

ABOLISH THE “WAR ON DRUGS”

By Richard Duffee

Our rate of incarceration began to escalate under Nixon with the rise of mandatory sentencing standards for drug-related offenses. It is now by far the highest rate of incarceration on earth.

The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 abolished legal segregation in housing, education, and employment. The White establishment reacted the same way to this that it reacted to the abolition of slavery. Just as between 1865 and 1875 the Southern establishment thrashed around for a way to get Blacks “back into their place” by instituting sharecropping and Jim Crow laws, between 1964 and 1974, the White establishment thrashed around until it found that drug laws could be used to criminalize a large enough percentage of young Black males that most Black families would have a family member who could be used to exclude them from housing and jobs.

Mandatory drug sentencing is just one more means to preserve White privilege. In 1992-94 I tried to persuade the Westchester Civil Liberties Union that challenging the sentencing policies that resulted in far higher Black than White incarceration rates should be their first priority. The ACLU is finally listening. But the number of Blacks in prison keeps growing.