

BLACK People, Enemies

Journalist Den Baum wrote in the April cover story of Harper's about how he interviewed, in 1994, John Ehrlichman, who was President Richard Nixon's chief domestic advisor when the President announced the "WAR ON DRUGS" in 1971.

Ehrlichman provide the following shockingly honest insight into the motives behind the war on drugs:

"You want to know what this was really all about?" he asked with the bluntness of a man who, after public disgrace and a stretch in Federal Prison for his central role in the Watergate scandal;

"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 the 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.

from Baum's "Legalize It All" cover story for Harper's April 2016 issue.