade and shopping malls of many Latin American cities, Miami included. Some rural towns or declining peasant districts may have survived on drug remittances and not a few national exchange rates have stayed afloat with recycled dollars. Some might celebrate a cultural explosion with drugs: "narcocorrido" musical combos (Wald 2001), sensually violent hit *telenovelas*, urbane "narco" crime novels, the cross-border influence on popular culture in *Miami Vice*, remakes of *Scarface*, Netflixed narcos and the cartel-accented black humor of *Weeds* and *Breaking Bad*. One could even suggest, in a strict Utilitarian calculus, that the thousands of drug-fueled parties and orgies in Hollywood, Wall Street, discos, suburban dens, blighted ghettos, and, increasingly, Brazilian clubs and favelas (or vaguer drug-inspired personal insight, creativity, or health gains) have spread more human happiness than

was offset by the misery of drug-related arrest, addiction, madness, user degradation, or prohibition violence.

However, these claims are dubious if not trivial compared to the untold destruction and scale of human suffering this permanent state of hemisphere war has wrought over the past four decades: the millions of Colombians displaced by hard-line drug eradication strategies, tens of thousands of Mexicans brutally tortured and murdered by cartel warfare and military repression since 2007 alone, the thousands of desperate Honduran kids fleeing drug gang violence now on our doorstep, environmental degradation of the marvelously biodiverse Andean tropics, destabilizing insurgencies, massive corruption, and, in a host of nations, a grave undermining of human rights, legitimacy, citizen security and trust, and perhaps even democratic futures. Not to mention our own costly post-1980 police-state roundup, in the name of a “drug-free America,” of millions of mostly poor disenfranchised black and Latino youth, making us disgracefully, as Michelle Alexander tells us, the most incarcerating democracy in the history of the world.

But here’s the paradox I’d like to end on: perhaps the notable new contribution of Latin America to global drugs has been to finally break their political silence and diversify the global debate about drugs. Until recently, Latin American oligarchs, fearing the undermining of values by illicit drugs, generally followed the hard-line U.S. doctrines. In fact, they served as a pillar of the inter-American drug war waged since the 1970s, though these guardian elites quietly griped that the real problem is the voracious U.S. demand for drugs. However, in 2008 a handful of eminent Latin American leaders in the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy (followed by a deeper and broader official 2013 OAS report) began to call on world leaders to fundamentally rethink the ways we control drugs (OAS 2013). Left and right, Latin American nations have entered this debate, Bolivia, Colombia, Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, among them. Our most devoted allies—the Colombian political and military caste that waged a decades-long fight against traffickers, guerrillas, and peasants on our behalf—now loudly voice concerns for sustainable policies in their recovery from drug war. Following deep-seated legalist traditions, South American supreme courts keep declaring drug possession laws unlawful infringements of liberty. Drugs like cannabis are quietly decriminalized as a drain on police resources across the hemisphere or in Uruguay’s case, and soon Jamaica, fully legalized by the democratic process (as in our own states of Colorado and Washington). Drug

sentencing is moving from punitive models, for example, in Ecuador, which with a decidedly Catholic flair has made the pardon of personal drug sin into a policy of national reconciliation. Bolivian peasant unions and nationalist politicians like Evo Morales have since 2006 successfully defied the DEA (which pulled out of the country) and the UN regime to uphold the cultural value of traditional coca leaf and to experiment with peaceful local policies to stop its processing into cocaine. The reasons for these shifts are no doubt complex but surely relate to how Latin Americans—witnessing from the front lines the disastrous violence and havoc in Mexico, and the latest wave of trafficking wars unfolding across a vulnerable Central America—have borne the destabilizing cost of the stubborn U.S. crusade to rid itself of drugs. Washington, with its historically Puritan “just say no” religion, is out of touch with these dilemmas and perhaps with a more flexible Latin culture itself. The debate also reflects the growing sovereignty of Latin American states, defying the United States on a key issue in ways unthinkable before or during the Cold War.

Europeans have a growing social democratic “harm reduction” version of drug reform, and in the United States we have our own brand of libertarian dissent to drug prohibition, at last catching fire around pot decriminalization and unjust racial sentencing. Some Latin American nations like Mexico and Peru, and often the popular classes, remain wary about drugs. But the drug reform movement in Latin America, should it continue, offers a possibly distinctive approach, focused on reducing the damage inflicted in plying and transiting drug commodities to the outside world, especially in much-needed programs of violence prevention. At the very least, it is shaking a pillar of a long hemispheric drug war. Moreover, the number of Latin American states joining this debate could have an impact on the larger UN drugs system, which is now being reshaped in meetings around the 2016 UNGASS reform of world drug conventions. Perhaps North Americans—who seem incapable on their own of ending their overseas drug wars and prohibitionist institutions—will be prodded along by outspoken Latin American reformers. It’s a new twist in the long saga of Latin American drugs, with their many contributions to world culture, their ironic worldly entanglements, and the changing meanings of drugs themselves.

Are there any lessons from this millennium of tangled drug histories? I think so. Mind drugs went from being the spiritual glue of close-knit communities to tools of priestly, militarist, and merchant power to expansive and addictive colonial and capitalist world goods and (under the duress of mod-

ern global prohibitions) to the savagely illicit, lean and mean commodities of today's world order. As we inch ourselves to drug reform, we might well ponder the historical error of commodifying the special powers of drugs. We might seek creative solutions beyond simply repackaging cannabis and other untamed drugs legally along the lines of Big Tobacco or Big Pharma. Ways that take us back, however imperfectly, to the peaceful and less commercial garden.

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NOTES

1. Winston LaBarre, "Old and New World Narcotics: A Statistical Question and Ethnological Reply," *Economic Botany* 24 (1970): 73–80. This pre-Columbian section is based largely on Dobkin del Rios, *Psychedelic Journey* (2009); and Schultes and Hoffman, *Plants of the Gods* (1992).
2. This discussion of colonialism and drugs draws liberally from Courtwright, *Forces of Habit* (2001); Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* (1992); and Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures* (2008).
3. Stimulant and export commodities of the age are examined in Topik, Marichal, and Frank, *From Silver to Cocaine* (2006); and Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine* (2008), chaps. 1 and 2.