

A Conversation with BILL BENNETT

Former Secretary of Education, Drug Czar, radio host, and author Bill Bennett discusses education under Ronald Reagan, the waging of the War on Drugs under George H.W. Bush, and the writing of his best-selling *The Book of Virtues*. Kristol and Bennett also discuss the case for education reform and vigilance against drug use in America today. Bennett is the author, with Robert White, of the newly-released [*Going to Pot: Why the Rush to Legalize Marijuana Is Harming America*](#).

On legalizing marijuana, Bennett says: When I was Drug Czar, people said, “Well, let’s let a state or two try legalizing [marijuana] and see what happens.” I said, “Not on my watch, we’re not going to do this.” Well, now you’ve got Colorado...So now we will see. The returns aren’t all in but as they come in, I think the people of Colorado are going to say: What did we do, what did we unleash?

On the American dream, Bennett says: If I could spend full-time and make a living at it, I would work to improve the teaching of American history and civics in the schools. You know, we talk about our math and science, but [our worst subject] is knowledge of America...The [American story] is unmatched. It’s a tapestry, it’s Joseph’s coat, it’s amazing. And it turns out to be a country, you know, where for an awful lot of people, dreams actually do come true.

On school visits as Education Secretary, Bennett says: I remember going to Chicago and saying, “these are the worst schools in the country.” And the spokesman from the mayor’s office said: “Why?” And I said: “You have a 50% dropout rate, and of the kids who remain in school, 50% of them score in the bottom 20% of the country.” And the guy did a couple calculations and he said, “Oh, we’re not the worst. Detroit is the worst.” And I said, “Well, do not be guilty of low aspirations.” And so we told the truth.

On an exceptional nation, Bennett says: If you live in some poor...part of the world where some dictator has his boot on your throat, and you see a group of men coming over a hill toward you and they’re carrying a flag, your prayer is that it’s the American flag because they’re there to help you.

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