Legalize Marijuana Essay, Research Paper

Every year, 400,000 Americans die of complications caused by tobacco products. Smoking kills more Americans each year than alcohol, crack, heroin, murder, suicide, car accidents, fires, and AIDS all put together. Every week, eight children under the age of eighteen die from alcohol related crashes. Alcohol abuse contributes to almost 50% of all traffic accidents, suicides, and homicides. However, despite the proven dangers of these “socially acceptable” drugs, they are still legal. Marijuana, a much less acceptable drug, is not legal however, despite the fact that research has yet to pin any specific dangers to this drug.

Aside from the health issues of marijuana, there are the many other aspects to consider when one broaches the topic of legalizing pot. Many arguments exist as to why marijuana should be legalized. Among these arguments exist the campaign of false propaganda that led to the ban on marijuana, the extreme harshness of marijuana laws, and the positive utilizations of the drug. The initial prohibition on marijuana was a mistake, and it is ridiculous that this recreational drug remains illegal after 63 years. When one weighs the pros and cons of re-legalizing marijuana, the logical result is to abolish the senseless ban on pot.

The events that led up to the prohibition on marijuana in 1937 are shady to say the least. For hundreds of years marijuana was noted as a cash crop from which clothing, rope, ship sails, and even bibles were made. During the 1920’s and 1930’s, the utilization of marijuana as a recreational drug became primarily associated with the Mexican-American immigrant workers and African-American jazz musician communities (http://www.natlnorml.org/facts/crazy.partI.shtml). The time old plant name of “Hemp” was replaced with “Marihuana” and was also referred to as “The Devil’s Weed.” This period of time saw the creation of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, which immediately launched a misinformation campaign that exploited Hollywood and several tabloid newspapers in order to exaggerate the effects of marijuana on society. Inflated accounts of the effects of marijuana included violent crimes, users going crazy, and death from marijuana usage.

This propaganda led to 27 states passing marijuana restriction laws. The Marijuana Tax Act, which would make use of marijuana a criminal offense, was introduced in April of 1937. The two congressional hearings combined totaled less than one hour. Oddly enough, these hearings were bases solely on the propaganda of the media. When the American Medical Association (AMA) came forward to state, among other things, that there was no proof that marijuana was at all harmful and that prohibiting the drug would severely compromise physicians’ abilities to utilize the therapeutic qualities of the plant, AMA Legislative Council Dr. William C. Woodward was told:

If you want to advise us on legislation, you ought to come here with some constructive proposals … rather than trying to throw obstacles in the way of something that the federal government is trying to do. (U.S. Congress, House of Ways and Means Committee)

After the bill was passed in the Ways and Means Committee, it moved on the House of Representatives. The House passed the bill after 90 seconds of debate. During this debate, one representative asked whether the AMA supported the bill. The Speaker of the House informed him falsely that the bill had the AMA’s full support. As can be observed by such actions, the federal government did not care one way or another about obtaining facts and evidence from the medical community. The underhanded way in which the government passed their prohibition on marijuana is reason enough for it to be revoked. Laws cannot be passed based solely on propaganda and exaggerations from the media and individuals who have no back round in the subject.

If one were to ignore the shady and deceitful ways in which the government criminalized the usage of marijuana, plenty evidence as to why it should be legalized still exists. Despite the 63 yearlong prohibitions on the drug, pot remains the third most popular recreational drug. After all these years, the stereotype that pot smoking is a fringe or deviant activity must be brought down. In reality, marijuana smoking is extremely common and marijuana is the recreational drug of choice for millions of mainstream, middle class Americans. A national survey by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that at some point in their life, 70 million people have tried marijuana. They also say that 18 million people have smoked in the past year, and that 10 million people are current smokers. The HHS also found that 57% of all illicit drug users report that marijuana is the only drug they have ever used; this figure rises to 77% if hashish (a more concentrated form of marijuana) is included.

This large number of people who admit to having tried marijuana include prominent businessmen, famous athletes, actors, musicians, and politicians; including the current president of the Unite States of America. In addition to these important social figures are patients who suffer from chronic illnesses such as AIDS and various forms of cancer who find relief from their sufferings in the form of a joint. The idea that marijuana is a drug used only by violent criminals is absurd, and one that must be ended. In the United States, a marijuana smoker is arrested every 45 seconds. The majority of these smokers are sent to jail for unreasonably long periods of time for the simple act of getting high. For example, if one were to be caught in Nevada with only 1 gr. of marijuana , one faces a jail sentence of up to five years in prison. That is longer than the penalty for aggravated assault, or even, in some cases, manslaughter.

These harsh charges for such a meager crime are ridiculous. Marijuana smokers are harmless criminals and are being jailed for longer than people who commit violent crimes. These harsh laws are another reason why marijuana should be legalized. Most especially because these laws seem to only affect people who are not famous or important. High school basketball player Michael Southall lost his basketball scholarship to GA Tech because of evidence showing that the high school senior had smoked pot once. Along with losing his scholarship, he was placed in military school. He avoided jail time only due of the fact that he was a minor and that it was his first offense. In Massachusetts, 18 year old, Brian Wright was arrested for the possession of marijuana with the intent to distribute. He was sentenced to 5 and one-half years in jail (www.yahoonews.com). When Vice-President Al Gore admitted to multiple uses of marijuana, however, nothing was done about it. Marijuana laws need to be abolished if some people are to allowed to get away with not even a slap on the wrist while others are receiving sever punishments.

These unforgiving laws against marijuana make utilizing the therapeutic properties of marijuana extremely risky to say the least. Marijuana can be utilized to treat numerous ailments. The cannabidiol (CB) and cannibichromine (CBD) are useful in combating the convulsive seizures of epilepsy. Cannabidiol also helps to protect brain cells during an attack of a stroke (http://www.norml.org/medical/marinol.shtml). Smoking marijuana also helps to reduce the nausea felt by chemotherapy patients, and AIDS patients on AZT. Despite the relief that marijuana can provide to all of these medical cases, United States Laws force these patients to suffer for fear of arrest and jail time.

In addition to helping certain sufferers of particular ailments, researchers are finding evidence that refutes prior information as to the harmfulness of marijuana. Dr. Grinspoon writes:

It is sometimes claimed that there is “new evidence” showing marijuana is more harmful than was thought in the sixties. In fact, the most recent studies have tended to confirm marijuana’s safety, refuting claims that it causes birth defects, brain damage, reduced testosterone, or increased drug abuse problems (Grinspoon 11).

Current research has disproved many myths about the harmful effects of pot. For example, it is a popular belief that pot kills brain cells. This myth has been shattered by a large, well organized, and controlled study involving monkeys, Jamaicans, and Costa Ricans. The occurrence of brain cell damage was never found in any of the studies. With evidence such as this showing up in multiple studies, the laws against marijuana must be carefully re-evaluated

Marijuana is a prominent recreational drug in the United States. Only alcohol and tobacco precede marijuana as the most popular drugs. These two drugs have been proven to be more harmful than marijuana, and yet these drugs remain legal, while marijuana usage carries with it harsh prison sentences. The medicinal usages of pot are well known, and the myths about the dangers of marijuana have been disproved. A large portion of America has admitted to trying marijuana, and the Vice-President of the United States of America admits to having used marijuana on multiple occasions. Marijuana was made illegal through trickery, deceit, and unfair propaganda. Despite all this, however, the drug still remains illegal.

Marijuana, hash, dope, weed, pot, bud, chronic, Mary Jane, reefer, however one desires to call it. This drug has many positive uses other than mere recreational enjoyment. Unfortunately, government strictures keep Americans from enjoying the full potential of this plant. It is time for the shackles to be thrown off from this plant. American citizens should be allowed to utilize this plant however they see fit, for medicinal, industrial, or simply recreational usage. Marijuana has inspired many people throughout the years. Among them is a band known as the Kottonmouth Kings. They once wrote:

How would life be if the world smoked weed?

Guaranteed there’d be peace not greed.

See? It’s hell, living in a cell.

Legalize the plant, only time will tell. (Kottonmouth Kings, Peace Not Greed)

This advice should be considered. We have seen what the prohibition against marijuana has brought about. It is time for America to see what the legalization of marijuana will bring about.

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