
Positive Sides Of Marijuana Legalization

The Debate Concerning the Legalization of Marijuana

The debate over the legalization of marijuana is long standing and will continue indefinitely for years to come. Both sides of this issue are passionate in their positions and provide strong arguments to support their stands. After reviewing all the information, I understand each argument but I feel strongly that it would do our country more good than harm to decriminalize marijuana. Aside from what the government would like you to think, there are actually positive effects that come from the use of marijuana.

Perhaps the most popular current controversy dealing with the ongoing war on drugs is legalizing marijuana for medical purposes. As of August 1999, five western states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington - passed laws legalizing the medical use of marijuana. Over the past two decades, more than 20 states and the District of Columbia have passed measures recognizing marijuana's therapeutic value, but those did not authorize cultivation as the new measures do. Some states have made progress towards helping the chronically ill, but those in other states who are experiencing the same symptoms and dying from the same diseases deserve the same treatments. It may be a slow process, but we can only hope that every other state cares enough about their people to give them the best therapy for their illness as well.

Jeff Jones, executive director and co-founder of the Oakland Cannabis Buyer's Cooperative, remembers being 14 years old and watching his father die an agonizing death from kidney cancer.

"Exactly four months after my dad passed away, I heard on CNN about Judge Young's recommendation that marijuana should be made available for treating things like chemotherapy-induced nausea. I'll tell you the message I got: that the federal government had been withholding valuable medicine and was indifferent to the suffering of its citizens." (Koch, 712)

What our country needs to do is stop looking at marijuana as an illegal substance, and instead realize how helpful it can be for those with serious diseases and ailments. It is completely insensitive to deny the sick and suffering an opportunity to relieve their pain if we have the means to do it.

"Proponents say marijuana - also known as cannabis - is an effective, safe and inexpensive alternative for treating nausea caused by AIDS medications and cancer treatments, intractable pain, muscle spasms, glaucoma, epilepsy, anorexia, asthma, insomnia, depression and other disorders. Ira Glasser, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, told a congressional subcommittee June 16 that the government has 'demonized all drug use without differentiation and has systematically and hysterically resisted science,' especially with regard to marijuana." (Koch 707)

The healing effects have been proven, and studies have shown that smoked marijuana can work when nothing else will. "In one study of 56 patients who got no relief from standard

antiemetic agents, 78% became symptom-free when they smoked marijuana.” (Grinspoon 143-144) “It is essential to relax legal restrictions that prevent physicians and patients from achieving a workable accommodation that takes into account the needs of suffering people.” (Grinspoon 149)

Legalization for medical purposes is of course the top concern of most supporters, however there are several strong arguments toward decriminalizing marijuana altogether, even for recreational use. The most obvious is to compare marijuana to legal substances, such as alcohol and tobacco.

“Health officials in Geneva have suppressed the publication of a politically sensitive analysis that confirms what aging hippies have known for decades: cannabis is safer than alcohol or tobacco. According to a document leaked to New Scientist, the analysis concludes not only that the amount of dope smoked worldwide does less harm to public health than alcohol and cigarettes, but that the same is likely to hold true even if people consumed dope on the same scale as these legal substances. The reason for making the comparisons was ‘not to promote one drug over another, but rather to minimize the double standards that have operated in appraising the health effects of cannabis.’ Nevertheless, in most of the comparisons made between cannabis and alcohol, the illegal drug comes out better—or at least on a par—with the legal one.”(Concar 1)

It seems that regardless of this information, marijuana is commonly looked at as a much more dangerous substance, mostly because it’s illegal. Lester Grinspoon, Harvard psychiatrist and author of *Marijuana: The Forbidden Medicine* (1993) notes that “there has never been a fatal overdose nor a single case of lung cancer that can be attributed solely to marijuana smoking” (Koch 711). Studies have shown that the consequences and effects of frequent alcohol use are almost always more severe than those caused by marijuana use.

Cannabis also fared better in five out of seven comparisons of long-term damage to health. For example, the report says that while heavy consumption of either drug can lead to dependence, only alcohol produces a ‘well defined withdrawal syndrome.’ And while heavy drinking leads to cirrhosis, severe brain injury and a much increased risk of accidents and suicide, the report concludes that there is only ‘suggestive evidence that chronic cannabis use may produce subtle defects in cognitive functioning. (Concar 1)

Given these facts and comparisons, it’s more than obvious that as long as alcohol is legal, there can be no argument that marijuana should not be. It is also becoming quite apparent that by enforcing strict legal punishments for smoking marijuana, officials are actually making the situation worse. Much like what happened during the Prohibition of alcohol, marijuana use has not stopped or even lessened. In fact, the number of users continues to increase along with the potency of the product.

The drug war, while barren of results, is rich in ironies. Increased law enforcement pressure on drug smuggling has encouraged greater purity of product, since less dilution means less bulk, which results in a reduced chance of discovery. When we enact policies that encourage higher-purity drugs, we are ignoring the increased-potency lesson that we learned with the prohibition of alcohol. During Prohibition, the consumption of lower-potency alcoholic beverages, such as beer, plummeted while the market share of moonshine and other strong distilled spirits soared. Soon after the repeal of Prohibition, the consumer patterns for both high-and low-potency

beverage consumption returned to pre-Prohibition levels. We can extrapolate from this that the shift to more potent drugs is directly related to the prohibition of drugs. This conclusion is strengthened by the decline in potency of today's legal drugs. Unfiltered cigarettes have given way to the

lower-nicotine, filtered brands, and hard liquor has declined in popularity while beer and wine sales have increased. (Eldredge 43-44)

For even further proof that legalizing marijuana can work and will not cause chaos throughout the country, we can take a look at the Amsterdam experiment. Luckily for us, our country would not be the first to test this idea out, it has already been legal in the Netherlands since the 1970s.

“And despite the anti-dope propaganda that circulates in the US, most people are thankfully well aware that no great social disaster has befallen the Netherlands, where cannabis has been sold openly in coffee shops for years. It would take a perverse mind to twist the data from Amsterdam into an argument for continued prohibition.” (Concar 1)

It seems as though everything that is said regarding Amsterdam depends on the speaker's politics, but in fact there are tons of statistics that prove the experiment has had a more positive effect.

“The Netherlands has fewer addicts per capita than Italy, Spain, Switzerland, France or Britain, and far fewer than the US. Only 0.3 percent of Dutch teenagers had tried cocaine in 1995, compared with 1.7 percent in the US. In the Netherlands, virtually everyone who uses drugs tries cannabis first, and many seem content to go no further. Dutch teenagers get among the highest scores in the world on international science and mathematics tests. If there are serious problems caused by legalizing marijuana, then twenty-plus years of the Dutch experiment has not revealed what they are.” (Mackenzie 2)

The Dutch have found out through experience that deciding to legalize has not been a mistake in any way. “Roel Kerssemakers, who works for the state-run Jellinek drug-abuse clinic, says this hasn't increased the number of smokers. ‘The forbidden-fruit effect is gone,’ says Kerssemakers. ‘There's very little peer pressure to smoke.’” (Jones 1)

It's pretty safe to say that most of what the general public think they know about marijuana has very little basis in reality. There are innumerable myths about marijuana that many come to believe without hearing the facts.

One of the major knocks on marijuana is that it causes otherwise productive, energetic people to become slothful and unmotivated. Evidence does not support that conclusion. Large numbers of successful, energetic people indulge with no external negative consequences other than the risk of legal sanctions. Another common myth about marijuana is that it serves as a gateway to other drugs; that most cocaine users once smoked pot is offered as support for this position. Most heroin users once drank alcohol, but no one charges alcohol with being a gateway to heroin. The reason for this inconsistency is that marijuana does not enjoy the social acceptance of alcohol and is therefore a politically convenient target for such allegations. There is nothing in the pharmacology of marijuana that would make a user more or less likely to indulge in another substance. (Eldredge 25)

Undeniably, the gears of government move slowly. Certainly thorough investigation must precede the endorsement of any questionable substance, but I feel that sufficient evidence has been presented to justify marijuana's legalization. We should feel fortunate that we have the ability to ease pain and suffering, and can now turn our investigation forces toward other issues.

Works Cited

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