

High Society

Mind-Altering Drugs in History and Culture

Mike Jay

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Every society is a high society. Every day, people drink coffee on European terraces and kava in Pacific villages; sniff cocaine in American suburbs and petrol in Aborigine slums; chew betel nut in Indonesian markets and coca leaf on Andean mountainsides; smoke *ya'aba* in Thai nightclubs and tobacco in every nation on earth.

Mike Jay's fascinating history of mind-altering drugs encompasses the culture of drug use around the world. Early evidence of intoxication can be found in archaeological sites to the botanicals of the classical world. The 18th century saw the first synthetic drugs when nitrous oxide or 'laughing gas' was discovered, and found Romantic writers eager to join in the experiments. By the late 19th century, high street pharmacies were a cornucopia of drugs with cocaine, opium and cannabis represented on the shelves.

World trade began to expand when drugs replaced the lure of spices as the most desirable cargo. The British forced the Chinese to open their ports to opium, but in the 20th century came the backlash, beginning with the American government's disastrous prohibition of alcohol policy.

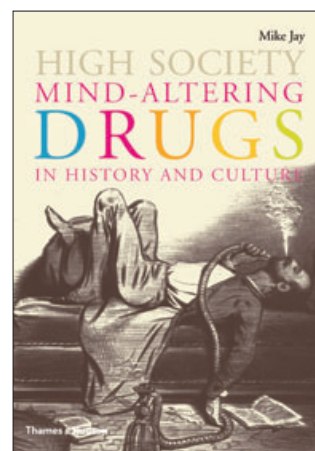
The consumer boom of the 1960s saw a mass demand for banned drugs. The world's markets were more open than ever and a curious younger generation awakened to the pleasures of hashish smoking, LSD and benzedrine pills. Today the advances in psychotropic medicine have opened the possibility of drugs that not merely make patients well, but better than well.

With the illicit drug trade estimated by the UN at \$320 billion USD a year, there is no doubt that prohibited or regulated, drugs will continue to drive the global economy of the future.

HIGH SOCIETY is published at the same time as the Wellcome Collection's exhibition (11 November - February 2010) of the same name, and features rarely seen illustrations drawn from their archive.

Author

Mike Jay is a critically acclaimed cultural historian and curator who has written widely on drugs and drug use around the world. Among his other books are *Artificial Paradises*, *Emperors of Dreams* and *The Atmosphere of Heaven*.



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