

# Three Good Reasons Why People of Color Should Question the Drug Legalization Movement

Drug laws may be draconian, but to use examples of abuse is rather easy. Such is old rhetorical sleight of hand. There are three good reasons for people of color to question the drug legalization movement.

## 1.) Drug legalization does not change the nature of policing.

There are problems with budgets and prisons. No one disputes this issue. A pathological obsession with mandating long sentences and death penalties in the U.S. has reached unmanageable proportions. For people of color, however, the issue is not merely out-of-control drug policy, but a racist criminal justice system few are simply willing to say is racist and needs immediate redress as a whole.

Every advocacy argument implies by omission that liberalizing drug laws will end overpolicing, racial profiling and institutional violence. Law enforcement has been guilty of atrocious behavior during the drug war. Yet does anyone in a community of color sincerely believe police will not abuse people of color, railroad us or continue to treat people of color like criminals because someone can smoke pot or shoot heroin without legal sanction?

Drug legalization advocates, by failing to address the epidemic of police violence as a whole visited on communities of color, live in an illusion if they believe other justifications won't be created.

## 2.) Drug legalization movements avoid larger problems faced by people of color.

The drug-law process is broken, but, as profound as the criminalization may be, people of color face institutional problems far more deep, including the criminal justice system itself.

Disenfranchisement of people of color is on display in many instances. Issues such as economics are creating an "ethnic recession" for people of color, while health care, legislation or not, is a crisis for people of color. Globalization is decimating the Third World, and what U.S. companies and comprador elements have wrought there — lack of opportunities and migration as a result — is appearing in immigration fights

The problem with drug legalization for people of color is such a movement is a single-issue matter and, like most single-issue stuff, is intended to get a large number of people to stand with its cause,

without much consideration to the realities potential supporters face.

## 3.) The impact of drug legalization on poor communities of color needs to be openly debated.

Drug legalization seeks to normalize a relationship with capitalism, one in which working people are sold this idea that they can 'make it' in this society by swallowing the rugged individualist mythology.

In a capitalist framework, those with the money and resources — in the case of drug legalization, most assuredly Big Pharma or whatever industry moves first — can swing the campaign donations, lobbyists, advertising and favorable regulations to ensure they and they alone maintain hegemony over an industry while those without the resources can be criminalized and swept aside. We see this today in every market, from alcohol to medicinal treatments. That means economically disadvantaged people of color will remain an incarcerated underclass and those with power, generally white, will not face the same sanction, while the streets of communities of color face another flood of marketing and unnecessary products.

By Ernesto Aguilar

