

End The Violence—Re-Legalize Drugs



Atlanta has once again been named the most violent city in America. Murders and robberies are staples of our daily news.

I'm sick of it. Aren't you?

I'm sick of seeing innocent young children gunned down in drive-by shootings. Sick of reading about families who live in constant terror of gangs, drug dealers, and violent criminals. Sick of kids selling drugs, and kids murdering other kids.

And I'm almost as sick of the phony election-year "solutions" politicians are hollering for: more prisons and more concentration camp-like "boot camps;" longer prison sentences for even casual drug users; and further cutbacks on our vanishing Bill of Rights freedoms.

Such "solutions" won't work. That's because they don't address the **major cause of murder and violent crime in Atlanta and the rest of America:** the War on Drugs.

Politicians claim the War on Drugs is supposed to protect us. But here's what this War is **really** doing to you and me and our families:

■ **The War on Drugs is the leading cause of robberies, burglaries and thefts in America.** Outlawing drugs doesn't get rid of drugs. It just drives their production and sale into an illegal, underground black market. Prices are vastly higher in this black market. Heroin, for example, costs perhaps 50-100 times what it might cost if it were legal. This means that addicts — driven by an insatiable desire for heroin — must commit crimes to get money to pay for their habits.

Researchers estimate that a huge percentage — quite possibly the large majority — of robberies and burglaries and thefts are committed by drug addicts stealing to pay

jacked-up black market prices for their drugs. If drugs were legal, a fix would cost about the same as a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of booze. Addicts would no longer have to steal to buy their drugs. That would halt most of their robberies. After all, when did you ever hear of a nicotine addict or an alcoholic breaking into houses to feed their habits?

Furthermore, the Drug War ties up tremendous amounts of law enforcement and prison resources. If the Drug War was ended, those resources could be used to fight other property crime.

■ **The Drug War causes up to half of the murders in America.** In the black market, gangs fight one another to gain control of the dope business. They settle disputes with guns. They kill informants, competitors, rivals, cops, and drug users who fall out of favor. They also kill innocent bystanders. Drug users committing robberies to pay for drugs sometimes kill their victims.

The total carnage is incredible. Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman estimates that as many as 10,000 of the 20,000 homicides committed in America each year are due in this way to the War on Drugs.

That's 10,000 people murdered each year — all because of **drug prohibition**. Such figures are necessarily estimates. But even if Dr. Friedman is only half right, ending the Drug War would cut our murder rate by a fourth or more.

This shouldn't be surprising. The exact same thing happened when America outlawed alcohol in the 1920's. Gangs sprang up overnight to supply booze, and violence skyrocketed. Drive-by shootings became

commonplace.

Eventually Americans woke up and repealed Prohibition. Surprise: the violence vanished, too. When was the last time you saw Kroger and Magic Mart blazing away with AK-47's to try and dominate the booze trade?

■ **The huge profits from illegal drugs are the lifeblood of gangs and organized crime.** If you want to see gang violence continue to grow, just keep drugs illegal.

■ **The Drug War encourages kids to use and sell drugs.** Drug pushers use children as look-outs, money carriers, and sellers because kids, when arrested, get off easy in the juvenile court system. The lure of big money also encourages kids to sell dope instead of staying in school and working at lower paying, legitimate jobs. Gang pressure also forces kids into the drug underworld.

The War on Drugs creates an environment in our inner city that virtually dooms many kids before they've even gotten a start.

* * *

Drugs — including marijuana, heroin and cocaine — were perfectly legal in America from 1776 until 1914. And we experienced none of the problems described above.

Drug prohibition, like alcohol prohibition, is an experiment that has failed miserably. It just puts money, guns, and power into the hands of the most ruthless and vicious elements in our society.

It's time to get serious about stopping violence and murder. It's time to re-legalize drugs. ■

—James W. Harris