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12 March 2007

The Legalization of Marijuana

A drug that has the ability to help cure obesity, asthma, and relieve nausea for cancer patients is surely the miracle drug of the future. In fact, this drug can help relieve the national debt by contributing over \$10 million dollars annually and also alleviate prison overpopulation problems. This drug is the most commonly used drug in the United States, and yet none of these positive aspects of it are being taken advantage of. With over 200 slang terms for this drug, it is most commonly referred to as *marijuana*. While the drug itself does have some drawbacks, its potential is enormous, and its advantages are untapped. This essay will establish the fact that marijuana has enormous medical, physical, and psychological benefits, while on the other hand the misconceptions of marijuana will be reviewed and examined further, and finally the economic benefits of marijuana to society will perhaps be its greatest contribution.

Ancient civilizations have taken advantage of marijuana's economical, medical, and religious perks, and with enough research today's society can take profit from this drug as well. Marijuana usage dates back to Ancient China where it was most commonly used in religious ceremonies to honor the dead. In time, it evolved to medical use by these ancient peoples to help alleviate such medical ailments as constipation, asthma, loss of appetite, inflammation, coughs, urinary tract infections, and hemorrhoid. Recent research has even supported most of these uses as accurate and efficient. In addition, more extensive research has confirmed that marijuana reduces the stress behind the eyes cause by glaucoma, and more impressively is its ability to

eliminate nausea from chemotherapy for cancer patients. Even though most chemotherapy has about an 80% remission rate, most patients turn it down due to its nauseating side-effects.

Equally important are the physical advantages that have recently been discovered with new research. Notably, the effects of marijuana on the brain are quite unexpected. Contrary to popular misconceptions, marijuana does *not* kill brain cells or damage them in any way. The drug itself actually stimulates the left side of the brain which increases productivity, while simultaneously relaxing the right hemisphere and thus causing a euphoric state that may either relax or motivate the user. The most surprising fact is the fact that to date, there is not one reported death in the entire world that is caused due to an overdose of marijuana. Dr. Andrew Weil testified before U.S. Congress that "a smoker would have to theoretically consume 1,500 pounds of marijuana

within about 15 minutes to induce a lethal response" -- whereas, he noted, eating 10 raw potatoes could deliver a "toxic response" and aspirin causes possibly thousands of deaths annually."

Marijuana's use extends beyond the medical field well into the religious beliefs of tens of thousands of individuals around the world. It has been used by such groups as Hindus, Buddhists, Rastafarians, and many more for religious ceremonies as a part of their culture and heritage. The United States Constitution does not restrict the use of marijuana so long as it is used for religious purposes. The major question in this statement is that if marijuana is safe enough for religious usage, why then is it so dangerous and illegal? Finally, the hemp plant that marijuana comes from is an incredibly useful natural resource that can be cultivated and used for purposes such as rope, clothing, and even food. Hemp grows very easily under almost any conditions and is very cost efficient to cultivate. Despite these innumerable benefits of

marijuana, many people, especially in the United States still believe that marijuana should be illegal due to preconceived notions about the drug.

In today's society, our nation's youth are bombarded by the anti-drug slogans "Just say no" and "dope is for dopes" without giving them the full spectrum of these drugs, both the positive and negative aspects. There are about as many myths about the horrendous effects of marijuana as there are urban legends about people getting their kidneys stolen, and for the most part, both myths are ridiculous lies. The most widely used lie about marijuana is that it is a "gateway" drug that will only lead its users to harder drugs such as cocaine. In a study in 1994, less than 16% of marijuana users have ever even tried any hard drugs. Furthermore, during the 1960's and 1970's, while marijuana usage increased, heroin usage increased, thus proving that those who used marijuana did not then turn to a harder drug. Another popular belief is that marijuana is more harmful for the user than smoking a cigarette. In fact, many claims are that smoking one joint is equal to smoking five cigarettes. While marijuana joints do contain more tar than cigarettes, they hold much less tobacco and tar is not the cancer causing component in a cigarette therefore it is not harmful. Finally, another popular argument is that smoking is bad for you no matter what it is that you smoke. This is in fact true, by smoking any plant increases the lesions in the lungs which increases risk for infection, although, if the marijuana user is worried about this, they have the option of either eating or vaporizing the drug, this cannot be done with tobacco. It is evident that marijuana has been bashed enough to make it seem more harmful than it is, without giving the full story which includes its positives which do not end with the user, but extend to aid its society.

Annually \$7.6 million are paid by taxpayers to put non-violent marijuana offenders in jail. This number includes those patients who use marijuana for their medicinal usage at the risk

of being arrested to help alleviate their pains. During the Reagan and Bush administrations only, the total expenditure of drug enforcement is an astonishing \$64 billion dollars and as of 1991, independently, states spend about \$17.6 billion between programs and the criminalization. By legalizing marijuana and setting a tax on it, the government would find itself easing out of the enormous debt we are currently experiencing. Not only would it relieve the national debt, but contribute to it. By charging a mere dollar per joint, the government would gain *at least* \$6.4 million dollars annually. Marijuana is legalized in many European countries that save billions of dollars each year while profiting from the sales. Additionally, these countries are better able to focus on the violent crimes occurring in the country and do not have to worry about minor drug offenses. Furthermore, the overpopulation in our nation's prisons has become an increasingly disturbing issue. With over 1.5 million drug related arrests yearly, it contributes to the over crowding and in 1999, 59.6% of all inmates in federal prisons were in for a drug related crime. Finally, by legalizing marijuana, it would eliminate the black market over priced selling of the drug and reduce crime rates in many urban areas. With those dealers off the streets, we may find that they simply turn to a normal life.

Evidently, the issue of legalizing marijuana is not one that is simply a moral or ethical issue, but rather an overwhelming collection of facts in favor of its benefits. Marijuana has proven to have considerable potential for a number of uses, yet we ignore them despite extensive research. As in the 1920's during the prohibition of alcohol, the government realized that by prohibiting alcohol, it led to an increase in crime. Likewise, the prohibition of marijuana has led to an increase in unnecessary arrests of non-violent people while violent murders are being committed continuously. Marijuana is nothing to be ashamed of, in fact, many famous leaders have admitted to using the popular drug such as, Al Gore, Willie Nelson, and our nation's first

leader George Washington even grew and cultivated the plant! Marijuana is not some drug that is fry your brain, it is a drug of the future and one that if people are open enough to try it, many will find it euphoric and a way to connect with others. As Bob Marley once said, “The more people smoke herb, the more Babylon fall.”

Works Cited

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