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An eye-opening remark from a former aide to President Richard Nixon pulls back the curtain on the true motivation of the United States war on drugs.

John Ehrlichman, who served 18 months in prison for his central role in the Watergate scandal, was Nixon's chief domestic advisor when the President announced the "WAR ON DRUGS" in 1971.

The administration cited a high death toll and the negative social impacts of drugs to justify expanding federal drug control agencies. Doing so set the scene for decades of socially and economically disastrous policies.

Journalist Dan Baum wrote in the April cover story of Harper's about how he interviewed Ehrlichman in 1994 while working on a book about drug prohibition. Ehrlichman provided some shockingly honest insight into the motives behind the drug war. From Harper's.

"You want to know what this was really about?" he asked with the bluntness of a man who, after public disgrace and a stretch in federal prison, had little left to protect. "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the anti-war left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about drugs? Of course we did."

In other words, the intense racial targeting that's become synonymous with the drug war wasn't an unintended side effect — it was the whole point.

Quote from Baum's "Legalize It All," Harper's April 2016 issue.