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# RECOVERY AND RADICALISM



**A collection of collaborative writings  
on the topics of shared space,  
activism, recovery, addiction, and the  
history of drugs and power.**

(cover image by Carlie Johnson)

*Big thanks to Kameron Fein for the amazing writing and love you put into this. Thanks to Beth Payne, Megan Walline, and Andrew Conway for your tireless help editing and critiquing despite my consistent and silly mistakes. Thanks to Carlie Johnson for doing the amazing art! Thanks to Jamal for encouraging and inspiring me to start this. A lot of other people have supported this piece whether directly or indirectly. I hope it serves a need and addresses some of what folks were struggling with or thinking about. We are open to updating things as well if you, the reader, see something problematic or incorrect.*

This zine was written collaboratively by Emmi Bevensee and Kameron Fein and can be found in it's original format at <https://emmibe.wordpress.com/2016/05/21/recovery-and-radicalism/>

## RESOURCES

Anarchist literature:

<http://www.olywip.org/archive/page/article/2011/01/03.html>  
<http://hivhepcanarchist.tumblr.com/post/140862037962/the-revolution-will-not-be-sober-the-problem-with>  
[https://ia802605.us.archive.org/8/items/TowardsALessFuckedUpWorld\\_149/towards\\_a\\_less\\_fucked\\_up\\_world-SCREEN.pdf](https://ia802605.us.archive.org/8/items/TowardsALessFuckedUpWorld_149/towards_a_less_fucked_up_world-SCREEN.pdf)  
<http://anarchistnews.org/content/anarchist-recovery-group>  
<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/8742>

Colonization:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1446168/pdf/10705850.pdf>  
<http://archive.tobacco.org/History/colonialtobacco.html>

<https://www.thefix.com/content/native-american-sobriety-circles>  
<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19900106&slug=1049342>  
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-spoils-of-war-afghanistan-s-multibillion-dollar-heroin-trade/91>

**Drug Laws:**

opiates: [http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/opiates\\_outlawed.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/opiates_outlawed.htm)  
cocaine: [http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/negro\\_cocaine\\_fiends.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/negro_cocaine_fiends.htm)  
weed: [http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/history/conspiracy\\_toc.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/history/conspiracy_toc.htm)  
incarceration rates  
<http://www.drugpolicy.org/>  
<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p12ac.pdf>  
Nixon's domestic policy chief interview  
<https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>  
COINTELPRO info  
<http://whatreallyhappened.com/RANCHO/POLITICS/COINTELPRO/USDomCovOps1.html>

**Queer and Trans**

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/report/2012/03/09/11228/why-the-gay-and-transgender-population-experiences-higher-rates-of-substance-use/>

## CONCLUSION

Radicals and drug use have always existed in the undergrounds of society, often sharing space. The pain of marginalization has always sought an escape, and living in the cracks, drugs and alcohol have often been the self-soothing many needed in order to survive the pain of life. Even if not as a means of coping, many used drugs for self-exploration or just delight for the sake of delight. However, for so many of us that escape turned into our worst enemy, and worse, an enemy that we depended on. Our old lover, drugs, turned on us. For radicals who have used drugs addictively and are seeking to stop there are options available to escape from the vicious cycles and further enable us to better engage in our activism. These people will need community support. Quitting drugs is exceptionally difficult, painful, and also at times quite isolating. However, for radicals who use drugs and don't want to stop or don't feel like it's a problem, these people too deserve safety and protection from the police and prison system. As long as there is oppression there will be radicals. As long as we are human, we will seek various forms of pleasure, escape, or exploration through things such as drugs. These are realities that can be handled with nuance in order to make our radical communities and movements more inclusive for all who need and want them.

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## WHO ARE WE?

The writers of this piece are 2 people of different genders and sexualities coming from different places across the continental U.S., both involved in some way or another in a recovery process and radical activism. This is written in an attempt to point to a diverse range of experiences and thoughts from activists “in recovery” (whatever that means to the individual). We also hope that this can serve as a resource to other radicals, seeking or in recovery but confused by or facing difficulties in the process.

## STORIES

### Story 1: Emmi

There’s something that a lot of people don’t know about me. I am an addict, but I haven’t used drugs or alcohol for over five years. I know some people will assume familiarity with the language of “addiction” and that they know what I mean when I say that. But give me a chance before you jump.

I used drugs very heavily for about 4 years. I drank even longer. I loved drugs at first. I really did. I explored transcendence and used drugs to escape in difficult periods of my life as a young closeted transwoman. However, the coping mechanism stopped working. I stopped enjoying drugs but kept using them.... a lot. Eventually this all morphed like a nightmare into one of the darkest periods of my life. I gave up on everything and put everyone who loved me through hell. I had succumbed to a

Furthermore, the so called, “Big Book” of AA speaks specifically to the ability of sober alcoholics to be around alcohol on pages 101 to 102. It reads, “In our belief any scheme of combating alcoholism which proposes to shield the sick man from temptation is doomed to failure.” This basically means that we can no more completely avoid temptation in our recovery than we can live in a bubble excluded from all outside interactions. They then go on to say that the alcoholic can be safe in environments with temptation if s/he has “legitimate business” for being there and is not just trying to “steal a little vicarious pleasure from the atmosphere.” In final, they say on the matter that we just have to ensure that we are in “fit spiritual condition” and that if we are feeling shaky (such as we may be in early recovery or times of intense distress) we’d best avoid such spaces. This being said, there is still room for a space to be considerate of the needs of addicts and alcoholics such as agreements not to offer or much less ever pressure someone to drink who is trying not to.

On page 103 it then concludes by saying that it is not helpful to show hatred for people who drink or use drugs just because you are clean/sober. It goes on to say, “Every new alcoholic looks for this spirit among us and is immensely relieved when s/he finds that we are not witch burners.” A belief in agency and autonomy promotes an understanding of individual rights to choice such that those choices do not impinge upon the freedom of others. This means that although there is a tendency to moralize about alcohol and drug use this should not be our concern. Broad critiques can be useful in addition to specific calls out of behavior or patterns but just because we are clean, doesn’t mean we’re saints. We can in this regard focus on our individual recovery and cleaning our side of the street while respecting the dignity of ourselves and others with whom we may share space.



horrible mistake, but even if that happens (which we doubt) AA can't kick us out because we have, as the third tradition states, "A desire to stop drinking" and that is the only requirement.

## SAFER SPACES

It is a kind of anti-intellectualism and really just self-defeatism that says that we cannot make the needs of various different groups feel heard in our radical spaces. Of course we have people who use drugs and people who used to, but no longer do. There is stigma against both of these groups. The tone that many articles and conversations take is that these groups are mutually exclusive when, in my experience they are not. It just takes reasonable dialogue, respect, and at times, some concessions. For example, it's not generally the end of the world to ask people to only smoke pot outside so that it doesn't make the whole space smell like weed, or we can build agreements about not having hard drugs in the space in certain events. If the hard drug users feel like they need a safe space to use, and the space decision-makers want to provide that, then different times can be set up. People in early recovery can, if need be, only attend events with a sober buddy who stays with them at all times if there is alcohol present. There can be events that are specifically alcohol and drug free or that alcohol or drugs can be consumed before or after but not during the event. I do believe deeply however, in the importance of having some drug and alcohol free events, especially things like group decision making processes. That way they can be not only more clear-headed, but also accessible to those in recovery. These are not meant as universal rules, just examples of the kind of agreements that can be made.

particular thread of nihilism that justified and reinforced my apathetic misery and suicidal tendencies. I over-dosed and just switched addictions. I lost touch with consensus reality and just switched addictions in an attempt to get back on track. I tried everything to stop. I felt completely worthless and useless. At this point the drugs and alcohol didn't even make me feel better, I just needed them to survive. Which is ironic because they were visibly killing me.

I'm not going to go much more into the graphic details but suffice to say, by the end of my runs, I was living in the homeless youth shelter in San Francisco. I had bedbugs and lice at the same time. I ended a deeply loving relationship. I had just started taking hormones, and was just in the beginning of coming out as queer and trans. I was a hot fucking mess. I was super toxic in many ways, even though the gentle loving part of me that many people know now was still there, just buried and stifled. Needless to say, I was not involved in any activism. I was barely getting by in my own life.

I quit drugs, not to get clean, but just to get my shit together long enough to get out of the incredibly stressful environment of the homeless shelter. I started going to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings in an SF neighborhood drug ghetto called the Tenderloin. I was familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) from being pressured to get sober when I was younger. I resented the entire model and framework but felt basically like, if this doesn't work (and I don't expect it to), I can always just commit suicide.

In my first meeting I was shaking so violently and so terrified that I spilled my coffee all over the floor and made what I felt like was an impossible mess. They told me not to worry and someone came by and mopped up the mess. After the meeting I tried to run out the door as quickly as possible but some scraggly older man stopped me by the door and said "Where you running to, jets? What's your name?" I thought, "I know this game." Ready to tear him up and waiting for him to hit on

me I engaged with his conversation. It slowly became clear that he was not trying to get in my pants at all. He actually just wanted to know if I was okay. I wrote it off as a fluke but kept going to meetings regardless.

In that first week of recovery I came to a troubling realization. I had serious drug and alcohol problems, but that even they were just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what I was struggling with. I knew there was no chance for me unless I could stay clean somehow. I knew the ropes in 12-step so I got a sponsor, went to a bunch of AA and NA meetings, learned some catchphrases, started making some friends, and white-knuckled against my constant cravings and withdrawal symptoms. But as the days started to connect I began to get some clarity and realized that I actually wanted to stay clean, not just that I had to.

That's how my relationship with recovery really got off the ground. Since then I have blossomed and struggled in so many ways but I have maintained my relationship not just to my recovery but also to the 12-step rooms. I worked the steps with a sponsor and went to lots of meetings and it truly changed my life. Don't worry this isn't going to be some advertising campaign for AA. I'm not that person. I have mixed feelings about AA and NA style recovery and always have, but I've also been able to take what I need and leave the rest.

After maybe 6 months of recovery I began to get involved in political thought and action again in my own small way. This began a relationship that has been nourished and sustained by my sobriety even though it was almost killed by my use. This nascent thread of activism ultimately became a huge source of community and hope that helped me to stay clean and hang onto life in some of my darkest moments since quitting use. It wasn't always a graceful process.

When I first came into the rooms I identified as pretty agnostic but was willing to believe in god if it could keep me off drugs. I

for a case study in scaling up anarchist federations even as some of the structural changes that happened in order to deal with the massive size were more hierarchical than originally intended. While there are definite issues with that system of having a sort of "mothership" it is one of the more horizontally formed power structures in any large scale 501c3 today, connecting groups across the world.

### **Tradition Eleven and this Piece**

The final tradition of direct relevance to this article is tradition 11 which states that, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

The first part of this means that we should never be a proselytizing organization. We shouldn't go around trying to recruit people. Which is why, in terms of this article, we are just sharing our experiences rather than preaching. This second part goes into how we should not advertise for ourselves in trying to speak for the twelve step programs as a whole. Obviously, this article falls under the purview of the second half of this tradition that states that, "we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." We have chosen our path in dealing with this thoughtfully. For one, we are not speaking for AA or other 12 step programs as a whole, we are simply sharing our experiences. Secondly, though it may be seen as loopholing, this tradition speaks nothing of the internet which again is symbolic to the failure of AA at revisionism and updating it's antiquated texts. So in this sense, writing this piece is also a resistance to that failure. Airing our dirty and clean laundry a bit is an open-sourcing of information and questioning of tradition very much in line with modern anarchist thought and practice. Some may say that we shouldn't have written this piece, and maybe we will someday realize that we made a

practically is, at times, a stifling environment for political activists in meetings (you learn workarounds though), but also a situation where members are not supposed to preach about their personal religious or political beliefs in a meeting. After the meeting of course, is another story.

The second tradition reads, “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” Although quite religious and Judeo-Christian in tone, this tradition functions as a method of preventing too much power from arising in any one member. That no AA member can govern and are only ever in service, is something of an anarcho model especially in light of the fact that group conscience defeats individual desire in the AA structure. Of course it has some room for manipulation in terms of what “God’s will” is. In general the result of group conscience is considered to be “God’s will” which is still effectively a democratic process.

In tradition six, 12 step programs refuse to become part of any corporations or “outside enterprises” which prevents a corporate control of AA, while tradition seven further prevents outside influence by refusing grants or other funding sources in favor of self-sufficiency. Tradition seven goes on to discourage professionalization in keeping with the informal attitude desired by 12 step fellowships. This tradition is extended in tradition eight which says, “A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve” which although oddly worded in terms of “never being organized,” mimics the committees and affinity groups present in many anarchist organizations especially in that these groups are “directly responsible to those they serve.” This, in an ideal sense, means that it should be a bottom up power structure, which in some ways, 12 step programs have succeeded in doing. Their success across international borders can be used

really gave that whole god thing my all. I spent the next three years on and off trying to find a version or sentiment or phrasing of god with which I could feel comfortable. Eventually, though, I found solace and relief in giving up that search and directing my energy towards radicalism in its etymological sense—that of ‘seeking roots’ or ‘root causes’. I recognize of course, that for many people the search for god is intrinsic to their search for root causes. For me, though, finding my comfort as an atheist was invaluable to my well-being as a recovering addict and as an activist. After I came to peace with my own atheism and political beliefs, it became easier to be comfortable with myself in the rooms of AA and NA. From there my politics and activism just continue to deepen over the years as I prove myself to be a trustworthy companion in radical struggle. The principles I’ve learned in recovery help me to be a reliable member of radical communities while the communities themselves give me the strength to keep pushing myself and to stay clean.

## **Story 2: Kameron**

I started getting high when I was 11. Weed was my first experience. I remember the feeling of that first time very vividly and the relief I was granted from my typical mindset. I remember up to this point there being some wall of disconnect between me and the people I surrounded myself with. I remember being in a room full of people that I could intellectually understand loved me, but not being able to feel that love. For this getting high served a fantastic purpose. I slowly started finding different substances I could use to alter my mindset. When I was fifteen I discovered opiates. They were the most effective thing for me to numb everything and cover up this feeling of inadequacy I carried around since as long as I can remember. Heroin always appealed to me for some reason, even when I was younger. All of my favorite musicians had been junkies and I somehow came to a conclusion that if I

was too then I would be a great musician. I found ways to justify my use regardless of how unsound they seem in retrospect.

At some point in time, it is hard to tell exactly when, heroin stopped fixing the problem. I would get high and still want to die. I felt lost and betrayed by the one thing I had always thought would fix everything. I was at this point where I couldn't really imagine my life with heroin, but I couldn't quite picture life without it either. I tried so many ways to get sober. I tried for a really long time, but it always seemed to become a reasonable choice to relapse. Sometimes it felt like desperation that brought me back to it and sometimes it was this furtive self-manipulation that ended with me getting high.

By then, it wasn't really sobriety I was after. I saw sobriety as a necessary step towards the goal I actually sought, internal peace. I wanted not to lay down to go to sleep and stay up for hours because my mind was flooding with every fucked up thing I had ever done, with every failed relationship I had been in, with every bridge I had burned. I wanted not to be in the state of mind where death seemed so appealing but the fear of dying was just as strong. I wanted to be able to live up to the ideals I had in my brain of what was right and wrong, and I wanted to be able to care about people again. I wanted to be able to look the world in the eye.

The last time I was in rehab someone showed up and started talking to me about what being an addict meant to him. Externally I couldn't relate to any of his experiences, but internally it seemed he had experienced the same struggle as me word for word. I decided to go with him to an AA meeting when I got out and he ended up being my first sponsor. I have a lot of mixed feelings about AA, but I used the 12 steps to get to a point of emotional stability. For my own particular journey I found a way to navigate the program while maintaining my agnostic views on spirituality and religion.

12-Step umbrella. Decisions that affect every meeting in a certain area are spread between all of the meetings affected so that everyone has a say in what happens. Decisions that affect AA as a whole are passed to area groups who then pass it down to individual meetings who are then able to have input on the matters that affect them

The “third tradition” of AA groups suggests that, “the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.” What this means is that no one can get kicked out of AA for who they are or what they believe even if they can get banned from specific meetings for inappropriate conduct or the like. This tradition is imperative to the quiet, but present, anti-prejudice values within 12 step communities. In the early days of AA in the 1930's there were some groups that wanted AA to become a white, straight, and Christian only organization, but it was through the third tradition that Bill Wilson and other founding members refused to shut the door on anyone desiring to stay clean. There is a somewhat lesser known story about a black transwoman (or drag queen... unknown) who came into a fairly conservative meeting in the early days. The people who ran the meeting wrote to Bill and the core members asking what to do with this drunken person, so different from themselves. Bill and the other members responded with one question, “Is he [possibly sic] an alcoholic?” The group responded, “Of that we are sure.” Bill volleyed back that, “Then you must help him [sic].” These traditions and practices all have resonance with anarchist values in that, although definitely understated and deserving of greater focus and practice, AA does hold anti-racist, anti-homophobic, etc. beliefs written into the core practices, despite being formed in the 1930's.

Through these types of early tensions AA came to the decision of the “10th tradition” that “Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.” What this means



something they were unable to do for themselves. In terms of the patriarchal language, it's pretty straightforward to just not say that shit, and one can ignore it to an extent. Of course there will be dogmatists in the meetings, but if you understand the principles and traditions of 12 step programs it's pretty easy to call them out or to just ignore the dogma and listen only to the people whose truth resonates with you. In some of our experiences with sponsees we try simply to nurture whatever it is that the sponsee actually believes in, rather than forcing our belief system or one that is normatively accepted in AA. For those of us that do believe in God, this process is definitely easier and requires less mental translation. To be clear though, if you are already a radical considering 12 step programs, you probably will have no problem bypassing dogma and creating a space for yourself.

The fourth step and subsequent steps are mostly just about unlearning our bad habits and being accountable for our wrongdoing, which is pretty straightforward human shit and falls in line with anarchist thought as well.

## **The 12 Traditions and Anarchism**

The 12 Traditions are the suggested procedures for groups and 12 step fellowships as a whole. The process of horizontalism in 12 step programs is maintained, in part, through the "fourth tradition" that states, "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole." This value towards autonomy, also highly in-line with anarchist values, allows individual groups to express and practice autonomy in, for example, their methods of self-governance and style of meeting. What this means is that even groups such as anarchist or atheist/agnostic specific meetings, although contradictory to some precepts offered in the "Twelve and Twelve," are still technically protected under the

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **What Are Drugs?**

For the sake of this essay, 'drugs' refers to a variety of chemicals used to induce altered states of consciousness, with an explicit focus on narcotics and alcohol. Alcohol is considered a drug in this essay in that it functions similarly and has high and brutal forms of addiction. Although things like marijuana and cigarettes, or addictive behaviors such as overeating, gambling, or risky sex are not covered extensively in this essay, if they are problematic for the individual, the information contained here may still be useful.

### **What the Hell is an Addict?**

The word addict has a ton of baggage. It bears the weight of the racist war on drugs coupled with the debate about whether addiction is appropriately categorized/pathologized as a medical condition or "disease". We recognize that those, and other related concepts are connotations when we use the word. It's frustrating to us to explain that we use it differently. We don't entirely buy into the 'disease' model prevalent in some recovery communities but we also understand its merit in the sense that, in general, addicts need non-enabling help and appropriate medical assistance, not the punishment of the prison-industrial complex models. It also has to do with the fact that many people who quit using drugs addictively and start again later, often return to their former level of addictive use and then go much farther into the darkness they survived.

We are not unilaterally against drug-use. Generally speaking, we are in favor of decriminalization and destigmatization efforts (although many serious issues have come up with the former). We believe that drugs can be used responsibly, spiritually,

recreationally, and therapeutically; they just don't work that way for everyone. So when pro-drug use activists hand-wave the phenomena of addiction in an un-nuanced glorification of drug use more generally, we can't help but roll our eyes. Anyone who has ever struggled with addiction or lost friends and family to it knows first-hand the utter destruction addiction can cause. The word 'addiction' however problematic, points to a real phenomena.

With all of this in mind, we use the word addiction not just to describe a cycle of continuous, entrenched, and destructive habits that begin to control a person's life, but also in the sense of recovery, where many of the aspects of addiction, such as dedication or sensitivity, that caused us such grief, can eventually become huge assets.

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It's hard to grasp the true nature of addiction from the outside due to varying opinions and experiences. We classify it as a form of neurodivergence. What that means, basically, is that the brain functions differently in a significant way from what is societally considered "normal". The ongoing debates of whether or not addiction is a disease is largely semantic. The impression being given when one hears that it is not a disease is that addiction is an absence of willpower. The implication here is that the person suffering from addiction is making a complete informed decision to use a substance to the point of self-destruction.

When you start looking into what psychologists mean when they say it is not a disease, however, a different picture is painted. A [study](#) by Neil Levy, published in the *Frontiers In Psychiatry* in 2013, argued that it was not a disease because neural dysfunction was not sufficient for impairment. According to Levy, it would have to be consistently an issue and not something with a trigger. There is, however,

is good reason for this, and yet a nuanced understanding of these steps entails a different reading. The first three steps are as follows:

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

In terms of step 1, many object to the usage of "powerless" as removing of agency. However, it should be distinguished from "helpless" in the sense that "powerless" is here more pointing to our inability to deal with the problem in a sustainable way without help, as anyone who has struggled with addiction will surely understand. Alternatively, "helpless" in this context would mean there is nothing we can do at all. Powerless implies we need help, but have choices.

Step 2 and 3 are criticized, along with a couple other steps, for their focus on "god" or a "higher power" and referring to it with male pronouns. While we agree that this languaging is problematic and non-inclusive in some ways of diverse experiences of belief and atheism, we have also found our own ways to work with them despite our diverse positionings. For example, for an atheist or agnostic, "higher power" can simply refer to a trusted and tight knit community of our peers, including our sponsor, who are invested in our well being. This is not meant to be a form of commune or collective worship, but rather a recognition that we can gain strength and wisdom through the community support often found through the 12 steps. Of course, there is a tendency in 12 step to over-idealize group mind but in practice there is a very "take what you can and leave the rest" type of attitude. In this respect many simply refer to GOD as Group Of Drunks, acknowledging that the group has helped them to do

In general though, the most important thing about being in recovery through 12 Steps is remembering that you are welcome, as you are, even if some other demagogues in the rooms try to make you feel unwelcome as a result of their insecurity. Twelve step programs, despite their internal norms, have room for anyone; just sometimes you have to make that room for yourself. But, by making a space for yourself, you widen the path for someone like you who comes after. Whatever seat you sit in is your fucking seat. No one can take it from you. The great thing about the third tradition (“The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop (whatever it is depending on which program)”), is that no one can kick you out for being who you are.

## **The 12 Steps and Anarchism**

The 12 Steps, of the title 12 step programs, are a process that people in recovery undertake in order to improve their life and get at the underlying causes of their addictions or problematic behaviors. There are a lot of overlaps between principles in the 12 step community and anarchism. For one, we are taught in the rooms to be accountable, both to ourselves and to others through working the twelve steps (especially steps 4, 5, and 10). We are expected to attempt to make amends (steps 8, 9, and 10) when we harm others and correct our behaviors that caused the harm in the first place. This emulates a rudimentary form of restorative justice and going through “accountability” in anarchist communities. We are taught principles that align with the anarchist concept of mutual aid. We help each other to help ourselves. We build intentional communities.

The first through third steps of AA and similar programs are the ones most often critiqued by activists and radicals. There

acknowledgement that there is neural dysfunction involved. He sums up the premise of differentiation with this statement:

“Stroke, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer’s disease cause significant defects of rationality and agency in almost any environment; though it might be possible to imagine environments in which some of these conditions did not cause impairment, such environments are not genuinely accessible (the costs of maintaining them would be prohibitive, to begin with). Addiction differs from paradigm brain diseases in that its correlates do not cause impairment across all, or nearly, accessible environments. For some conditions that cause suffering, neural correlates are sufficient to cause an impairment and for some they are not; only those which fit into the former class count as brain diseases. Addiction fits into the latter class because, with the possible exception of some deficits that are likely relatively minor (such as somewhat impaired self-control mechanisms), addiction only causes impairments in certain social environments, and social environments in which addiction would not cause any significant impairment are accessible.”

We don’t fully agree that these environments are entirely accessible to everyone, but we understand the basic delineation that is being made. There are reprieves from the negative affects of addiction, just as there are reprieves from GAD, BPD, PTSD, etc. The effects of a disease are more consistently debilitating.

Another study (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3785104/>) done by the State University of New York in 2004 on neural mapping in the offspring of alcoholics found what they considered to be sufficient evidence of a neurological marker for alcoholism. This marker was decreased P3 amplitudes, which basically means the section of the brain relating to inhibition produces significantly less brain waves than average.

“This reduction in P3 amplitude is not only observed in alcoholism, but for a spectrum of disinhibitory disorders, such as conduct disorder (CD), attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD). In recent years, alcohol/drug dependence is considered to be part of the disinhibitory/externalizing spectrum as these disorders co-exist in their clinical presentation, and share similar electrophysiological indices. Further, it has been suggested that the production of P3, irrespective of the task and modality, is associated with widespread cortical inhibition, and hence the low P3 amplitude would indicate a state of disinhibition. Genetically mediated CNS disinhibition as indexed by such electrophysiological anomalies formed the core of the model for alcoholism as proposed by Begleiter and Porjesz (1999).”

Causes of addiction are vast and have been linked to:

trauma :

555 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12033>

environmental factors

10 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/37781>

epigenetics

049 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21205>

What addiction was like in a condensed way was that when we were sober, we would find some way to convince ourselves to get high, regardless of the situation we were in or the potential consequences. When we got high we were not always able to control our intake. No matter how much we bought, or how many days we intended it to last, the time it took to do it all stayed the same.

personal experience and thoughts only.)

There is much to critique and much to love about 12 step programs. There are solid critiques such as ableist language around ‘sanity’, pathologizing disease models, Judeo-Christian god focus, dogmatism, the 501c3 model, and failure to acknowledge the importance of reformism and update core texts (with such embarrassing chapters as “To Wives” and “We agnostics”). Each of these critiques has validity that is offset in part by the reality of how they are dealt with even by non-radical members and additionally must be balanced with the strongly positive qualities that we’ve found “in the rooms.”

## Strategies

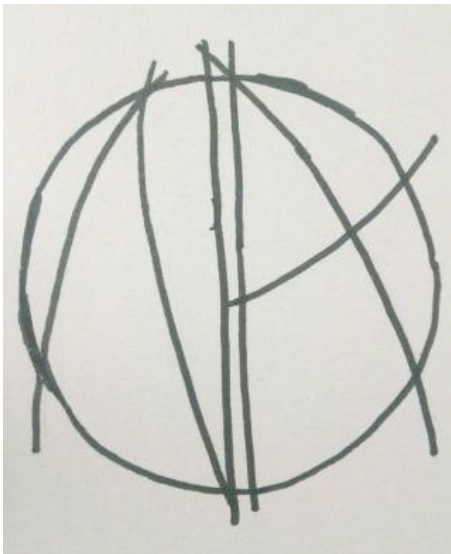
The critiques against 12 step programs are substantial and important. We do not shy away from the problems. Yet at the same time, for those of us writing this, 12 step was the only effective option we found– and we tried everything else. Although an anarchist community could probably create a more inclusive and radical form of AA and 12 steps, it has not yet done so with enough traction to supercede the resource provided by the international network of 12 step members.

What we all had to do was honor our personal grievances and critiques with the program, stand by them, and yet still access the incredibly useful tools and community that can be found in the rooms. There are small forms of resistance that some of us have chosen such as refusing to say Him in reference to god or refusing to say god at all and only referring to a higher power. There are also larger forms of resistance that some of us have done such as forming anarchist meetings using the twelve step structure but without a sole focus on a Judeo-Christian and patriarchal god model and allowing greater degrees of discussion of political activism in meetings.



70's Christiania dealt with numerous overdoses and began to approach dealers and people using hard drugs and gave them an opportunity to partake in rehab or leave the community. This process of state self-justification is not entirely different from the rationale that Assad, George Bush, and now leaders in France used to justify their dominance and ongoing abuses. They use the notion of a "state of exception" based on a perceived, created, or invented threat to justify further breaches of basic rights and secure their own legitimacy. Drugs, drug users, and armed drug gangs have time and time again been these scapegoats. So while there are underlying issues of power, many autonomy or resistance movements have sought to undermine drug and alcohol use/trafficking as part of a larger strategy.

## TWELVE STEP PROGRAMS



(We do not speak for 12 Step programs as a whole. This is our

We feel it is important to view this under the umbrella of neurodivergence and that a more compassionate response to addiction be enacted.

## What the Hell is Recovery?

Recovery is a process of transcending the vicious cycles associated with addiction to mood-altering substances or behaviors. Recovery also extends beyond the cessation of use or abuse of these addictions and into the realm of confronting the deeper causes that led to our coping mechanisms becoming so problematic in our lives. Through this work many of us find issues related to trauma, hypersensitivity, environmental stressors, issues of upbringing, or poor coping abilities as more root causes that led us to turn to our addictions of choice. Recovery is addressing and transforming the multi-determined causes of our destructive behavior and thought patterns. As recovery is a process of getting at the roots of dysfunction, it can be considered radical in the etymological sense of the word.

**radical** (adj.) late 14c., in a medieval philosophical sense, from Late Latin *radicalis* "of or having roots," from Latin *radix* (genitive *radicis*) "root" (see *radish*). Meaning "going to the origin, essential" is from 1650s. (etymonline.com)

*Be like the Radish!*

## DRUG USE

### Drug Use and Activism

We understand that many people see drug use as revolutionary.

In ways it could be. But for us, it was not. It removed us from the fray entirely. We know many people organize and do activism while high or in the periods when they are still using. If they can do that and not hurt anyone, more power to them. We could not. We were almost entirely self absorbed in our search for a fix. There was an overwhelming sense of apathy that came with active addiction that prevented us from putting forth an effort towards organizing. Our days were spent finding ways to get money so we could get high and that kept most of us out of the loop of what was going on around us regarding politics. It took some of us a period of sobriety for our thinking to even out enough to the point where we could get involved with projects and actions. Some of us utilized organizing to get sober in the first place.

Getting involved in activist work it became apparent that organizing encompassed a lot of the things that we needed to maintain sobriety. It also fit better with our ideals of how to go about these things. We had accountability for our actions. We had “service work” that was rooted in mutual aid and solidarity, rather than building up this savior complex so many people fall into. We found community with people we held affinity with. We learned again, what it meant to be part of a community in terms of the responsibilities, rights, and benefits. This learning served the ways in which we approach activism and our activist communities.

Additionally, many of us found great strength and support for our recovery through our organizing and activism. Our work in recovery supported our stability which aided the efficacy of our activism and our activism in turn gave us hope and meaning to keep pushing on in the difficult task of changing our lives. Furthermore, when addicted to a substance, the range of our possible choices in any given moment are limited so it follows that for those with destructive habits of consumption, breaking free can literally be enhancing our range of agency and degrees of freedom, which is itself a form of activism, albeit individualized.

established with rules against drug peddling within their membership. They weren’t staunchly opposed to intoxication, but during things like weapon training and such they wouldn’t allow intoxicated people to participate. It isn’t super clear how long those rules lasted during the course of the BPP’s existence, but they were effective in maintaining responsibility and accountability within the membership. Another worthy note is that the BPP founded and maintained drug and alcohol detox centers and inpatient rehabs that were free to the community of which they were a part.

The American Indian Movement (AIM) also took an anti-drug stance in their early days and many of the individual chapters still have a strong opinion on drug use within indigenous communities. The devastation and destruction of various indigenous communities in the U.S has been attributed to disproportionately high rates of alcoholism and drug addiction. The links between colonization and these statistics are a huge reason for the stance AIM took. Since the seventies they have lead various marches to bring exposure to this issue as well as to work towards solutions.

Many anarchist communities have had difficulties keeping levels of violence down due to drug trafficking and have come to a the conclusion they must eliminate this issue from their communities entirely. Exarcheia in Greece and Christiania in Denmark are two examples. Both communities have been in an ongoing battle against local governments for the legitimacy of their autonomy and, on top of the violence, both found the drug trafficking issue to be one that gave these local governments a tactical advantage in infiltration. Greece sent in drug dealing informants and allowed drug mafias to enter the area without being arrested. The mafias were violent and sexually assaulted members of the community and eventually stabbed 3 people who confronted them. Near 1000 of the residents banded together in militia form to remove the police informants and mafia presence from the community. In the

One of the members of this group writing this piece had the humbling honor of being able to live for a short time in the Zapatista autonomous zones, in the jungles of South Western Chiapas, Mexico. This member participated on two separate occasions in “encuentros” or encounters in the autonomous zones including participating in the “Escuelitas por Libertad y Justicia.” In these experiences she was able to see, first-hand, the effects of a society in opposition to hard drug and alcohol usage. In a country where so much of the violence directed at indigenous people is related to the government and drug trade relationships, the Zapatistas made their pueblos drug and smuggler free. Although there is occasional pot-usage and tobacco, alcohol is also banned from the Zapatista revolutionary “territories.” This is, in part, because like in the United States much of the pacification of radical indigenous movements is created through rampant alcoholism as a result of trauma and systematic lack of social supports and resources.

However, when someone is found with a substance that they collectively agreed not to have in the autonomous zones, they are not punished through a punitive system. There are no prisons. They use something resembling restorative justice wherein people who break the collective agreements are required to perform a form of community service aimed at reconnecting them to their community, healing whatever harms they had experienced, and giving them the skills needed to live a sustainable life. For example, a coyote, or smuggler caught trying to cross through Zapatista territories in the Caracole de La Realidad, was assigned to an 8-month carpentry apprenticeship making things for the Zapatistas for free. All of his needs were met during this time even though he was not a Zapatista. When he was finally sent back to Guatemala he had a new skill-set that gave him the option of leaving his high-risk job.

The Black Panthers, as another example, had originally been

## **Inebriation and Sexual Assault in Radical Communities**

Sexual assault is a huge problem in radical communities. This cannot be understated. So often we fail to hold our leaders accountable, we ignore our survivors, or we participate in a culture of disposability of everyone involved. What ends up happening is that if an incident of violence ever even reaches group discussion, it divides the community into factions: those that side with the survivor, those that don't believe the survivor or side with the accused, those trying to stay neutral but in effect failing to make a stand, those for complete ostracization or retaliatory violence, those for no punishment, those for more restorative justice style approaches etc. We've seen countless movements and collectives actually be completely destroyed by this in-fighting. While we don't claim to have all the answers to this problem, it is clear that, aside from larger structural issues of rape culture, patriarchy, and the like there are also huge issues of consent. Consent, while incredibly simple in some sense is also quite difficult in other ways because people can be confused about our own desires, they can change rapidly, etc. While we do not deny that it is possible to share consent while intoxicated, statistics show that sexual assaults are far more likely under the influence. This is not that surprising considering that many substances, alcohol especially, make the delicacy and nuance of explicit consent processes more difficult. While there are of course cases

wherein a perpetrator intentionally assaults a victim, there is also the phenomena of poor consent practices turning into someone experiencing a violation of boundaries. It follows that a combination of strong consent practice and sobriety is the safest way to ensure the communication necessary to hot, enjoyable, and consensual sex.

## Drugs and Colonialism

Most historical studies show a pretty clear distinction between precolonial usage of mind-altering substances and postcolonial use. Most documented use prior to Europeans' appearance in North America revolved around enlightenment, rites of passage, healing, and preparation for war. This was predominantly done in a ritualistic way rather than recreational. Even among the initial introduction of European alcohols there was a short period of time where abuse wasn't something that occurred. I specify European alcohols because it is a misconception that there were no fermented beverages in precolonial times (see balche, tiswin, and pulche to name a few). Eventually alcohol became the main source of trade and European settlers encouraged heavy drinking within tribes in the area they traded with. The encouragement emulates modern day drug dealers giving away or reducing prices of addictive substance in an effort to get their customers hooked and dependant upon them. Records from this time show a huge jump in consistent binge drinking and violence within tribal communities. The demand became so high for alcohol that trading for it, in a lot of cases, became economically devastating. This pacification made it easier for settlers to colonize areas and either move or kill off entire communities. These situations were not seen in every part of North America and a lot of communities actively resisted consuming or trading for alcohol. Many tribes that did imbibe in alcohol learned the behaviors of excessive drinking and violence from settlers they were trading with. It is difficult to separate the success of colonization from the introduction of alcohol.

Tobacco was a major tool of colonization as well. Originally used as a ritual herb in various cultures, it was co-opted by European settlers and was used to justify various land grabs in early colonization. The increasing demand for tobacco

scenes. What differs drastically about radical and fascist groups such as these is the reasons and methods for opposing drug use. Many white supremacist groups will sell drugs into black and brown neighborhoods but not allow their inner ranks to use those drugs in explicit attempts to undermine the stability and survival of communities of color. A radical community that is also anti-drug counters this with an inclusive anti-marginalization rationale that sees survival as a form of resistance for all marginalized people, rather than an imagined endangered white race.



<http://www.durt.de/2011/LatinAmericanPhilosophy.html> "The council of good government strictly prohibits....the consumption of drugs and alcohol..."



Most of us found that the feelings we were trying to run from were eventually exacerbated by drugs. Many turned to drugs and alcohol as a social lubricant to escape that intense feeling of loneliness only to find ourselves eventually pushing out everyone who cared about us. We used drugs to cover up the feelings of shame that were ingrained in us from not fitting into the ideal model of person in our communities, only to eventually feel ashamed of the means we utilized to obtain our next high. These are not universal experiences, but for a lot of people who self identify as an addict they are highly relatable.

There was a time when getting high alleviated all of the heavy things we carry around with us, but the shine wore off eventually, which is why we decided to get sober. Getting high no longer masked the feelings of inadequacy. This is one of the main reasons the arguments regarding therapeutic benefits should not be taken as a universal fact. While these things can have a practical use, they are not a valid option for people prone to abuse them. While many people may be able to use successfully without negative effects, there are those of us who aren't and the duality of that is something that needs to be considered when advocating recreational drug use as therapeutic.

### **Revolutionary Groups Against Drug Use**

Many radical and revolutionary groups have historically been specifically against drug use and had their own critiques of drug and/or alcohol usage. It is not without note that many groups such as white-supremacists and National Socialist/Neo-Nazi groups have also been against drug use in an attempt to "keep the race pure." This can be seen as having strong overlap with the hate-edge (completely different from straight-edge which is generally radical not fascist) groups prevalent in some hardcore and punk music

also increased demand for slave labor. In the mid to late 1700s Indigenous and African slaves were brought to these farms in higher numbers than had previously been seen and caused a major boom the slave trade industry. The estimated increase in African slaves was a jump from 100,000 people to over 1 million.

Mutual aid based communities for alcoholics have been present in indigenous cultures for longer than the communities that are typically attributed with creating them. There were sobriety circles created by indigenous tribes throughout the country as far back as the 1750's. For the last 40 years there have been handfults of large marches to help make sobriety movements in indigenous communities more visible. Even with the efforts to spread sobriety, the effects of early colonization and the introduction of toxic drinking habits are still clearly visible in the disproportionate levels of alcoholism and alcohol related deaths.

One of the most infamous examples of the relationship between drugs and colonialism took place in the Opium wars between Britain and China in the mid-19th century. These wars were fought with the explicit intention of superseding Chinese sovereignty in an attempt to open up ports and give special privileges to British merchants. A key goal of these battles was to secure access to Opium and override Chinese laws banning the sale of Opium. This was both an attempt to secure their own supplies and undermine the strength and isolationism of the Qing dynasty. After extensive gruesome conquest, Britain was also ceded Hong Kong and China was forced to pay extensive "compensations" and fix tariff rates in order to help the British empire pay back it's many debts accrued in the colonies. In simple terms, Britain needed money and drugs so they robbed China and then set up an extortion situation that forced China to keep giving them the money and drugs they wanted indefinitely.

In a not entirely different situation (except this time oil was also on the table), the US invasion of Afghanistan resulted in a massive supply of Heroin and pharmaceutical opiate fundamentals to the tune of billions of dollars. This contains multiple levels of irony in that one of the US “goals” in Afghanistan was to “destroy the opium trade” as it was a primary source of income to the Taliban. However, through the course of the war, the production more than tripled with the peasant farmers themselves generally making hardly a subsistence wage and the majority of the money going to traffickers, refiners, and international distributors. One researcher went as far as to say, “Heroin is a multibillion dollar business supported by powerful interests, which requires a steady and secure commodity flow. One of the “hidden” objectives of the war was precisely to restore the CIA sponsored drug trade to its historical levels and exert direct control over the drug routes.” So, much as was discussed in the drugs and capitalism section, colonial conquest, in now a neocolonial form, was utilized to secure control over both the black market drugs themselves and the processes that surround them. Controlling drug flow is a powerful tool of geopolitical politicking that has scarcely been missed by an empire in history. All of this had roots in the US geopolitical wars against the Russians in which they utilized the drug trade to support the same mujahideen fighters that eventually turned against them. The same author from above recounts, “As revealed in the Iran-Contra and Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI) scandals, CIA covert operations in support of the Afghan Mujahideen had been funded through the laundering of drug money. “Dirty money” was recycled –through a number of banking institutions (in the Middle East) as well as through anonymous CIA shell companies–, into “covert money,” used to finance various insurgent groups during the Soviet-Afghan war, and its aftermath”. Heroin trafficking became a primary source of at-a-distance colonial control of the war for influence in South-Asia that ultimately morphed into an

turned away at hospitals and rehabs much as happened in the AIDS epidemic. A significant portion of non-state rehabilitation centers are run by churches or religious groups. Salvation Army, for instance, refuses to allow queer and trans folk into their facilities. Discrimination can also be found heavily in employment opportunities, housing opportunities, and basic social scenarios. This isn’t too much different from a lot of marginalized communities, but due to the fact that it is still legal in places in the U.S. it happens at a fairly high rate. It can also be added that a lot of alcohol and cigarette marketing gets aimed towards exploitation of queer club scenes. We cited earlier that some of the causes of addiction were environmental and trauma related so the connection of these things to high rates of drug use are not unfounded. It is estimated that 20-30% of queer and trans people use drugs compared to 9% of the general population.

### **Therapeutic Arguments for Drug Use**

First off, we are not questioning the responsible usage of prescribed medications or herbal supplements to treat and deal with mental illness, intolerable pain, and the like. This is of course a necessary part of many people thriving. We are simply looking at people who abuse their medications or other drugs in a way that causes harm to themselves and others. While of course drugs and alcohol are often used in order to help people exist as a traumatized and marginalized human being, there is also a kind of deep enabling that can happen within our communities: “It’s okay you’re destroying yourself and everyone around you... it’s cuz yr oppressed.” While this is true, if someone’s drug or alcohol use has become problematic rather than “therapeutic” there should be space ready for them should they choose to make changes to their life.

found in the FBI's program COINTELPRO. They used supposed tips that certain groups had drugs to raid houses and alternative newspapers to gain entry and destroy equipment such as typewriters, cameras, printing presses, layout equipment, business records, and research files. They planted drugs and arrested people on bogus trumped up charges. They sent anonymous tips to gangs dealing drugs to pit them against each other and make them easier to infiltrate. They even used these "tips" to disrupt groups that were against drugs, such as the Black Panther Party, as a way to turn members against each other. In 1994 John Ehrlichman, Nixon's domestic policy chief, told news reporter Dan Baum that the drug war, which Nixon started in 1971, had everything to do with pacifying both anti-war and black movements. Baum only recently released the article, but quoted Ehrlichman saying "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

Another thing worthy of note is that drug abuse is found in significantly higher frequencies in queer and trans folks. This is best attributed to the stress levels and frequency of traumatic events that happens to these individuals in particular. As a queer and trans person it is often very hard even to date or make friends in sober environments because drug use has so flooded queer spaces. In the gay community there was a strong correlation between drug-use and the spread of HIV especially in the peak years of the virus' destruction. It is still common for queer and trans people to be

unwinnable war between the U.S. and it's own puppet military forces.

## Drugs and Capitalism

There is a notion that because one buys drugs illegally that it is somehow anti-capitalist. This is bullshit. Just because illicit activities are not included in the GDP of a nation does not mean that they are not a part of the national economy or that they are somehow subverting it. This can be proven even in obvious ways without even resorting to conspiracy theories: drug use plays into the formal economy through, for example, the prison and policing industrial complex (PIC). Every single thing in a prison or with a cop is built by a cottage industry usually at exorbitant prices. Each of these suppliers has a monopoly through deals and lobbying with the prisons (private and public) or police departments. Cops and governments have always made money from and manipulated the illegal economies. That is a fact of capitalism. Drug lords and governments often depend on each other even as they are bitter enemies. This is of course not to say that drug users are to blame for the vicious cycle of commodification and enslavement of (mostly black and brown but also poor white and trans) bodies through the school-to-prison drug pipeline. It is saying we have the chance to opt-out (*in some ways*) and not play that fucking game by not using drugs and by protecting those that are having trouble escaping that world from the fucked up police system. Of course some people have few other available options available than to sell drugs and engage in sex work in order to survive. Although these should not be understood as lesser forms of work than any other, they do face certain distinct risks as a result of stigmatization and criminalization. Those of us who don't have that struggle (currently) can help participate in harm reduction and cop watch with greater degrees of impunity.

In this complex power theater many leftists and radicals have come to side with drug rings and large gangs as legitimate anti-statist actors. However, given the example of many drug-supported gangs in Mexico, Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia, or Lebanon, we can see that given the chance, gangs may become just as brutal, capitalist, and hierarchical as the state in the territories they control. It is of course true that gangs such as these often provide invaluable resources to communities that the state has devastated and that to the extent they challenge state hegemony they are doing a kind of good work, but a reactionary approach that fails to see the damage of large scale methamphetamine, crack, or heroin usage in poor communities or the often grotesque violence that accompanies that power trade, in favor of approving carte blanche for “non-state” actors is also a grossly incomplete analysis. We can find more nuanced and less oppressive forms of anti-statist resistance and community based support.

### **Drug Use in Marginalized Communities**

The criminalization of many drugs has connections to or direct roots in racism. The legalities of marijuana, for instance, had a lot to do with lobbying done by paper companies who saw hemp as a dangerous competitor. In court trying to argue why weed should be illegal they are reported to have made the claim that weed was the reason why black men went after white women. This seemed to be enough of a motivator. The first US law on record directed at opiates specifically was passed in 1875 and targeted opium dens in San Francisco. The argument that got that law passed—Chinese men were seducing white women in opium dens. This was obviously done in an attempt to specifically target and impoverish Chinese people. In an article written against cocaine in 1914 it was claimed to make black people crazy

and kill white people. By the 1970s and 1980s coke was predominantly found in white neighborhoods and the government was intentionally flooding poor black neighborhoods with the cheaper offshoot of cocaine — crack. Laws were passed that caused crack to have a mandatory minimum sentence equal to ten times the sentence for the same amount of coke. Nearly the same justification was given as when coke was made illegal: it made black people violent. This again, was clearly just coded racist language used to cover up that despite the fact that the war on drugs was only in its infancy it had already become a tool for reinforcing the Jim Crow era policies on an emergent neoliberal landscape.

Today there are a lot more calls for compassionate responses rather than punitive ones. You can draw a direct line from heroin being discovered in white middle class homes to new legislation requiring officers to have Narcan shots, and other laws passing regarding filing no criminal charges when people call for help with overdoses. While racism regarding drug laws is becoming more furtive, it is still clearly there. You can see it within our statistics of incarceration rates. While black people make up roughly 14% of drug users (roughly the same percentage of black people in the U.S.), they make up 37% of those arrested for drugs, and 45% of those incarcerated for those drug charges. This means they are more likely to be searched, they are more likely to be charged if things are found, and the sentences passed down are higher than their white counterparts with the same charges. These numbers are especially problematic considering the fact that 50% of our prison population are drug offenders. This is coupled with the striking failures and unequal application of NYC’s “Stop and Frisk” policies on black, brown, and transgender communities.

More evidence of racism piggybacking off drug laws can be