

Before the DEA there was the FBN

Anslinger's Army

The Strength of the Wolf by Douglas Valentine, Verso, 2004

The Strength of the Pack by Douglas Valentine, TrineDay, 2009

Drug Warriors and Their Prey by Richard Miller, Praeger, 1996

By Tom O'Connell, MD

In *The Strength of the Wolf* and its sequel, *The Strength of the Pack*, Douglas Valentine has written a two-volume history of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. The FBN was established as a branch of the Treasury Department in 1930. It provided employment for agents who had previously been enforcing alcohol prohibition. The FBN disbanded in 1968, making way for the Drug Enforcement Administration (a branch of the Justice Department).



HARRY ANSLINGER, director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, at a photo-op c. 1933.

For more than three decades the FBN director was Harry Anslinger, who led the “reefer madness” campaign that culminated in Congress passing the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, i.e. imposing federal prohibition. There is evidence that Anslinger was “only following orders” from the Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon (whose niece the ambitious young Anslinger had married).

Many Americans look at our crumbling infrastructure and empty treasury and ask, “Why must we be the cops of the world?” The CIA arranged for a fall-back answer long ago: to enforce drug prohibition treaties.

The *Strength of the Wolf*, unfortunately, does not shed light on which high-level decision makers masterminded marijuana prohibition. Nor does the author challenge the intrinsic legitimacy of drug prohibition.

Valentine's interest in the FBN began in 1968 when research for a book about CIA activities in Viet Nam led him to a cluster of former FBN agents willing to reminisce. His strength lies in providing the agent's-eye view of an expanding government bureaucracy.

Without Valentine's interest and diligent research, we'd have almost no record at all because academic historians and biographers have displayed so little unbiased interest in the drug war's origins.

The CIA, as Valentine documents meticulously in *Strength of the Pack*, has had the dominant role in American drug policy since 1947. United Nations treaties pushed through by the U.S. — with

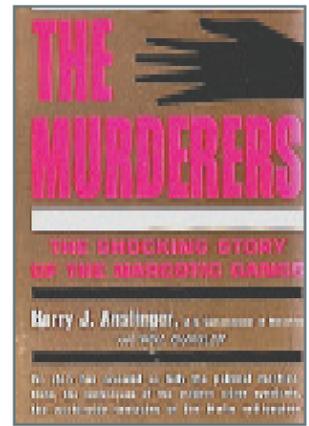
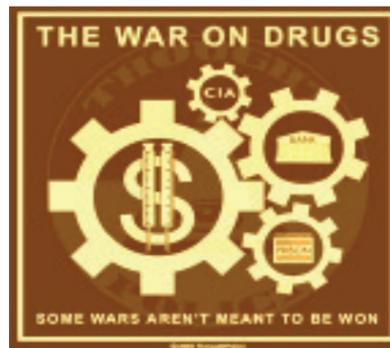
Anslinger playing an active diplomatic role! — now obligate 195 nations to outlaw cannabis except for medical use. “Our” obligation to enforce these treaties provides an excuse for the U.S. to maintain military bases and armed forces worldwide.

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the world?” The CIA arranged for a fall-back answer long ago: to enforce drug prohibition treaties.

Richard Lawrence Miller, like Valentine, is a non-academic historian whose area of special interest is not drug policy. His previous book, *Nazi Justiz, Law of the Holocaust*, was published in 1995, and research for it and *Drug Warriors and Their Prey* must have overlapped. Both are studies of the techniques by which minorities can be made into scapegoats, targets of mob fear and hatred, and then transformed into enemies of the state and “legitimate” targets for destruction by law enforcement.

What Miller makes chillingly clear in *Justiz* is that the transformation of Germany from an orderly society into a criminal nation was meticulously “legal.” National Socialism was imposed under color of law by the legal profession itself. In the United States, where 2.3 million people are behind bars, the process has been more leisurely and less murderous.



The Murderers: The Shocking Story of the Narcotics Gangs by Harry J. Anslinger and Will Oursler; Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1961

The Trouble With Harry

“A flaxen-haired 18-year old girl sprawled nude and unconscious on a Harlem tenement floor after selling herself to a collection of customers throughout the afternoon, in exchange for a heroin shot in her arm...”

That racist image — almost pathological in its prurience — is one Harry Anslinger provides at the start of “*The Murderers*” to exemplify the evil of drugs.

What's noteworthy is not that Anslinger is a racist sicko — that was evident in the 1930s — but that he was still the U.S. Commissioner of Narcotics (a title proudly displayed on the book jacket) under President John F. Kennedy in 1961.

In '61 Anslinger scored a political triumph as significant as the marijuana prohibition of 1937: the United Nations adopted the “Single Convention” on drugs, which he had been pushing for years. This treaty obligated the rest of the world to adopt the U.S. approach — crop eradication and severe criminal penalties for producers and distributors of cannabis (coca, opium, etc.).

Co-author Will Oursler was a hack writer who specialized in “inspirational” books.

Our Original ‘Drug Czar’

By Fred Gardner

America's original Drug Czar, Harry Anslinger, was born in 1892, the eighth of nine children. He grew up in Western Pennsylvania. His mother was from Baden, Germany, his father from Switzerland.

His father couldn't make a living as a barber and went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was then one of the most powerful corporations in the US. As a teenager Harry suffered a detached retina in a rumble of some kind — he got hit with a pear someone threw — and lost vision in one eye. He went to school part-time and worked for the railroad, which assigned him to do security work.

As a young investigator Anslinger helped win a big case for the railroad and was promoted to chief inspector. He took two years of business classes at Penn State. He occasionally played the piano at silent-movie theaters (around 1914-15) His mother had hoped he'd be a concert pianist.

When the U.S. entered World War One Anslinger volunteered for the army but was ruled ineligible because of his eye injury. He became an officer in the Ordnance Reserve Corps and was rapidly promoted. He applied to and was accepted (with letters of recommendation from the Pennsylvania Railroad) by the U.S. State Department. He became

an attaché in the American Legation (the classic cover for spies) at the Hague. He spoke perfect German and good French and picked up Dutch quickly. He was involved in several undercover missions. (Henry Kissinger would also owe his career to speaking German and getting assigned to Army Intelligence.)

Anslinger claimed that he insinuated his way into Kaiser Wilhelm's entourage and delivered an important message advising that the U.S. did not want him to abdicate at the end of the war because it might lead to the Social Democrats coming to power. (The Kaiser did step down, however.)

In 1921-22 Anslinger was posted by the consular service to Hamburg. He married the former Martha Denniston, a niece (said to be the favorite niece) of Andrew Mellon, the Pittsburgh banker who became Secretary of the Treasury in 1921. Martha had a 12-year-old son from a previous marriage.

Anslinger's next posting was to a beautiful port city in Venezuela, La Guaira (which lies at the foot of a sheer, tropical mountain and along a crescent-shaped beach). Anslinger hated it, according to his biographer, John Williams, and bombarded the State Dept. with letters requesting a transfer. He was transferred to Nassau, where his career as a Prohibitionist took off.



HARRY ANSLINGER

Consul Anslinger urged the British to crack down on the Bahamians running liquor to the U.S. At a conference in London he recounted seeing ships leaving Nassau loaded with whiskey and returning empty. The Brits agreed to a protocol — ships going in and out of Nassau harbor would have to show paperwork — that became known as the “Anslinger Accord.”

Andrew Mellon requested that Anslinger be transferred to Treasury so that he could make similar arrangements with Canada, France, and Cuba. Anslinger became chief of the Prohibition Unit's Division of Foreign Control (anti-smuggling). He attended conferences in London and Paris, and conducted inspections in Vancouver, Nova Scotia, Antwerp, Havana.

In 1929 Anslinger was made Assis-

tant Commissioner of Prohibition. He ardently believed that prohibition could be enforced if Congress would amend make it a crime to buy alcohol. (Only manufacture, sales and transportation had been Prohibited.) Under Anslinger's Draconian proposal, a second conviction would carry a mandatory minimum two years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

In 1930 Congress created a Federal Bureau of Narcotics (also part of the Treasury Dept. but separate from the Prohibition Bureau). The top contender to run the FBN, Levi Nutt, got embroiled in a scandal involving his son taking money from Arnold Rothstein, the infamous gambler. Mellon named Anslinger Acting Commissioner.

Harry then organized a lobbying campaign to get the job permanently. He had the backing of railroad magnates, William Randolph Hearst, the National Association of Retail Druggists, and the AMA. (One Senator had questioned whether the job called for someone with a medical background. He arranged a meeting with Anslinger. Harry arranged for a major bust — a million dollar's worth of opium — the day before that meeting. The skeptical senator was so impressed he inserted the *Washington Herald* story of the bust into the Congressional Record.) Anslinger was appointed Narcotics Commissioner by Herbert Hoover in September, 1930, at the age of 38.