

## What Is Marijuana?

Marijuana, a drug obtained from dried and crumpled parts of the ubiquitous hemp plant *Canabis sativa* (or *Cannabis indica*). Smoked by rolling in tobacco paper or placing in a pipe. It is also otherwise consumed worldwide by an estimated 200,000,000 persons for pleasure, an escape from reality, or relaxation. Marijuana is known by a variety of names such as kif (Morocco), dagga (South Africa), and bhang (India). Common in the United States, marijuana is called pot, grass, weed, Mary Jane, bones, etc. The main active principle of cannabis is tetrahydrocannabinol. The potency of its various forms ranges from a weak drink consumed in India to the highly potent hashish. The following consists of pure cannabis resin. Marijuana is not a narcotic and is not mentally or physically addicting drug. One can use mild cannabis preparations such as marijuana in small amounts for years without physical or mental deterioration. Marijuana serves to diminish inhibitions and acts as an euphoriant. Only once in a while will it produce actual hallucinations. More potent preparations of cannabis such as hashish can induce psychedelic experiences identical to those observed after ingestion of potent hallucinogens such as LSD. Some who smoke marijuana feel no effects; others feel relaxed and sociable, tend to laugh a great deal, and have a profound loss of the sense of time. Characteristically, those under the influence of marijuana show incoordination and impaired ability to perform skilled acts. Still others experience a wide range of emotions including feelings of perception, fear, insanity, happiness, love and anger. Although marijuana is not addicting, it may be habituating. The individual may become psychologically rather than physically dependent on the drug.

## Legalization Of Marijuana

Those who urge the legalization of marijuana maintain the drug is entirely safe. The available data suggested, this is not so, Marijuana occasionally produces acute panic reactions or even transient psychoses. Furthermore, a person driving under the influence of marijuana is a danger to themselves and others. If smoked heavily and a great deal of consistency, its use has been clearly associated with mental breakdown. In many persons who smoke chronically, the drug reinforces passivity and reduces goal-directed, constructive activity. The chronic use of pure resin (hashish) has been associated both with mental deterioration and criminality. One of the major complications of marijuana use is the tendency on the part of some users to progress to more dangerous drugs. Users in economically deprived areas usually go on to heroin, whereas more affluent individuals tend to move from marijuana to more potent hallucinogens such as LSD. There is no established medical use for marijuana or any other cannabis preparation. In the United States, its use is a crime and the laws governing marijuana are similar to those regulating heroin. Many authorities now urge that the laws be modified to mitigate the penalties relating to conviction on marijuana possession charges.

## The Case For Legalizing Marijuana Use

The United States stands apart from many nations in its deep respect for the individual. The strong belief in personal freedom appears early in the nation's history. The Declaration of Independence speaks of every citizen's right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness." The Constitution and Bill of Rights go further, making specific guarantees. They forbid the government to make unwarranted entry into dwelling places. They forbid seizure of personal property, except when very clear reasons are approved by the courts. They allow every citizen to remain silent in court when accused of a crime. Legal decisions have extended these rights, so that every citizen may feel safe, secure, and sheltered from public view in the privacy of his or her home.

### The Right To Privacy

In recent years, Americans have referred to privacy as one of the basic human rights, something to be claimed by anyone, anywhere. United States citizens feel strongly about this and often tell other countries that they must honor their people's claims to privacy and personal freedom. Foreign leaders often disagree. They resent what they deem arrogant meddling by the United States. Leaders of the Soviet Union, for example, regard individual privacy as trivial when compared to the needs of the state. If the United States is to be persuasive in promoting freedom in other parts of the world, it must respect the privacy of its own citizens. Sometimes it is hard to do this because what goes on in people's private lives may seem offensive. But, according to U.S. traditions, there is a strong case to be made against legislating the private behavior of adults, so long as that behavior does not in turn violate the rights of others. Some people feel that this reasoning should hold also for marijuana. A person who smokes at home is not doing injury. The marijuana user is indulging in a minor pleasure over which that government should have no jurisdiction. It is quite clear from survey data that most people do not become physically dependent on marijuana. The majority use it as others use alcohol - to relax occasionally and to indulge a festive mood. How can a mild intoxicant, taken less than once a day by most users, be seen as a public threat? Even those who are "hooked", or psychologically dependent upon their habit, should not be penalized by the law. Some people find any compulsive and unproductive behavior disgusting. But that is not a reason for outlawing it. Consider eating, many people develop compulsive habits about food. They talk about it frequently. They spend many of their waking hours anticipating, planning, obtaining, and consuming food. This may be unattractive. It certainly is not productive and it can be harmful if the "food addict" is over weight. But there are no laws to prevent food addiction. If Congress tried to forbid the eating of ice cream sundaes or cotton candy, many people would be outraged, others would simply laugh. The same sort of argument is raised by some people with respect to marijuana. Even compulsive marijuana smoking by an adult is not so offensive that it injured neighbors or requires government intervention. The attempt to use the law to tell people what they may and may not consume at home is an arrogant invasion of personal privacy. Protecting the Drug User's Physical Health Sometimes it is said that the law must protect the drug user from himself. The argument takes two forms. One has to do with the damage a drug may do to a person's health and the other with the individual's power of self-control or freedom. First consider the health effects. By any reasonable standard, marijuana is a mild drug and as for overdosing, there is no scientifically valid evidence of anyone dying of an overdose of marijuana smoke. Of course, it is possible to commit suicide by consuming large amounts of marijuana. But it is possible to

die by eating too much salt. Salt is not illegal. Aspirin kills by overdose and that's legal. Many people die by drinking too much alcohol, an addictive drug. It too is legal. Why is marijuana considered more dangerous?

### Protecting Society from Marijuana

One argument made against the legalization of marijuana is that it damages not only the user but innocent bystanders. This argument, like the one about protecting the user, has two parts. The first deals with physical injury and the second with spiritual health. The main physical threat to society is that users under the influence of a drug with crash a car or airplane, or lose control in some way and do harm. People who have recently smoked marijuana do show signs of clumsiness and disorientation. They should not operate machinery in this condition. One study estimates that alcohol plays a part in 55% of all fatal highway crashes. Marijuana may present similar risks, but at present there are no reliable data on its importance in accidents. According to John Stuart Mill's writings, the government should try to control only the aspects of drug use that injure society. In this vein, it makes sense to have laws against driving under the influence of marijuana similar to those governing driving under the influence of alcohol. In other words, driving while on marijuana should be outlawed by not the use of marijuana itself. Some people believe that marijuana threatens society in a more insidious way. They argue that it drains workers' energy and makes them less productive. This in turn lowers the vitality of the economy, depressing the overall quality of life. In addition, drug use- including marijuana smoking- is seen as a plague on society that must be isolated. This disease theory holds that legalizing marijuana would make it more widely available and that this would tend to increase its use as well as the use of all kinds of drugs. One of the detriments of tolerating drug use, according to this theory, is that it encourages the use of more and different drugs. The National Institute on Drug Abuses 1984 report to Congress cited no evidence to support the idea that drug use is hurting economic productivity. It said: "The fact is, very little is known about the complex relationship which undoubtedly exists between drug abuse, worker performance, and productivity, or the lack thereof.... Simply put, the number of unanswered questions currently far outnumbers the available answers." Nor is there any strong evidence that legalizing marijuana would increase use of the drug. In fact, there is some evidence suggesting that drug use under a relaxed legal system might not increase at all. Many states have removed the penalties for marijuana possession that were on the books in the 1950s and 1960s. The change occurred during a reform movement that swept the nation in the mid 1970s. Yet in spite of the less stringent laws, studies show that the use of marijuana in the affected states has, after an initial increase, declined. Although marijuana became easier to use (from a legal standpoint), it also became less popular.

### The Failure of Prohibition

Examining the U.S. policy on marijuana on the basis of performance, one must judge it a miserable failure. The number of people who have smoked the drug at least once has grown from an uncounted few in the 1950s, when some of the strictest antimarijuana laws were imposed, to nearly 50 million today. During this period the

federal government has made steadily increasing efforts to stop its production and importation, and seizures of marijuana in the ports has grown steadily. Elaborate and costly international police campaigns have been launched, and the number of drug arrests in the United States has increased. The federal budget for drug enforcement reflected in several agencies has gone above \$1 billion a year. And yet the illegal trade in marijuana continues. Supplies are so plentiful that the price has actually come down. The response has been to redouble police efforts and hope that things will change. The result is that more money is spent on a failed policy, creating an ever-growing army of drug enforcers dedicated to keeping the policy alive. The illegal market for marijuana grows even faster than the police force, however, because the drug users are willing to pay more to get what they want than taxpayers are willing to pay to stop it. The drug police enjoy their work and are not going to quit. And why should they as long as their salaries are paid? The admission that the marijuana laws have failed will have to come from someone else- not from the police. Marijuana is a common weed, easier to produce than the bathtub gin of the Prohibition years. It is not surprising that thousands of "dealers" have been drawn into the marijuana business. Despite the great risks they face, including bullying by other dealers and the threat of arrest, they are attracted by the profits. The law cannot change the economics of this market because it operates outside the law. All the police can do is to make it risky to get into the marijuana business. This is supposed to drive out the less courageous dealers, reduce the amount of marijuana available, and inflate prices. But even by this measure, the police effort has failed. As mentioned earlier, the price of marijuana is declining. There are several ways in which the policy on marijuana imposed a burden on society. The obvious one is the cost of supporting the federal enforcement effort. Aside from this, there is a hard-to-measure but significant impact on society because the law creates a huge criminal class. It includes not just dealers who are out for profit but a much larger group of users. Consider three major penalties for having such a large criminal class.

#### Some Benefits of Legalizing Marijuana

By lifting the ban on marijuana use and treating it like other drugs such as tobacco and alcohol, the nation would gain immediate and long-term benefits. This change in the law would greatly improve the quality of life for many people. Victims of glaucoma and those needing antinausea treatment, for example, would find marijuana easily available. If the medical advantages that are claimed for marijuana are real, many more patients would benefit. Research, which has been slowed in the past by the government's reluctance to grant exemptions to the marijuana laws, would be easier to conduct. The cloud of suspicion would disappear, and doctors could get on with investigating marijuana's medical uses with out fear of controversy. It might become possible to discuss the dangers of marijuana use without getting caught up in a policy debate. Meanwhile, the black market would disappear overnight. Some arrangement would be made to license the production of marijuana cigarettes. Thousands of dealers would be put out of business, and a secret part of the economy would come into the open. It is difficult to say whether this change would reduce crime because criminals would probably continue to sell other drugs. But it would have an impact on the amount of money flowing through criminal channels, and this might weaken organized crime. Lastly, the federal

budget would benefit in two ways, Federal revenues would increase, because marijuana cigarettes would be taxed at the point of sale. The companies that make the cigarettes would also pay income taxes, adding to the federal coffers. Second, there would be a reduction in the amount spent on law enforcement efforts to apprehend and prosecute users and sellers of marijuana. The drug enforcement authorities might reduce their budget requests, or, more likely, focus more intensely on hard drugs and violent crimes. The courts would be relieved of hearing some drug cases, as well. The most important gain would be in the quality of government. The sorts of temptations and opportunities that lead to corruption would be significantly minimized. The illogical pattern of law enforcement, which now treats marijuana as more dangerous than alcohol, would end. It would set more achievable goals for law enforcement, and this would lend strength and credibility to the government.

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Alcohol vs. Marijuana 1: Over 100 thousand deaths annually are directly linked to acute alcohol poisoning. 2: In 4,000 years of recorded history, no one has ever died from a pot overdose. 3: Alcohol causes severe physical and psychology dependence. 4: Alcohol is reported to cause temporary and permanent damage to all major organs of the body. 5: Cannabis is a much less violent provoking substance than alcohol. \* With over 60 million people using cannabis in the U.S. Today our laws and law makers should view it under the same light. As they do alcohol.

Marijuana Status 1970: 11% of high school seniors said they were using marijuana every day. 1975: About 27% said they had used marijuana sometime in the previous month. 1978: The monthly users grew up to 37% then in 1986 dropped to 23%. 1979: 12 to 17 year olds reported using it within the last month has dropped from a high point of 17% and in 1987 dropped to 12%.

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