

Isn't it time to repeal the war on drugs

Written by William Reed
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Why do Black Americans allow the war on drugs unfair toll on people of color to continue? Instead of putting a stop to the racial disparities and arrests, prosecutions, imprisonments, and lack of rehabilitation programs, Blacks have unknowingly allowed the status quo to continue in their communities.

In the 40 years since Richard Nixon declared the war on drugs, that war has cost over \$1 trillion. It has wrought the largest prison population in the world. There are 1.6 million adults in state and federal prisons around the country, and many experts believe the costs now vastly outweigh the benefits. More than half a million of the people incarcerated are there for drug law violations.

Drug arrests have swelled since the 1970s and African Americans make up a disproportionate percentage of those arrested. Blacks make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population and about the same percentage of all U.S. drug users, but they account for more than 35 percent of all drug arrests. They also represent 55 percent of all convictions for drug possession and 74 percent of all people imprisoned for drug possession. Additionally, sentences imposed on Black people in the federal system tend to be about 10 percent longer than those given to White people convicted of the same crime.

The outrageous disparity between the sentences meted out for possession of crack cocaine and those given for possession of powder cocaine is a disparity that has helped fill U.S. prisons with Blacks who are low-level drug users (80 percent of sentenced crack defendants are Black).

High numbers of Black Americans' arrests and possession charges show that although the majority of U.S. drug users are White, African Americans are the largest group being targeted as the root of the problem. There is cause for alarm. For Black Americans to allow ongoing incarceration of disproportionately high numbers of us breeds our overall destruction. The problem goes beyond those arrested and sentenced. The war on drugs has destroyed Black families and created the norm that Black children grow up in single parent homes with their fathers and mothers away in prison for long periods of time.

While our Black American leadership fiddles along with partisan politics, the future of our race is at risk. African-American children are over-represented in juvenile hall and family court cases, and as a result, they are removed from their families in droves, and placed in the federal system. While those Blacks who are politically active in Main Street issues are stuck on Main Street, the high incarceration rate of Black fathers and mothers has led to the point where millions of Black families lack a parental figure. One in every 15 African Americans is incarcerated. African-American youth are highly involved in gangs to generate income for families lacking a primary breadwinner.

Isn't it time we eliminated the racial disparities evident in our nation's criminal justice policies and practices? When will we wake up? Who among us can deny that the war on drugs has enabled the police to target African-American communities with high levels of surveillance and invasion of privacy rights? It's imperative we have criminal justice reform. It's time African Americans get off the wrong side of the drug trade. The facts are overwhelming: The global drug trade ranks as one of the top 20 economies in the world. The U.N. estimates the global

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illegal drug trade being worth more than \$320 billion.

Let's be about the business of repealing genocidal drug laws and regulations. Legalizing and taxing many types of drug sales would yield U.S. governments \$46.7 billion in revenue. Legalizing drugs would save \$41 billion a year in enforcement costs. We can't continue failing strategies. Rather than continuing on the disastrous path of the war on drugs, we need to look at what works and what doesn't. Are there any people dedicated enough to support a real and focused movement for racial justice in America?

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