



End the Drug War, Save Black America

by **John Stossel** ([more by this author](#))

Posted 03/16/2011 ET

Updated 03/16/2011 ET

One key to getting past the race issue in America is to end the [war on drugs](#). John McWhorter says it's the most important thing we could do.

Cato's Letter features a lecture by McWhorter in which he calls for an end to the war on drugs. (It's really a war on certain people.) McWhorter, the former Berkeley linguistics professor and now senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, specifically indicts the war on drugs for "destroying black America." McWhorter, by the way, is black.

The "main obstacle(s) to getting black America past the illusion that racism is still a defining factor in America" are, he says, "the strained relationship between young black men and police forces" and the "massive number of black men in prison."

And what accounts for this? Prohibition.

"Therefore, if the [War on Drugs](#) were terminated, the main factor keeping race-based resentment a core element in the American social fabric would no longer exist. America would be a better place for all."

McWhorter sees prohibition as *the* saboteur of black families. "It has become a norm for black children to grow up in single-parent homes, their fathers away in prison for long spells and barely knowing them. In poor and working-class black America, a man and a woman raising their children together is, of all things, an unusual sight. The [War on Drugs](#) plays a large part in this."

He also blames the black market created by prohibition for diverting young black men from the normal workforce. "Because the illegality of drugs keeps the prices high," he says, "there are high salaries to be made in selling them. This makes selling drugs a standing tempting alternative to seeking lower-paying legal employment."

This has devastating consequences. The attractive illegal livelihood relieves men of the need to develop skills that would provide stable legal incomes. To those who argue that there's a shortage of jobs for black men, he says that is refuted by the black immigrants who thrive in America. "It is often said that because immigrants have a unique initiative or 'pluck' in relocating to the United States in the first place, it is unfair to compare black Americans to them. However, the [War on Drugs](#) has made it impossible to see whether black Americans would exhibit such 'pluck' themselves if drug selling were not a tempting alternative."

One poisonous byproduct of prohibition and the black market, McWhorter says, is that going to prison is a now "badge of honor." "To black men involved in the drug trade, enduring prison time, regarded as an unjust punishment for merely selling people something they want (with some justification), is seen as a badge of strength: The ex-con is a hero rather than someone who went the wrong way." This attitude did not exist before drug prohibition.

Would cheaper and freely available drugs bring their own catastrophe? McWhorter says no.

"Fears of an addiction epidemic are unfounded. None such has occurred in Portugal, where the drug war has been significantly scaled back." How about damage to the culture?

"Our discomfort with the idea of heroin available at drugstores is similar to that of a [Prohibitionist](#) shuddering at the thought of bourbon available at the corner store. We'll get over it."

He enumerates the positive results from ending prohibition.

"No more gang wars over turf, no more kids shooting each other over sneakers. ... (P)eople who don't sell drugs for a living don't much need to kill each other over turf. ... (T)he men get jobs, as they did in the old days, even in the worst ghettos, because they have to."

To the majority who say that there are better and less risky ways to address the troubles of young men in black America, McWhorter replies:

"(T)he question we must ask is: What do you suggest? ... Community centers? Take a look at the track record on that. Or is it that we have to try a lot of things all at the same time? Well, what else have we been doing for 40 years, and where are we now?"

[John Stossel](#) is host of "Stossel" on the Fox Business Network. He's the author of "Give Me a Break" and of "Myth, Lies, and Downright Stupidity." To find out more about John Stossel, visit his site at johnstossel.com.

[Advertise](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#)
Copyright © 2011HUMAN EVENTS. All Rights Reserved.