

Drug Prohibition Quotes

Compiled by Barb and Charlie Asher

1. "Prohibition is an attempted cure that makes matters worse—for both the addict and the rest of us." — Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate in Economics
2. "We're fighting the crusade for a drug-free America." — Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States
3. "The entire American media apparatus bought into the drug war . . . and there wasn't enough critical reporting about it." — David Talbot, journalist and author
4. "The drug war is a holocaust in slow motion." — David Simon, author and journalist
5. "The war on drugs is a war on communities." — Holly Near, singer and activist
6. "If you want to fight a war on drugs, sit down at your own kitchen table and talk with your own children." — Gen. Barry McCaffrey
7. "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting." — Sun Tzu
8. "Now is the time for ministers to start writing rules for the new legal market . . . so we can finally take back control from the criminal gangs." — Nick Clegg, former UK Deputy Prime Minister
9. "Drug consumption rooms have the potential to offer information about harm reduction and treatment, to decrease overdose [and disease], and reduce the negative impact on neighborhoods." — Dr. Matthew Frei and Dr. Alex Wodak
10. "The War on Drugs has been an utter failure." — Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States
11. "The drug war is simply an instance of the illegitimate use of powers by concentrations of power that shouldn't exist in the first place." — Noam Chomsky
12. "The story of the War on Drugs is a story of the law of unintended consequences." — Neil Woods
13. "It's the causes, not the dependent person, that must be corrected. The War on Drugs . . . is focused on fighting drug dealers and the use of drugs, when the effort should be primarily aimed at treating and curing the causes that compel people to reach for drugs." — Chris Prentiss

14. “Despite people of all colors using and selling illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates, this war has been waged almost exclusively in poor communities of color.” — Michelle Alexander, Author, *The New Jim Crow*
15. “Operation Pipeline [that trained over 25,000 officers] is exactly what the Framers meant to prohibit: a federally funded general search program that targets people without cause for suspicion, particularly those who belong to disfavored groups.” — Prof. Ricardo Bascuas, Univ. of Miami School of Law
16. “The percentage of drug arrests with prison sentences . . . has quadrupled, resulting in a prison-building boom the likes of which the world has never seen.” — Michelle Alexander, Author, *The New Jim Crow*
17. “Between 1980 and 2000, the number of people incarcerated in our nation’s prisons and jails soared from roughly 300,000 to more than 2 million.” — Michelle Alexander, Author, *The New Jim Crow*
18. “Decades of research demonstrate that . . . biases lead to discriminatory actions, even when an individual does not want to discriminate.” — Michelle Alexander, Author, *The New Jim Crow*
19. “Prohibition is an awful flop—we like it. It can’t stop what it’s meant to stop—we like it. It’s left a trail of graft and slime, it doesn’t prohibit worth a dime. It’s filled our land with vice and crime. We’re for it.” — Franklin P. Adams, American columnist
20. “Prohibition will work great injury to the cause of temperance.” — Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States
21. “Prohibition is a species of intemperance within itself, for it goes beyond reason [attempting] to control a man’s appetite by legislation.” — Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States
22. “Prohibition makes a crime out of things that are not crimes.” — Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States
23. “A prohibition law strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our government was founded.” — Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States
24. “Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don’t mean to do harm—but the harm does not interest them.” — T. S. Eliot, poet and essayist
25. “There’d never been a more advantageous time to be a criminal in America than during the 13 years of Prohibition.” — Bill Bryson, author
26. “Even if one takes every reefer madness allegation of the prohibitionists at face value, marijuana prohibition has done far more harm to far more people than marijuana ever could.” — William F. Buckley, Jr., American conservative writer

27. "Prohibition didn't work in the Garden of Eden. Adam ate the apple." — Vincente Fox, Businessman and former President of Mexico
28. "The War on Drugs is an ideal vehicle for political rhetoric." — Nicholas Katzenbach, former U.S. Attorney General
29. "All crime has an emotional appeal and there is a great deal of political appeal in playing the role of the tough enforcer. Successful prosecutors can become governors, senators, even aspiring to the Presidency." — Nicholas Katzenbach, former U.S. Attorney General
30. "The current prohibition laws are forcing drug disputes to be played out with guns in our streets. We need to put a stop to this criminal drug element in our country." — Gary Johnson, former two-term governor of New Mexico
31. "The great majority of serious crimes in California are drug related; that is to say, caused not by the perpetrator's ingestion of drugs, but by his or her need to obtain the large amounts of money necessary to purchase drugs on the street." — Justice William A. Newsom, California Court of Appeal
32. "The War on Drugs will go down in history as the most racist crusade since slavery." — Thor Benson, journalist
33. "I realized how much of the story of police corruption revolved around drugs. . . . If you ask enough people . . . to go into a room with a bag of apparently untraceable cash, sooner or later, someone will unzip the bag and take a bundle." — Federal prosecutor Thomas Hagemann
34. "Money from drug smuggling supports terrorists. Terrorists provide assistance to drug traffickers. Organized crime works hand in hand with these other outlaws for their own profit." — Former Secretary of State George Schultz
35. "As someone who spent 35 years wearing a police uniform, I've come to believe that hundreds of thousands of law-enforcement officers commit felony perjury every year testifying about drug arrests." — Retired Chief of Police Joseph D. McNamara
36. "I think our federal and state drug policy has been counterproductive, not to mention horribly expensive. After 20 years of experiencing our myopic drug war, without any successful reduction in drug use, I have come to the reluctant conclusion that the criminal law remedy is worse than the disease." — Judge Rudolph J. Gerber, Arizona Court of Appeals
37. "If the resources now spent on criminalization of drugs were devoted instead to education and treatment, the cost and danger of drug use would be greatly reduced. . . . The money spent on police practices that fail to reduce consumption could be directed to traditional areas of law enforcement that have been preempted by this futile war effort." — United States District Judge John L. Kane, Jr.

38. “Drug use, legal and illegal, is principally a health problem which is best dealt with not by driving it underground with prohibition tactics, but by having it out in the open to allow for treatment and education.” — United States Court of Appeals Judge Juan Torruella
39. “It is difficult to understand why illegal drug addiction should be treated differently from alcoholism or nicotine addiction: all are basically public health problems.” — United States Court of Appeals Judge Juan Torruella
40. “There is just so much money to be made that the slim chance of being caught is always worth the risk.” — Judge Ronald Rose, United States District Court, Santa Ana, California
41. “Believe me, after 20 years as a prosecutor and judge, I can assure you that we only catch the stupid ones.” — Judge Ronald Rose, United States District Court, Santa Ana, California
42. “More than 50 percent of Americans have breached the drug laws. Where a law is that widely broken, you can’t possibly enforce it against every lawbreaker. The legal system would collapse under the weight of it. So you go after the people who are least able to resist, to argue back, to appeal—the poorest and most disliked groups. In the United States, they are black and Hispanic people, with a smattering of poor whites.” — Johann Hari, journalist
43. “It took me a while to see that the contrast between the racism directed at Billie Holiday and the compassion offered to addicted white stars like Judy Garland was not some weird misfiring of the drug war—it was part of the point.” — Johann Hari, journalist
44. “People overdose because [under prohibition] they don’t know if the heroin is 1 percent or 40 percent . . . Just imagine if every time you picked up a bottle of wine, you didn’t know whether it was 8 percent alcohol or 80 percent alcohol [or] if every time you took an aspirin, you didn’t know if it was 5 milligrams or 500 milligrams.” — Ethan Nadelmann, former director of the Drug Policy Alliance
45. “Punishment—shaming a person, caging them, making them unemployable—traps them in addiction.” — Johann Hari, journalist
46. “The drug war was a bipartisan effort. This rhetoric of law and order deployed by politicians won elections nationwide, from races for local council seats to the presidency.” — Dominique DuBois Gilliard
47. “The same drug that had been considered fearsome twenty years earlier, when associated with African Americans and Latinos, was refashioned as a relatively harmless drug when associated with whites.” — Michelle Alexander
48. “Prohibition kills, education saves lives.” — Dominic Milton Trott

49. “We cannot incarcerate ourselves out of addiction. Addiction is a medical crisis that—when it comes to nonviolent offenders—warrants medical interventions, not incarceration.” — Dominique DuBois Gilliard
50. “In a free society, how can you commit a crime against yourself?” — Jesse Ventura, former Minnesota governor
51. “The critical point is that thousands of people are swept into the criminal justice system every year pursuant to the drug war without much regard for their guilt or innocence.” — Michelle Alexander
52. “So just take a look at the different prosecution rates and sentencing rules for ghetto drugs like crack and suburban drugs like cocaine . . . or just between blacks and whites in general. The statistics are clear: this is a war on the poor and minorities.” — Noam Chomsky
53. “The War on Drugs . . . is manifested in the pregnant Celia kneeling on the sidewalk, handcuffed wrists behind her back, eyes cast on the ground. There was no Detective-Sergeant Gillespie to protect her when, as a little girl, she was raped by her stepfather, so in the War on Drugs she has become one of the enemy.” — Gabor Maté
54. “At a time when the current and two former US presidents have admittedly indulged, as have politicians of all stripes from Al Gore to Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin and over 50% of the adult US population, the credibility tipping point of the War on Drugs propaganda has long been passed.” — Jeffrey Dhywood
55. “All that appears to be missing is the political courage to admit failure and move on to more realistic and efficient policies.” — Jeffrey Dhywood
56. “What will it take for decision makers to display the wisdom and garner the courage to end the disastrous War on Drugs and responsibly take charge of drug production and trade instead of leaving it in the hands of extremely dangerous and powerful international criminal organizations?” — Jeffrey Dhywood
57. “A wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits This is the sum of good government.” — Thomas Jefferson
58. Increase in America’s prison population since President Nixon’s declaration of a War on Drugs in 1971: 700%. — ACLU Incarceration Facts
59. “Once brave politicians and others explain the war on drugs’ true cost, the American people will scream for a cease-fire. Bring the troops home, people will urge. Treat drugs as a health problem, not as a matter for the criminal justice system.” — Larry Elder
60. “The war on drugs is wrong, both tactically and morally. It is morally bankrupt.” — Larry Elder

61. Sample incarceration rates per 100,000 population:
 - USA 639 (highest in the world)
 - Saudi Arabia 197
 - China 121
 - Canada 104
 - France 90
 - Italy 89
 - Germany 69(Source: Wikipedia)
62. "I believe that the war on drugs is a tragically misplaced use of resources – an immoral venture that produces far more suffering than it alleviates." — David Harsanyi, National Review senior writer and conservative commentator
63. "The old system, the War on Drugs, was a train wreck." — Former Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper
64. "If you support the war on drugs in its present form, then you're only paying lip-service to the defense of freedom, and you don't really grasp the concept of the sovereign individual." — Neal Boortz, conservative commentator
65. "The War on Drugs employs millions . . . that probably couldn't find a place for their dubious talents in a free market, unless they were to sell pencils from a tin cup." — L. Neil Smith
66. "Let's face it: The War on Drugs was a disaster. It may be well intentioned . . . but it sent millions of kids to prison, gave them felony records, oftentimes when they had no violent crimes." — Former Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper
67. "Judge Jim Gray's thorough and scholarly . . . book drives a stake through the heart of the failed War on Drugs and gives us options to hope for better battles to come." — Walter Cronkite
68. "We have been following essentially the same Drug Prohibition policy for many decades, and it has given us the worst of all worlds." — Judge James P. Gray
69. "Instead of being shielded, our children are being recruited into a lifestyle of drug selling and drug usage by the current system." — Judge James P. Gray
70. "There may be a few judges in this country who believe that our current drug policy is working, but they are surely a small minority." — Judge James P. Gray
71. "Attempts at enforcement have clogged the courts, filled the prisons with non-predatory offenders, corrupted officials, bred disrespect for the law, imperiled the liberties of the people, burdened the taxpayers, impeded public health efforts, and brought the nation no closer to abstinence." — Joint letter from 11 prominent American judges

72. "I have learned over twenty years of experience that although the War on Drugs makes for good politics, it makes for terrible government." — Judge James P. Gray
73. "We pursue the [War on Drugs] not because it is effective, but because it is 'fundable.'" — Judge James P. Gray
74. "Within a few years of [changing to a better policy], we will look back in astonishment that we allowed our former policy to persist for so long, much as we look back now at slavery, Jim Crow, or the days when women were prohibited from voting." — Judge James P. Gray
75. "My own view is that we should readopt the concept of federalism . . . and allow each state to adopt policies that it concludes will best meet its needs." — Judge James P. Gray
76. "The advocates of the status quo stand firmly against any full or open discussion of federal drug policy, but what we really need to do is explore our options realistically, and tell each other the truth." — Judge James P. Gray
77. "People think they can stop the drug traffic by putting people in jail and by having terribly long sentences. But, of course, it doesn't do any good." — U.S. Senior District Judge Whitman Knapp
78. "To the old saying that enforcing prohibition always leads to violence, corruption, and crime, it can be added, at least in this instance, that it has also resulted in the creation of an enormous bureaucracy—a prison-industrial complex—and it has thrived." — Judge James P. Gray
79. "Tougher drug laws are the main reason why one in five black American men spend time behind bars." — *The Economist*
80. "I sit there on the bench and send these small dealers, who are black, off to prison for years and years and years. And they look at you almost uncomprehendingly. They don't even know why we're mad at them." — Judge James Ford, Superior Court, Sacramento, California
81. "We have a failed social policy and it has to be re-evaluated. Otherwise, we're going to bankrupt ourselves. Because we can't incarcerate our way out of this problem." — General Barry R. McCaffrey, former Drug Czar
82. "[Our] system has arrested, imprisoned, and eliminated from the market the stupid, disorganized, and less violent drug traffickers and smuggler, thus leaving this phenomenally lucrative market open to offenders who are smarter, better organized, and more violent." — Judge James P. Gray
83. "I am convinced the present drug policy is impotent and a dreadful waste of human resources and tax dollars." — U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Paul Mannes

84. "The law enforcement net is even more effective in catching and incarcerating female drug offenders" — Judge James P. Gray
85. "Typically the women involved in the illicit drug trade are low-level lookouts or 'mules' who transport drugs for short distances. . . . What is seldom addressed, however, is that about 75% of all these women prisoners are also the single parents of young children." — Judge James P. Gray
86. "For more than 19 years . . . , I've issued hundreds of drug-offense search and arrest warrants. As a matter of personal curiosity I have asked the DEA agents, 'Are we winning the war on drugs?' To this date I have never received an affirmative response." — U.S. Magistrate Judge Wm. F. Sanderson, Jr., Dallas, Texas
87. "A survey disclosed that 43% of all the juvenile suspects booked into the Juvenile Hall in California's Orange County had ingested [drugs] within three to five days of their arrest. It is clear that any child of a mind to obtain illicit drugs can do so easily." — Judge James P. Gray
88. "Every time you see a report that a ton, or ten tons, or a hundred tons of cocaine have been seized, see it for what it is. It is not a victory but merely a symptom of the depth of the problem." — Judge James P. Gray
89. "A further unintended consequence of our drug policy is that the potency of the illicit street drugs increases as a direct result of the drug's illegal status." — Judge James P. Gray
90. "The prestige of the government has undoubtedly been lowered considerably by the [Alcohol] Prohibition law. For nothing is more destructive of respect for government and the law of the land than passing laws which cannot be enforced." — Albert Einstein
91. "It is an open secret that the dangerous increase of crime in this country is closely connected with [Prohibition]." — Albert Einstein
92. "The war on drugs has done considerable damage to the fourth amendment." — Judge Morris S. Arnold, United States Court of Appeals
93. "There are many devastating results of the War on Drugs. One which is especially cruel and will have a terrible impact on America life for many generations is the large increase in the number of women incarcerated for drug violations." — U.S. District Judge John T. Curtin, Buffalo, New York
94. "As a former drugs squad chief, I've seen too many youngsters die. I'm determined that my children don't get hooked—which is why I want all drugs legalized." — Edward Ellison, former head of Scotland Yard's Anti-Drug Squad, 1998
95. "It is the declared policy of the United States to create a Drug-Free America by 1995." — U.S. Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988

96. "After 20 years on the bench I have concluded that federal drug laws are a disaster. It is time to get the government out of drug enforcement." — U.S. Senior District Judge Whitman Knapp
97. "As long as we indulged the fantasy that the problem could be solved by making America drug-free, it was appropriate that the government assume the burden. But that ambition has been shown to be absurd." — U.S. Senior District Judge Whitman Knapp
98. "The variety, complexity, and importance of these questions make it exceedingly clear that the federal government has no business being involved in any of them. What might be a hopeful solution in New York could be a disaster in Idaho, and only state legislatures and city governments, not Congress, can pass laws tailored to local needs." — U.S. Senior District Judge Whitman Knapp
99. "What did the nation do when it decided to rid itself of the catastrophes spawned by Alcohol Prohibition? It adopted the 21st Amendment, which excluded the federal government from any role in regulation of alcoholic beverages." — U.S. Senior District Judge Whitman Knapp

Watch our video entitled **"The Prohibition Blunder: Dismantling Drug Prohibition in Half an Hour"** to learn why America needs drug legalization now.

