

Marijuana Solution

America's War on Marijuana—Timeline

1600–1890s *Domestic production of hemp encouraged*

American production of hemp was encouraged by the government in the 17th century for the production of rope, sails, and clothing. (Marijuana is the mixture of dried, shredded flowers and leaves that come from the hemp plant.)

In 1619 the Virginia Assembly passed legislation requiring every farmer to grow hemp. Hemp was allowed to be exchanged as legal tender in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland.

Domestic production flourished until after the Civil War, when imports and other domestic materials replaced hemp for many purposes. In the late nineteenth century, marijuana became a popular ingredient in many medicinal products and was sold openly in public pharmacies.

During the 19th century, hashish use became a fad in France and also, to some extent, in the U.S.

1906 *Pure Food and Drug Act*

Required labeling of any cannabis contained in over-the-counter remedies.

1900–20s *Mexican immigrants introduce recreational use of marijuana leaf*

After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Mexican immigrants flooded into the U.S., introducing to American culture the recreational use of marijuana. The drug became associated with the immigrants, and the fear and prejudice about the Spanish-speaking newcomers became associated with marijuana. Antidrug campaigners warned against the encroaching “Marijuana Menace,” and terrible crimes were attributed to marijuana and the Mexicans who used it.

1930s *Fear of marijuana*

During the Great Depression, massive unemployment increased public resentment and fear of Mexican immigrants, escalating public and governmental concern about the problem of marijuana. This instigated a flurry of research which linked the use of marijuana with violence, crime, and other socially deviant behaviors, primarily committed by “racially inferior” or underclass communities. By 1931, 29 states had outlawed marijuana.

1930 *Creation of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN)*

Harry J. Anslinger was the first Commissioner of the FBN and remained in that post until 1962.

1932 *Uniform State Narcotic Act*

Concern about the rising use of marijuana and research linking its use with crime and other social problems created pressure on the federal government to take action. Rather than promoting federal legislation, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics strongly encouraged state governments to accept responsibility for control of the problem by adopting the Uniform State Narcotic Act.

1936 *“Reefer Madness”*

Propaganda film *Reefer Madness* was produced by the French director Louis Gasnier.

The Motion Pictures Association of America, composed of the major Hollywood studios, banned the showing of any narcotics in films.

1937 *Marijuana Tax Act*

After a lurid national propaganda campaign against the “evil weed,” Congress passed the Marijuana Tax Act. The statute effectively criminalized marijuana, restricting possession of the drug to individuals who paid an excise tax for certain authorized medical and industrial uses.

1940s *“Hemp for Victory”*

During World War II, imports of hemp and other materials crucial for producing marine cordage, parachutes, and other military necessities became scarce. In response the U.S. Department of Agriculture launched its “Hemp for Victory” program, encouraging farmers to plant hemp by giving out seeds and granting draft deferments to those who would stay home and grow hemp. By 1943 American farmers registered in the program harvested 375,000 acres of hemp.

1944 *La Guardia Report finds marijuana less dangerous*

New York Academy of Medicine issued an extensively researched report declaring that, contrary to earlier research and popular belief, use of marijuana did not induce violence, insanity or sex crimes, or lead to addiction or other drug use.

1951–56 *Stricter Sentencing Laws*

Enactment of federal laws (Boggs Act, 1952; Narcotics Control Act, 1956) which set mandatory sentences for drug-related offenses, including marijuana.

A first-offense marijuana possession carried a minimum sentence of 2–10 years with a fine of up to \$20,000.

1960s *Marijuana use popular in counterculture*

A changing political and cultural climate was reflected in more lenient attitudes towards marijuana. Use of the drug became widespread in the white upper middle class. Reports commissioned by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson found that marijuana use did not induce violence nor lead to use of heavier drugs. Policy towards marijuana began to involve considerations of treatment as well as criminal penalties.

1968 *Creation of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs*

This was a merger of FBN and the Bureau of Dangerous Drugs of the Food and Drug Administration.

1970 *Repeal of most mandatory minimum sentences*

Congress repealed most of the mandatory penalties for drug-related offenses. It was widely acknowledged that the mandatory minimum sentences of the 1950s had done nothing to eliminate the drug culture that embraced marijuana use throughout the '60s, and that the minimum sentences imposed were often unduly harsh.

Marijuana differentiated from other drugs

The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act categorized marijuana separately from other narcotics and eliminated mandatory federal sentences for possession of small amounts.

National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) founded

1972 *Shafer Commission*

The bipartisan Shafer Commission, appointed by President Nixon at the direction of Congress, considered laws regarding marijuana and determined that personal use of marijuana should be decriminalized. Nixon rejected the recommendation, but over the course of the 1970s, eleven states decriminalized marijuana and most others reduced their penalties.

1973 *Creation of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)*

Merger of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNND) and the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (ODALE).

1974 *High Times founded*

1976 *Beginning of parents' movement against marijuana*

A nationwide movement emerged of conservative parents' groups lobbying for stricter regulation of marijuana and the prevention of drug use by teenagers. Some of these groups became quite powerful and, with the support of the DEA and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), were instrumental in affecting public attitudes which led to the 1980s War on Drugs.

1986 *Anti-Drug Abuse Act—Mandatory Sentences*

President Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, instituting mandatory sentences for drug-related crimes. In conjunction with the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, the new law raised federal penalties for marijuana possession and dealing, basing the penalties on the amount of the drug involved. Possession of 100 marijuana plants received the same penalty as possession of 100 grams of heroin. A later amendment to the Anti-Drug Abuse Act established a “three strikes and you’re out” policy, requiring life sentences for repeat drug offenders, and providing for the death penalty for “drug kingpins.”

1989 *Bush's War on Drugs*

President George Bush declares a new War on Drugs in a nationally televised speech.

1996 *Medical Use Legalized in California*

California voters passed Proposition 215 allowing for the sale and medical use of marijuana for patients with AIDS, cancer, and other serious and painful diseases. This law stands in tension with federal laws prohibiting possession of marijuana.

2009

President Obama and his administration make history by releasing a memorandum that vows to leave state laws that tightly regulated medicinal marijuana alone.

2012

Colorado and Washington both vote to legalize recreational marijuana.

2014

January 1, Colorado rolls out the sale of recreational marijuana; July 7, Washington rolls out the sale of recreational marijuana.

2016

Retail sales of marijuana to begin in Oregon and Alaska.