

# Hemp, why it should be legalized



When the subject of hemp is brought up, most of us think of an illegal plant that produces a hallucinogenic high when the flowers or leaves are eaten or smoked. A plant that corrupts our youth, causing our teenagers to drop out of school or use the drug as a stepping stone for harder drugs such as cocaine or heroin. Does any of this sound familiar? What do you think would happen to these beliefs you have if you were to find out the information given to you was one sided. That hemp was really a commendable plant.

A plant that could be used to help worldwide with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, and shelter. A plant that could help save our natural resources by using hemp fiber for paper instead of trees and hemp seed oil to run our cars instead of gasoline. Would you still want this natural resource to be illegal, or would you consider legalizing it after hearing both sides? The first goal to understanding hemp and all the wonderful properties it retains is that it is not marijuana, its notorious cousin.

Hemp and marijuana are varieties of the same plant, *cannabis sativa* L. (Isn't Hemp). The difference between the two varieties of plants is two cannabinoid proteins; the first called delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, and the second protein being cannibidiol, or CBD. These two proteins mentioned are the difference between getting high when smoking or eating the flowers or leafs from the two plants. THC is what creates the high and CBD is what lowers it. That's why you get high when you smoke marijuana, because it contains high levels of THC and low levels of CBD, while hemp on the other hand has low THC (less than 1%) and high amounts of CBD (Isn't Hemp).

The second difference between the two plants is their physical structure; Hemp, grown for its fiber, has been selectively grown to produce a much thicker-stalked plant with fewer leaves and flowers. Marijuana on the other hand is grown for the THC-containing leaves and flowers, so it has been selectively bred to produce a plant which produces more foliage than stalk (Isn't Hemp). Now, . . . Knowing the chemical and physical difference between hemp and marijuana, we can now look at hemp as an individual plant without the bad publicity of its cousin, marijuana.

If we look back to the early colonial times when America was starting out, we can see that hemp was an indispensable raw material used in everyday life. Hemp helped to provide the essentials for life and keep the colonies going (Roulac 32). The long fiber of the hemp plant was used for very desirable textiles (mainly clothes and shoes). Its antimildew and antimicrobial properties were perfect for sails and rope. The medium fiber produced from the hemp plant is what produced the paper the colonies needed for such things as books, bibles and maps.

They also used it for their newspaper, and eventually for the Declaration of Independence. The short core fiber of the hemp plant was used for animal bedding and animal food. It also served as a direct and sturdier replacement for wood in construction materials (Roulac 13-14). Even the seeds of the hemp plant played their role. The seeds were used as a protein source that tasted better than soybean, and could be processed into milk, cheese, ice cream, and butter among other foods. Hemp seed oil was burned in lamps and used to make soap.

Seed meal could be blended with other grains for many kinds of baking goods (flour and breads) (Roulac 14-15). In fact, in 1619; Jamestown Colony, Virginia enacts the New World's first marijuana legislation, ordering all farmers to grow Indian hemp seed. Mandatory hemp laws were passed in Massachusetts in 1631 and in Connecticut in 1632 (A Concise History). These laws were enacted for the simple fact that without the proper supply of hemp it could effect the cordage needed for our ships. Every major colonial port had a least one rope walk, which made cordage and sailcloth (or duck).

Hemp was the ingredient for ropes and usually also for sailcloth (although linen and cotton were also used). For ropemaking, the natural glue was washed out of soaked, decomposed hemp; then the hemp fibers were separated and split. Spinning was accomplished by walking the fibers through a spreader, a drawing frame, and two sets of rollers. (Ward 91) And since hemp was used for barter, farmers not complying with law could be imprisoned. Some colonies even let you pay your taxes with hemp (Ward 105). It isn't until the late eighteenth century that we start to see a decline in the use of hemp.

Technology starts to come about with new inventions such as the cotton gin (a machine that separates the seeds, hulls, and foreign material from cotton) that cuts labor costs in half, or the steam engine which started replacing the rope and sails on ships ( Cotton Gin 295). These kinds of inventions hampered hemp crops until February 1917, when an inventor named George Schlichten invented the decorticator (Hemp 33-34). A machine capable of stripping the fiber of any plant, and leaving behind the pulp, an answer to the hemp industries six thousand year old problem.

Hemp now could produce more than five thousand textile products from rope to fine laces and more than twenty five thousand products ranging from dynamite to cellophane (Perlin 105). Unfortunately though.. . powerful and wealthy men who stood to lose fortunes because of this new invention looked upon the decorticator as a threat. Two of these men, Lammont Du Pont, owner of the Du Pont company, and William Randolph, Hearst who owned and ran the Hearst newspaper chain, were two major influences to the illegalization of the plant Cannabis Sativa L (Colby 291-296).

With modern technology lurking around the corner, Du Pont and Hearst were looking to double their wealth without the complications from all natural processes. In the 1920s the Du Pont company developed and patented fuel additives such as tetraethyl lead, as well as the sulfate and sulfite processes for manufacture of pulp paper and numerous new synthetic products such as nylon, cellophane and other plastics. At the same time other companies were developing synthetic products from renewable biomass resources especially hemp.

The hemp decorticator promised to eliminate much of the need for wood-pulp paper, thus threatening to drastically reduce the value of the vast timberlands still owned by Hearst (American). With both men standing to lose a great deal, they come up with a plan to start ruining the reputation of hemp by calling it marijuana, making no difference between the two plants. Hearst and Du Pont started pushing for the illegalization of cannabis before the modernization of hemp processing could get off the ground, giving them time to introduce their synthetic products.

So began the bashing of hemp to make it illegal. The plan was to lie about and falsify facts to start creating a new disturbing belief about hemp. William Randolph Hearst's newspaper empire fuels a tabloid journalism propaganda campaign against marijuana. Articles with headlines such as Marijuana Makes Fiends of Boys in 30 Days; Hasheesh Goads Users to Blood-Lust create terror of the killer weed from Mexico. Through his relentless disinformation campaign, Hearst is credited with bringing the word marijuana to the English language.

In addition to fueling racist attitudes toward Hispanics, Hearst papers run articles about marijuana-crazed negroes raping white women and playing voodoo-satanic jazz music. Driven insane by marijuana, these blacks according to accounts in Hearst-owned newspapers dared to step on white men's shadows, look white people directly in the eye for more than three seconds, and even laugh out loud at white people. For shame! (A Concise History) After Hearst starts his false lies about the minorities and what marijuana can do to the innocent, Du Pont goes to seek the help of the Treasury Secretary, Andrew Mellon.

Mellon was not only the Treasury Secretary and the richest man in the world during this time, he also owned Gulf Oil and stood to lose just as much as Hearst and Du Pont if not more (Colby 322). After Du Pont sought out Mellon with the situation at hand, Mellon created and appointed his future nephew-in-law Harry J. Anslinger to the head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. This enabled the men to control the inside investigation of marijuana. Then; The Treasury Department secretly introduces its marijuana tax bill through the House of Ways and Means Committee, bypassing more appropriate venues.

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Committee chairman Robert L. Doughton, a key Congressional ally of Du Pont, rubber-stamps the bill. (A Concise History) The bill, now in front of Congress known as the Marijuana Tax Act, will start hearings to enact the bill. This is where the appointment of Anslinger to head the Federal Bureau of Narcotics became so crucial. Anslinger used his position to create havoc by confirming the stories of Hearst newspapers to tell congress about the horrible things the minority population was doing to the society of America.

Anslinger than falsifies information on police reports and medical reports to help destroy any credible evidence that hemp was different from marijuana. Anslinger was so convincing that he had a well known doctor of medicine, Dr. James Woodard, denounced from the hearings. When all was said and done the hearings ended and the new Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 was passed and signed into law (Act). Since that day in 1937, the American people were deceived out of a precious natural resource called hemp.

Could the world have been a different place if we actually pursued hemp over other natural and synthetic material? Would we have cleaner air, bluer oceans, and even healthier lives? Maybe, maybe not. But in the words of Henry Ford; Why use up the forests which were centuries in the making and the mines which required ages to lay down, if we can get the equivalent of forests and mineral products in the annual growth of the fields? I know from experience that many of the raw materials of industry which are today stripped from the forests and the mines can be obtained from annual crops grown on farms.

Industrialization of crops will also have the advantage of making a considerable saving to the manufacturer who learns how to accomplish it. The best possible working plan for any man in our civilization is to have one foot on the soil and the other in industry. (Roulac 38) I myself though have doubts about legalizing hemp for the simple fact that it could be a gateway for people to legalize marijuana. The medical world says it can achieve the same medical remedies with the hemp plant as it could with the marijuana plant.

The only true reason people seek the legalization of marijuana is for the hallucinogenic high (Therapeutic). In conclusion, there should be a well executed study performed to separate the cannabis family. It is my belief that we could benefit from hemp as another natural resource. Without hemp, how far can society go on natural resources that can take hundreds to thousands of years to produce? Or synthetic products that cause pollutants to over-run our earth. Hemp is not the total solution but rather a remedy until we can reach a perfect world.