

Message from the Executive Director

We believe that the crisis in our criminal justice system fueled by the so-called “war on drugs” is a major component of the unfinished business of the civil rights movement. The human and social costs of this war have been steep. Nowhere has the impact been felt more severely than in communities of color: Many know that drug law enforcement disproportionately targets communities of color, but few are aware of the broad scope and depth of the impact. From racial profiling, arrests, incarceration and post-conviction sanctions, to access to drug treatment and infectious disease prevention, poor communities of color are being devastated by the impact of the “war on drugs”. We are a national organization established to educate and help empower communities of color to reverse the negative impacts of punitive drug policies and replace them with policies based on science, public health and human rights.

*Peace,
Deborah Peterson Small*

Lecture and Workshop Topic Areas

- The history of drug policy in the United States.
- Reducing the harms caused by drugs and drug policy
- The impact of drug policies on communities of color
- The impact of drug policies on women and families
- Understanding illicit drugs: trends, risks & treatment
- Effective drug education and prevention programs
- The international impact of U.S. drug policies



To order BTC publications or to schedule a speaking engagement or workshop, send an email to info@breakchains.org, call 510.280.3774 or visit our website at www.breakchains.org.



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BREAK THE CHAINS



COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND THE WAR ON DRUGS



WHO WE ARE

Break the Chains: Communities of Color and the "War on Drugs" (BTC) is a non-profit organization that seeks to build a national movement within communities of color to promote reform of punitive drug policies, with the ultimate aim of enacting alternative policies based on public health, compassion, racial justice and human rights.

A guiding principle of Break the Chains is that since people of color are disproportionately affected by current drug policies we must be an integral part of the movement to reform them.

We seek to achieve long-term change by:

Increasing awareness that the criminal justice system is not the place to deal with problems related to drugs;

Promoting a public health approach to drug policy;

Increasing access to community-based treatment for all those who want and need it;

Promoting a range of approaches that reduce the harms of drug use and addiction;

Reducing the number of people of color arrested, convicted and incarcerated for drug offenses; and

Reducing the amount of substance abuse and addiction plaguing poor communities, especially communities of color.



OUR ADVOCACY

Break the Chains has a four-part program of advocacy:

We work with community-based organizations to cultivate leadership and mobilize activism for drug policy reform in communities of color through BTC conferences, educational trainings and presentations.

We support community leaders and elected officials in "connecting the dots" between the "war on drugs" and their concerns about such issues as criminal justice reform, educational equity, unemployment and infectious disease prevention.

We work with local organizations and elected officials in developing effective strategies to reduce the disproportionate and negative impact of punitive drug policies on their communities.

We develop communication strategies to expose racially-and gender-biased drug law enforcement and to promote drug treatment over incarceration.



TOP TEN THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE "WAR ON DRUGS"

The "war on drugs" causes more harm than good.

The "war on drugs" is misnomer because you can't wage war on plants or chemicals. It is a war on people.

The "war on drugs" has not reduced drug use or the availability of illicit drugs.

Mandatory minimum drug sentencing has filled prisons with low level drug offenders, not "kingpins" who control large-scale drug distribution.

More whites buy, use and sell drugs, including cocaine, than do Blacks, Latinos and other people of color.

The "war on drugs" has fueled the unprecedented growth of the prison industrial complex..

Women, especially Blacks and Latinas, are the fastest growing population of people incarcerated for drug offenses.

A drug conviction affects access to housing, employment, education and other benefits of citizenship.

The "war on drugs" is an international war on poor people and communities of color.

There is a better way. Treating addiction as a public health problem reduces the crime, death, and disease associated with substance abuse.

