George Floyd Should Be Alive Today

In response to the unconscionable killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police, where a police officer joked about not doing drugs as Floyd desperately pleaded to breathe, Kassandra Frederique, Managing Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns for the Drug Policy Alliance, issued the following statement:

“George Floyd should be alive today. Instead, he drew his last breath after one police officer knelt on his neck for nine minutes and another taunted ‘don’t do drugs, kids’ to the gathered crowd. With George Floyd most recently, Breonna Taylor earlier this month, and countless others before them, perceived drug possession and drug use served as a justification by law enforcement to dehumanize, strip dignity from, and ultimately kill people of color.

The drug war did not create institutional racism or disregard for Black life in the US. However, it feeds and bolsters the racist structures that snuff out Black life daily. This tragic case is no different. Officer Thao invoking drug use as a warning to bystanders and later as pretext for Mr. Floyd’s death is unconscionable, but the real cause of his death was his brutal mistreatment at the hands of police who repeatedly ignored not only his desperate pleas for mercy but also those of bystanders. The real danger we should be drawing awareness to is not drugs, but the ways in which the color of one’s skin, one’s perceived gender — as our trans siblings know all too well — or one’s socio-economic status make them a target for
harassment and, far too often, death.”

**Trump Activating Paramilitary Federal Agencies and Threatening Military Intervention**

The Trump Administration is activating paramilitary federal agencies to support police in suppressing the widespread lawful protests over the killing of George Floyd. **Maritza Perez**, Director of the Office of National Affairs for DPA, released the following statement:

“Over the last 24 hours, Trump has responded to the nation's widespread protests over the killing of George Floyd by activating the Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs and Border Protection and other paramilitary federal agencies to bolster police forces. He also threatened authoritarian-style military intervention and used military-style assault to rid peaceful protestors from outside the White House, making it clear that lawful resistance against police brutality will be met with a stronger militarized force than protestors are already fighting against.”

*Read the full statement.*

**A History of the Drug War As a Tool for Repressing Black Communities**
This video from hip hop legend Jay Z and acclaimed artist Molly Crabapple depicts the drug war’s devastating impact on the Black community from decades of biased law enforcement.

Many currently illegal drugs have been used for thousands of years for both medical and spiritual purposes. So why are some drugs legal and other drugs illegal today?

It’s not based on any scientific assessment of the relative risks of these drugs – but it has everything to do with who is associated with these drugs. The first anti-opium laws in the 1870s were directed at Chinese immigrants. The first anti-cocaine laws in the early 1900s were directed at Black men in the South. The first anti-marijuana laws, in the Midwest and the Southwest in the 1910s and 20s, were directed at Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans. The inherent racism in drug policing has only grown over the following decades.

President Richard Nixon, who officially declared the beginning of the U.S. war on drugs, was motivated by racism. Nixon’s domestic policy chief, John Ehrlichman, admitted this in an interview:

“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.”

This explosive admission, while provocative, was not unexpected. DPA and our allies in the movement to end the drug war have long known that U.S. drug policies have been inherently racist and discriminatory. Despite comparable rates of drug
use and sales, communities of color and other marginalized groups have been the principal targets of drug law enforcement and make up the vast majority of people who have been incarcerated or otherwise had their lives torn apart by the drug war. This is why our work is centered on speaking truth to power and demanding accountability for the gross harms caused by the drug war.

*Learn more about race and the drug war.*

**Pride Was A Riot**

June is Pride Month, and Pride was a riot. It’s more important than ever to understand how we got here. Ifeayo Harvey, DPA's marketing coordinator and facilitator of the organization’s LGBTQIA+ group, shares her thoughts:

“Reflecting on the escalation of police violence erupting throughout most major cities in the United States right now, we are reminded of the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969 in New York City, during which the LGBTQ+ community staged a series of demonstrations in response to police violence. Today, we express gratitude for the protesters and organizers of today’s uprisings and those of the past. Their names shall not be forgotten: Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, Tammy Novak, Bob Kohler, Maria Ritter, Storme Delarverie, and others. They laid the foundation of which many of our movements rely on today.”

To celebrate Pride, DPA staff are writing a four-part op-ed series on the intersection of drug policy reform and LGBTQ+ rights movements for Filter Magazine. The first piece - *How the Drug War Is a Tool to Criminalize LGBTQ+ People* - was written by our interim executive director, Richard Burns:

“When we think of the criminalization of the LGBTQ+ community, our minds likely veer to the Stonewall Riots of 1969. But to see that as the whole picture is to erase the struggles that have continued to plague our community over the last half century. Across the country, LGBTQ+ people have faced and still face discrimination and criminalization for our sexual orientation, taking on many forms, with one of the most common being drug arrests.

As we have seen with other minority groups, as laws were created to
protect LGBTQ+ people from overt discrimination, and engaging in sexual acts with someone of the same gender was no longer a crime, law enforcement found new ways, such as drug possession, to replicate age-old practices of bias, abuse and profiling. Law enforcement didn’t even have to change locations in most cases: The same places, such as gay bars, that were already under surveillance became easy targets for drug arrests.”

Read the full article here.

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COVID-19 & drug policy:
a new discussion series from the Drug Policy Alliance

DPA is hosting a series of online discussions about COVID-19 and drug policy. To register for the rest of our discussions, click here.

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NYC Ban on Pre-employment Marijuana Testing Comes Into Effect

Most companies in New York City can no longer test prospective employees for marijuana use. This new policy – the first of its kind in the country – came into effect on May 10.

The resolution was initially passed in 2019, following years of advocacy by DPA and our allies. DPA worked with New York City Council’s Progressive Caucus and the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus on a #MarijuanaJustice legislative package that addressed multiple facets of marijuana criminalization and aimed to move away from the harms of marijuana prohibition in as many ways as possible at the city administrative level while
we pursue statewide legalization.

The package also removed marijuana as a violation of probation, challenged the way marijuana criminalization impacts families through child welfare proceedings, and more. Despite being focused at the municipal level, these shifts are significant and could have national implications. Similar legislation to prevent pre-employment marijuana testing passed recently in Rochester, NY and multiple other jurisdictions across the country are considering bills to end this exclusionary practice.

Read more about this important victory.

DPA's Drug Education Curriculum, Safety First, Launches Distance Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed many of the challenges that come with providing education outside the classroom. And mass protests against racist police killings present an important moment to reassess drug disciplinary policies and the reliance on punishment in our schools, especially among Black children.

We remain committed to developing educational resources that meet educators and students where they are. That’s why we just launched a distance learning version of Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens.

Safety First is the nation’s first harm reduction-based drug education curriculum for high school teachers. We worked in collaboration with teachers – some of which have used Safety First in their classrooms – youth development specialists and community health advocates to adapt it for current online learning and teaching needs.

We hope our distance learning version of Safety First will be informative and empowering for teachers and students at home and online.

Drugs are not an excuse. Donate Now.
Drug involvement - whether perceived or real - has provided a convenient excuse for violent and too often fatal law enforcement interactions. DPA will continue fighting to remove drug involvement as a cover for disregarding the dignity and sanctity of human life.

With your support, we will organize, strategize, lobby, and hold our elected officials and institutions accountable to decarcerate our jails and prisons, decriminalize all drugs, prioritize the health and safety of people who use drugs—and to end this drug war once and for all. Please give what you can today.

![Donate Button]

**Drug Policy in the News**

*TalkingDrugs*: The War on Drugs and the Justification of Black Death

*Marijuana Moment*: Marijuana Legalization And the Fight for Racial Justice

*Vox*: Why the Policing Problem Isn't About "A Few Bad Apples"

*NY Daily News*: Marijuana Enforcement is Still Driving Racist Policing

*Buzzfeed*: The DEA Has Been Given Permission to Investigate People Protesting George Floyd's Death


Put DPA in your will or estate plan. Find out more about how to join The Ashawna Hailey Planned Giving Society today.

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