

Should Marijuana be Legalized?

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People tend to think that marijuana is a bad drug, only leading to crime and violence and a pursuit of money through buying and selling it. Certain groups lobby with Congress and with the media to argue that marijuana is a harmful drug that needs to be kept off the market and out of the hands of everyday citizens. After researching, some would conclude that marijuana is not a harmful drug, that it is in fact less dangerous than tobacco and alcohol and that if they are legal, surely a less harmful drug should be legal also. Marijuana can be used for vast industrial purposes, one of those being the production of paper. Marijuana is the only drug to be used in some severe medical cases—medicinal marijuana. The legalization of marijuana would decrease crime rates and the control of it by the government increases the wealth of country.

The article titled “Cannabis: Effects and Consequences” insisted that marijuana has to be banned because:

Marijuana is a powerful drug with a variety of effects. 1) Marijuana users are subject to a variety of adverse health consequences: respiratory damage, impaired physical coordination, problem pregnancy and postnatal deficits, impaired memory and cognition, and psychiatric effects. 2) There are crimes in illegal marijuana markets, 3) Countries that have liberalized drugs have the highest rate of illicit drugs, 4) Legalization and permissiveness will increase drug use and abuse substantially, the costs of health care, prevention, productivity loss and enforcement will increase proportionately (“Cannabis”).

It seems clear that marijuana is not as harmful as some fighting its legalization claim it to be. The health risks associated with marijuana are much less harsh than other substances such as alcohol and tobacco or the much harsher drugs such as cocaine, meth, and heroine. More than 400,000 Americans die from diseases related to cigarette smoking each year. More than 150,000 Americans die of alcohol abuse each year. But in the many years of usage, there has been no report of anyone dying from marijuana (Hill).

Marijuana is the third most popular recreational drug in America, behind only alcohol and tobacco. Marijuana has been used by nearly 80 million Americans (“Testimony”). According to government surveys, some 20 million Americans have smoked marijuana in the past year and more than 11 million do so regularly despite harsh laws against its use. The smoking or ingestion of marijuana leaves is less harmful to the body than smoking tobacco or drinking alcohol. As shown in the graph below.

	<u>Heroin</u>	<u>Alcohol</u>	<u>Tobacco</u>	<u>Cannabis</u>
<u>Physical Dependence</u>	Very Strong	Very Strong	Strong	Weak
<u>Psychological Dependence</u>	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong	Weak
<u>Nervous System Toxicity</u>	Weak	Strong	None	None
<u>General Toxicity</u>	Strong	Strong	Very Strong	Very Weak
<u>Social Risk</u>	Very Strong	Strong	None	Weak

Chart found on Dopehead.

Most know that smoking can cause various types of cancer and respiratory damage; alcohol ingestion can cause cancer, impaired physical coordination, and memory and cognition impairment; and that both can cause problems in pregnancy and post natal developments. However, these substances are legal. There are laws set in place for the use of alcohol and tobacco—how much alcohol you can have in your system before not being allowed to drive; no smoking within a certain distance of buildings and around children; age limits for both drinking and smoking. Marijuana is no more harmful to an individual than this—why can’t there be laws controlling its use?

Marijuana is not as harmful as harder drugs like cocaine, meth, or heroin. However, many argue that marijuana is a gateway drug. This can mean two things: 1) that the use of this drug will lead to the using of harder, more harmful drugs to get a high, or 2) if marijuana is legalized, drug users will push for the legalizing of other, harder drugs. To combat this argument, a study was done in the Netherlands. After they legalized marijuana in the 1970s, hard drug use (heroin and cocaine) had declined substantially. Other studies done at this time showed a negative relationship between the use of

marijuana and alcohol meaning marijuana tends to be a substitute for the much more dangerous, hard drugs like alcohol, cocaine, and heroin.

Marijuana has vast industrial applications. The following materials can be made from marijuana: paper, textiles, building materials, food, medicine, paint, detergent, varnish, oil, ink, and fuel. Unlike many crops, marijuana can be grown in most locations and climates with only moderate water and fertilizer requirements. Where hemp is grown, it has become a valuable and environmentally friendly crop (Dophaed). Now trees are used to make paper. What citizens don't know is that the chemicals used to make wood chemical pulp paper—the most common paper used—could cause us a lot of trouble tomorrow. Environmentalists have been concerned about the effects of dioxin and other compounds on wildlife and even people. Beyond the chemical pollution, there are agricultural reasons why marijuana hemp should be used instead. When trees are harvested, minerals are taken with them. Hemp is much less damaging to the land where it is grown because it leaves these minerals behind (Dopehead).

Marijuana can also be used for medicine. Marijuana was available as a medicine legally until 1937 in the USA and was sold as a nerve tonic. Marijuana can be used as a medicine to treat nausea, pain, and muscle spasms caused by cancer treatments such as chemo therapy. It alleviates symptoms of glaucoma, multiple sclerosis, AIDS, migraines, rheumatoid arthritis, and other debilitating diseases. There are over 60 chemicals in marijuana which may have medical uses in treating Alzheimer's, Tourette's, Hepatitis C, and decrease cancer cell growth. One chemical in marijuana may be useful to help people who cannot sleep. Another is taken from premature buds, called cannabidiolic acid, is a powerful disinfectant. Marijuana dissolved in rubbing alcohol helps people with the skin disease, herpes, control their sores and a similar salve was one of the earliest medical uses for marijuana. The leaves were once used in bandages and a relaxing non-psychoactive herbal tea can be made from small marijuana stems. It is relatively easy to extract chemicals from marijuana and put them into food or beverage, or into some sort of lotion using butter, fat, oil, or alcohol ("Medical Marijuana").

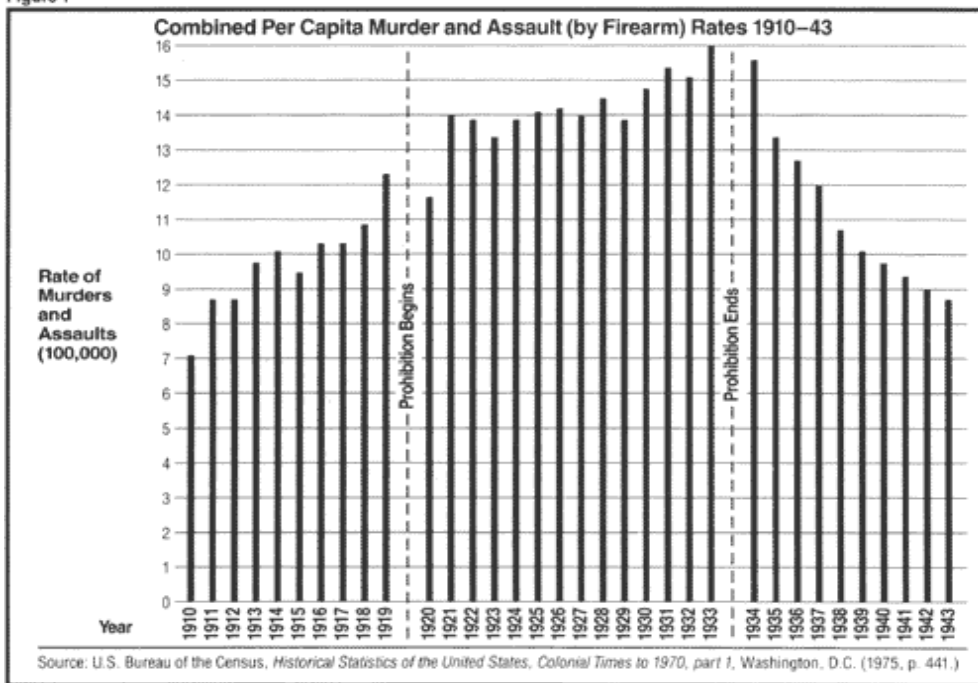
In America, the enforcing of marijuana prohibition costs taxpayers an estimated \$10 billion annually and results in the arrest of more than 734,000 individuals per year—far more than the total number of arrestees for all violent crimes combined, including murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Illegality of marijuana is a tremendous waste of national and state criminal justice resources that should be focused on combating serious and violent crime (“Marijuana Decriminalization”). In addition, it invites government unnecessarily into areas of citizens’ private lives, and “needlessly damages the lives and careers of hundreds of thousands of otherwise law-abiding citizens” (“Introduction”).

Many people are arrested for having marijuana in their possession—their only crime. They did not commit crimes of murder or armed robbery. Most of them are ordinary people; they just enjoyed

marijuana. Twelve million citizens have been arrested on marijuana charges in the US since 1965 (“Arrest Reports”). To prevent these useless arrests, marijuana must be legalized.

As shown in the table below, the murder rate rose with the start of

Figure 1



Prohibition, remained high during Prohibition, and then declined when Prohibition ended (Ostrowski).

This can also apply to marijuana. Prohibition, the illegalization of a substance, just increases a gangster’s power because they sell prohibition goods and get an enormous profit from it.

Some worry that if marijuana becomes legal, users of marijuana will dramatically increase but in actuality, “prohibition on marijuana” increase users. In 1985, 5.5% of American high school seniors used

marijuana daily, but in the Netherlands, where the use of marijuana is legal, the rate was only 0.5% daily (Lee). Even though, momentarily, users of marijuana increase when legalization of marijuana starts, consequently users of marijuana will decrease. This follows the line of thinking that if someone says “don’t do it” people might really want to do it.

Marijuana may also provide an income for the country or a state. By putting a tax on it, such as the tax that is put on alcohol and tobacco, states can make money off consumer purchasing of marijuana. If, as a nation marijuana were to be legalized, the country would be able to make revenue from all the marijuana sold illegally. The money would be taken from the black market and used in the national budget instead.

On the other side of the spectrum, if marijuana were to be legalized, many horrible things could come from it. Many Americans may think that legalization is a good thing to do, but don’t really think of what bad it could cause, not only the people that use it but also the people around them: friends, family, associates, or even complete strangers that just happen to be by them while they are smoking. Of course second-hand smoke is a bad thing for anyone to inhale. According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, “Second-hand marijuana smoke is at least as harmful as exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke” (Smoking Marijuana).

There are many other reasons on why it would be a bad choice for this nation to legalize Marijuana. Some of these reasons are: 1) the fact that once it is legalized it can fall into children’s hands; 2) it is a stepping stone to other drugs; 3) loss of control; 4) it is addictive; and 5) if it were to be legalized what is going to stop future legalization of stronger, harder drugs?

If it is legalized, there is more of a chance that children could get their hands on it and can ruin their lives. Marijuana usage would increase because children would start young and would continue using as they get older. It could also cause an increase of crime rates to go up because many marijuana users will do anything to get more and if they need to they will do dangerous and illegal things. This can be a stumbling block for the future of the U.S.

Another reason of why it should not be legalized is marijuana is considered a stepping stone to other drugs that are stronger and that are even more addictive. The users of marijuana want to heighten their high by using other stronger drugs ("Is Marijuana"). Other stronger drug use will increase, drug which are more fatal than marijuana. This will cause more deaths over the years because the other drugs such as meth, cocaine, and ecstasy are highly more addictive and can cause more damage to your body and your brain. If this were to happen, a decrease in marijuana usage would occur and more people would want to use the other stronger drugs that are worse for an individual in the long run.

Which leads into the fact that if marijuana is legalized, what is going to stop people from wanting the other drugs to be legalized in future? Marijuana is stepping stone to other drugs and once marijuana is legalized many may want others to be legalized as well, because if one is legalized what will stop them from legalizing others? Argument similar to those made for marijuana legalization: so much will be made off of them from taxes; it is not stopping people from using it just because it is illegal; and so many other excuses and ideas that people think could be the benefits from legalizing any drugs.

This also leads to the fact that marijuana is very addictive and that one can lose your self control because of it. Many people have a hard time with giving up marijuana because it is so addictive. Of course anything is possible if you really try and you are adamant about it, but it can be a lot harder for one person than it is for another. They are using it but they don't have enough money to get more of it so they will do anything to get money so they can buy more. In many cases this can cause crime to go up because someone needs to have more marijuana so they can get high. This can cause a major downfall in our society because those users will want to get more, or may cause them to use other drugs instead as mentioned before, which will cause more people to get into trouble and can cause some people to be hurt. It is also a bad thing for it to be legalized because once someone starts to use it, it can be very difficult to give up and stop using. This in the long run can cause major health issues not only to the user, but also to those around them while they are smoking.

In an article entitled “Marijuana Use Causes Brain Damage Confirmed” found on Medical Daily’s website states:

Australian researches showed that the earlier people start their marijuana habit, the worse the brain damage. Their results suggest that long-term cannabis use is hazardous to white matter in the developing brain. This concept is true because we all know that while going through adolescence our brain still in development. Scientists from Melbourne University and Wollongong University compared MRI scans of the brain for 59 people who had been using marijuana for an average of 15 years to 33 healthy people who had never used the drug. Researchers found that the ones who have been using cannabis had disruptions in their white matter fibers. The brain’s white matter is responsible for the information passed between different areas of the brain’s thinking areas that peak at age eight; white matter continues to develop as people age. They found that there was more than 80 percent reduction of white matter in the brain of users. And very interesting is that they found that the average age of participants in the study started using the drug at a younger age like 10 or 11 had even more severe brain damage. This study is a factor in determining the severity of the brain damage (Hsu).

In order to really get into the depths of marijuana brain damage, an interview was done with Brandy Warner (cousin of Euclides Cruz). Brandy started using marijuana when she was 12 years old and today is 36 years old; she suffers the consequences of this illegal drug.

Brandy has great desires to go back to college and earn a degree, but because the long term effect of using marijuana has affected her ability to think reasonably, Math becomes a big problem to Brandy. She has said that she cannot solve any kind of math problems even something very simple to her it turned into a nightmare and is impossible to solve. Also, she has trouble understanding people around her. She became very slow on making decisions and sometimes she acts like she was 12 years old when making adults decisions. Brandy used to be a very smart girl growing up; she loved to read and

write poems. She cannot do these activities anymore. As she has said, she cannot concentrate on anything that is time consuming. To her, it is very difficult to take care of her children. Brandy has 2 children and she struggles every day to educate and give her children the right directions on how to succeed in life. In general, others make decision for her in her life. She was very addicted to marijuana, could not go one day without it, and she would do anything to get it. She dearly regrets the many years she wasted using marijuana, all the money she spent buying marijuana, all the pain and trouble she caused to her family and friends, and most important of all, she regrets all the damage that it caused to her brain (Warner).

As explained with all these reasons of why marijuana shouldn't be legalized, they are not only affecting the user but also to those around them and potentially in their community. This can cause many traumatic things to happen in this nation over the years after it would be legalized. After reading both sides hopefully an understanding of why marijuana legalization is not the best for the country is gained. The cost to society and an individual health far outweigh the income transferred to the pocket of government and companies controlling use. It is a topic that has been discussed a lot lately and hopefully this paper has informed readers of arguments on both sides. Next time someone brings up marijuana legalization, the reader will be armed and educated, ready to debate.

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