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Ethan Nadelmann
Executive Director
Drug Policy Alliance
70 West 36th St., 16th floor
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Dear Ethan,

I write to nominate Professor Harry G. Levine for the 2007 Lindesmith Award for scholarship in the service of drug policy reform.

Harry Levine has a remarkable scholarly record – particularly for an avowed “high school screw-up” (a tribe I know well). He managed to gain admission to Brandeis University and to work closely there with two eminent social theorists, Professors Lewis Coser and Philip Slater, both of whom wanted to make his senior thesis on utopian communities into a book. Upon graduation, Harry worked as a civil rights activist in the South in the War on Poverty. He then won a highly coveted, full fellowship to the Sociology Graduate Program at Berkeley, then the top-ranked sociology program in the world. Despite the high regard in which the program was held by professional sociologists, Harry found it an awful place in which to do serious sociological work. He meandered a bit, including a year in India, but by accident fell into a true community of scholars at the Alcohol Research Group, attached to Berkeley’s School of Public Health. There he won a prestigious doctoral fellowship from the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse. At this point Harry embarked on a major line of research that ultimately became his PhD dissertation, *Demon of the Middle Class: Alcohol, Self-Control, and the Culture of Temperance in 19th-Century America*. This work still ranks with only Joseph Gusfield’s classic, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*, as the definitive work on the history of the alcohol problem in the U.S.

Harry has a habit of asking questions no one else asks. Sometimes this merely disturbs the conversations of his closest friends, but more often it disturbs the fundamental philosophical premises and cognitive categories in terms of which society understands itself. He sought to figure out when exactly people first spoke of “addiction” and why. When he delved into the Temperance movement literature (the genre of substance scapegoating deployed in all subsequent drug scares), Harry wanted to know why anyone would actually believe the crazy claims made by anti-drink religious fanatics, how such palpable nonsense could actually make sense at the time. His analysis spelled out the basic conditions under which alcohol was transformed from a widely consumed and highly valued beverage which even Puritan

preachers called “the Good Creature of God” in the 1600s and 1700s, to the demon “destroyer” drink became in the 19th century. He showed how the affinity between pleasure-renouncing Protestant preachers and worker-disciplining industrial capitalists led to this jarring rupture with 2,000 year-old Bacchanalian traditions that problematized a drug for the first time in U.S. history. This stands as the foundation of critical scholarly work showing how social understandings of drugs and their effects are cultural constructions – systems of discourse that have less to do with molecular effects than with moral entrepreneurs, less to do with biology than with culture and social structure.

Harry has done such foundational scholarship from the very start of his career. It seems to be the only kind of work he knows how to do. In 1978, part of his dissertation was published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, the top journal in the field, as the now-classic “The Discovery of Addiction.” This article won the Mark Keller Award for the most significant “scientific contribution through excellence in research and innovative thinking” on drinking published that year. This one article has sparked dozens of other articles, books, and papers, and is broadly understood and cited as one of the key pillars of social constructionist scholarship in the drug field.

Harry went on to extend this work and to publish about such topics as why women were so central to the Temperance Crusade; the role of the power elite in both passing and repealing Prohibition; the contingent nature of presumed link between intoxication and disinhibition; the lexicon of drunkenness; the characteristics of temperance cultures in Scandinavian and the English-speaking world; and what the history of alcohol prohibition has to tell us about the future of drug prohibition.

His more recent work includes several book chapters and articles and the co-authored (with me) book, *Crack In America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice*, listed by the University of California Press as one of its “best sellers” and widely reviewed, cited, and assigned in college classes. At present Harry is finishing up a major new research project that exposes both the rise in marijuana arrests and the disproportionate share of them being made on young African Americans. This work will be a major resource in local struggles for racial justice in criminal justice as well as to change police policy toward marijuana possession in the U.S.

Harry Levine’s scholarship has been published in the *British Journal of Addiction*, the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, the *Journal of Drug Issues*, *Addiction*, *Contemporary Drug Problems*, *Milbank Quarterly*, *Independent Review*, *Social Justice*, and the *International Journal of Drug Policy*, which devoted a special issue to discussion of his article analyzing drug prohibition as a global system and the prospects for changing it within the UN treaties. (According to Reed Elsevier Publishers, this article was one of the top 10 “most downloaded” articles published in the journal.) All of this work is critically engaged with drug policy issues, brilliantly argued, and written in jargon-free, crystalline prose.

Quite aside from the sheer quantity of scholarly research Harry Levine has produced, there are other indicators of its quality and influence. His work has been translated into Finnish, Swedish, German, and Russian. It has been widely anthologized, for example, in Bayer and Oppenheimer’s *Confronting Drug Policy: Illicit Drugs in a Free Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); in Bollinger’s *De-Americanizing Drug Policy* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994); in Jefferson Fish’s *How to Legalize Drugs* (Aronson, 1996); in Joel Best’s *Images of Issues: Contemporary Perspectives on Social Problems* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1989; 1998); in numerous editions of Newman’s *Sociology Readings: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* (Pine Forge Press, 2000-06); in Crutchfield et al.’s *Crime and Society* (Pine

Forge Press, 1995, 2000); and in Loseke and Best's *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings* (Aldine de Gruyter, 2003).

Beyond these scientific and scholarly venues, Levine has published numerous reviews and essays that bring critical scholarship about drug problems and drug policy to popular audiences. These include articles in *The Nation*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, *New York Newsday*, *The Village Voice*, Bill Moyers' PBS series, *Addiction*, and *Contexts* magazine. And under this heading I would also list his own website, www.hereinstead.com, through which several thousand people have connected to critical scholarship on drug prohibition.

Harry Levine has been tireless in personally presenting the drug policy reform message. For 25 years he has taught a course on the Sociology of Drugs to undergraduates at Queens College, which has recognized him as a "Master Teacher." Queens College doesn't have graduate students, but graduate students seem to find their way to Harry anyway: for example, Daniel Hood who studied the politics of drug treatment and Chris Fried who studies the formation of the field of addiction medicine from CUNY Graduate Center; Canadian and Finnish PhD students who base their work on Harry's stuff and who flew him in to be their external interlocutor, robes and all; and a postdoctoral fellow from the Czech Republic who moved to New York and apprenticed himself to Harry in 2006-7. Beyond students, Harry has rarely missed an opportunity to give a talk or present a paper. He has been actively engaged in presenting scientific evidence about drug policy to professional organizations such as the American Sociological Association and the Society for the Study of Social Problems. He has organized panels and/or presented at nearly every DPF and DPA conference for twenty years.

In devoting his life to critical scholarship showing not just that repressive drug wars are crazy but why so many people imagine them to be sane, Harry Levine is our Michel Foucault. While there are other scholars who have done vital work for drug policy reform, no one's work is more in the sociological spirit and the clear and fearless style of Alfred Lindesmith than Harry Levine's. A century from now, when a historian writes about the barbarism that marched under the banner of prohibition, she will surely cite Levine along with Lindesmith as among the intellectual giants on whose shoulders drug policy reform activists stood.

Sincerely yours,

Craig Reinerman
Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies