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[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Brook Bernreuter 4/18/13 ENG 201: Gardner (11 MW) Legalization of Marijuana The relationship Americans have with marijuana is unique. Some would go as far to say it's dysfunctional. On one side, the government has reported over 100 million Americans, or 43 percent of the population over the age of 12, have admitted to using marijuana at least one time. On the other side, marijuana is very much illegal for recreational use and is classified by federal government as one of the most dangerous drugs. In films, marijuana is somewhat glamorized showing actors and actresses smoking and using marijuana much to the audiences' enjoyment, while the same behavior is often criticized in real life and deemed " socially unacceptable". Keeping a drug that is considered so dangerous, but obviously used responsibly by millions, illegal is supposed to be keeping it out of the hands of teens, but according to a poll published by the National Institute of Drug Abuse teen use has been going up steadily sense 2005 (Monitoring the future n. p.). The relationship Americans have had with prohibition has also been an extremely rocky one. It is common knowledge what happened during the prohibition of alcohol involving the black market, disapproval, lack of enforcement, and its final end in 1933. What is not common knowledge is that this is slowly becoming the movement for marijuana legalization as well. The black market involving marijuana is a billion dollar industry that funds much of the cartel destruction and violence in Mexico. The " War on Drugs" has been put on hold by Obama's drug czar contributing to lack of enforcement, yet America is still throwing billions in taxes down the drain keeping laws that no longer support what science tells us about marijuana. A telephone poll conducted shortly after the 2012

election by CBS found that a record of 49 percent of Americans are now in favor of legalization and abolishing prohibition once again as more and more Americans come to realize prohibition is failing (CBS n. p.). Medical marijuana has been legalized with a doctor prescription in thirteen states, and decriminalization of marijuana is accepted in some states and many large cities. Both of these alternatives to legalization are failing, and sending the wrong message giving way only to full legalization. Only two states so far have bravely agreed to legalize marijuana recreationally, easing the path for other states to follow suit. Prohibition of marijuana fuels black market violence, overcrowds jails, and sends the wrong message about the drug. Marijuana should be legalized because the government can easily regulate sales, increase tax revenue, and focus the time, manpower, and tax dollars elsewhere. Prohibition of marijuana and the "war on drugs" in the United States has been one of the biggest wastes of tax dollars in this country since the 1970's. In 1970, after classifying marijuana as a schedule 1 drug, congress enacted the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse to do a two year study on the drug so more could be known about its effects. A schedule 1 drug is defined as a drug that currently has no accepted medical use and is considered to be highly addictive and dangerous. Other drugs in the schedule 1 category include heroin, LSD, and ecstasy. The study was considered to be the most comprehensive study of marijuana ever in the United States. The final report was issued to President Nixon in March 1972 which concluded there was little danger of physical or psychological harm from using the drug, and that marijuana is clearly not in the same chemical category as drugs such as heroin or LSD. They also concluded that private

use or possession in one's home should not have a stigma of criminalization. They called for decriminalization and for it to be removed from its classification of a schedule 1 drug. President Nixon responded to the recommendations with " I shall continue to oppose efforts to legalize marijuana" (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 58), and shortly after formed the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and launched the war on drugs with marijuana being the number one public enemy. The " war on drugs" has thrown many Americans into the court system who otherwise would have not been labeled as criminals if legislators would open their eyes to the facts. So many Americans are being penalized for using a drug that has never been known to directly cause violence or harm toward others. The punishment for the use of marijuana does not seem to fit the crime. The federal government called for congress to eliminate all criminal penalties of possession and use of marijuana in the 70's, yet people who are charged for possession can face loss of financial aid, housing, careers, and even their children. Along with the financial and emotional burdens that go on the person being criminally charged, taxpayers are paying eight to ten billion dollars on arresting, prosecuting, and housing offenders - not counting prison sentences which are costing up to a billion dollars annually (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 115). Billions of dollars a year are being wasted with virtually no return on people who aren't even causing any actual harm to others. The authors of the book " Marijuana Legalization: What everyone needs to know" urge that marijuana related arrests will not change, and problems related to excessive consumption will still increase with legalization because illegal drug dealers will still sell marijuana (Caulkins et al. 117). The authors of this book are all

well educated on the issues of drug policy and respected in the field. While it may be true that some drug dealers will continue to sell marijuana simply because it is their pure source of income, the majority of users will decide to buy the drug legally. In 2007 police made over 837, 000 marijuana arrests. Of that number, nine out of ten were for possession only, not cultivation or distribution (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 114). This statistic shows the majority of the arrests are being made for possession. Legalizing marijuana will keep a large majority of users out of jail if they are choosing to use legally. The majority of marijuana users are not trying to break the law, they are simply trying to unwind or enjoy themselves. Americans buy and use alcohol responsibly, which has more erratic effects on the body and mind than marijuana, so the general population would most likely choose to buy and use marijuana responsibly as well. Some large cities and states have elected to decriminalize marijuana in an attempt to save the professional lives of young people making bad decisions, and to keep jails less crowded. The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) is an organization that is committed to changing the drug policy with a vision that people should not be punished for what they do in their spare time or for what they choose to put into their bodies, but only for harm they may cause to others. According to the DPA, decriminalization is not enough because it still falls under prohibition. Police in California seemed to be more likely to hand out " tickets" for small amounts of marijuana possession knowing it had much less adverse effects on the person's future if there is no jail time involved in possession (Drug Policy Alliance n. p.). Some of the people who receive these tickets are unable to pay them on time or complete the task given by a judge and end

up in jail via unpaid fines continuing to contribute to crowding jails and wasting more money to house and prosecute offenders. Another problem with decriminalization is the fuel it throws on the black market fire. According to the authors of " Marijuana Legalization: What everyone needs to know", most prohibitions' generate some type of black market activity. Around the world there is a black market on endangered animals, human organs, weapons, or anything that is illegal to possess and or distribute, but the black market on drugs in America is proving to be increasingly large and destructive (Caulkins et al. 111). Decriminalizing marijuana is making an already bad problem much worse because while it may be legal to possess small amounts of marijuana, the distribution, use, and purchase of marijuana is still very much illegal unless it's prescribed medically. This leaves users with virtually no out because they are still breaking the law on multiple levels by using and purchasing the drug. Marijuana is one of the biggest sources of income for the Mexican cartels. According to an article in the Foreign Policy journal written by the editor-in-chief, Mosies Naim, " Wasted: the American prohibition on thinking smart in the drug war.", the United States hands over ten billion dollars from marijuana alone to Mexican cartels each year with the number increasing more and more by year (Naim n. p.). This is money that could be used in the United States to fund and pay for countless things if it was not going straight to the hands of Mexican Cartels. Instead, the money continues to fund more violence each year ending in more murders, turf wars, and fatalities over the border than ever. These turf wars are now beginning to reach into American soil with over 195 cities that now are established Mexican cartel turf (Naim n. p.). Legalizing marijuana

will cut off the majority of the supply of money for the cartels in Mexico, and put a stop to most of the violence in the United States, Mexico, and at the border. If Americans were able to buy marijuana from the Government there is almost unimaginable financial and economic benefits that come along with the biggest cash crop in America. If marijuana was legalized, there are multiple financial and economic benefits that could follow. In 2007, an economic analysis done by Jon Gettman, a George Mason University professor of economics, found the retail value of the marijuana market stands at about \$113 billion dollars a year. Using standard tax percentages, that's \$31. 1 billion raised annually just in taxes (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 113). If that amount of money isn't enough to make someone think about legalization, the boost in the economy will. Legalization would create thousands of new jobs for Americans. There would be jobs created in a wide range of skill from cultivating and growing the plant, factories to package it, drivers to deliver it to the shops, workers in the shops, and so many in between. The government can also make money on the taxes from wages of workers in the marijuana industry. Furthermore, legalizing marijuana would bring in much more tourist attractions to the United States just as coffee shops have in other countries. Wine vineyards in California and casinos in Las Vegas are both examples of adult activities that cost money and boost economies in certain areas. Some people may argue that legalizing marijuana is sending the wrong message to children and teenagers about the use of drugs. While there is truth in that statement, the government now considering marijuana to be a medical drug is sending a confusing message. The majority of teens do not know a thing about marijuana or any drug until

after their first time trying it. A Poll done by Monitoring the Future, an organization committed to monitoring the use of drugs and substance abuse among teens, found that more teenagers are considering marijuana to be okay to use and the perceived risk of using is lower than ever before (Monitoring the Future n. p.). This is blamed in large part on the medical marijuana industry, and rightfully so. The classification of a Schedule 1 drug, as discussed before, states that there are no current accepted medical uses. This goes against what most states are saying by now calling it medicine. Fully legalizing marijuana could make it possible to fund education on not only marijuana but other legal drugs such as tobacco and alcohol as well. Not only are teenagers perceiving the risk of using to be lower than ever, teenagers in the United States are using marijuana more than ever before. Monitoring the Future found that in the last three years, more teenagers in tenth grade and above are using less tobacco and using more marijuana (Monitoring the Future n. p.). Why are teenagers using an illegal substance over a legal one? This is because marijuana is illegal and is commonly sold by drug dealers on the street, not at a convenience store by workers who must abide by laws. Drug dealers do not ask for proper ID. The government claims the primary reason for keeping marijuana illegal is so it can be kept out of the hands of teenagers, yet this strategy is obviously failing because marijuana is often very accessible to teens and does not require I. D. If marijuana was legal teen use would be expected to increase slightly, but then generally decrease over time. Legalization will in fact make it much harder for teenagers to get their hands on marijuana because it will only be sold in stores that sell marijuana and follow strict guidelines and laws.

Legalization would make marijuana even safer to use and buy because the connection is no longer a random person on the street just trying to make money. Countless stories are told by people not in favor of legalization about marijuana having unknown chemicals in it or even shards of glass to make it weigh more when sold. If marijuana became legal, the government would be able to control production, packaging, and quality of the drug. The side effects and warnings will be labeled right on the bag along with how much exactly is there, and its potency. Different side effects come with different strains of marijuana just as different side effects come with different kinds of alcohol. For example, some people say they get really angry when they drink whisky so they stick to beer. In the same general way, the user would be able to know what type of marijuana would work best to avoid the types of side effects that are undesirable such as paranoia or sleepiness. A dark cloud has lingered over the possibility of legalization by those who still believe that marijuana is "socially wrong". In an article written in the Denver Clarion by Katie Walker, she claims use of marijuana to be "wrong, unhealthy, and stupid" (Walker n. p.). Katie Walker is a freelance writer for the Denver Clarion, and appears in a few other opinion articles but little is known on her credentials. The article discusses her opinion that just because marijuana is now legal in Colorado that it is still socially unacceptable. She supports her claims by referring to the common Hollywood stereotype of a "pothead" and discusses similarities in real life suggesting users of marijuana are feel good hippies who are lazy and destined to sit on their couch with their friends forever. She also states "Either way, law abiding potheads are potheads all the same" (Walker n. p.). She goes on to discuss that nobody would want the

neurosurgeon working on them to be a marijuana user and users of marijuana have no value in the workplace. While it is probably true that nobody wants an impaired individual working on their brain, it is highly unlikely a doctor would be under the influence of marijuana while at work, although if he wants to drink himself into oblivion after work that is socially acceptable. The social stigma that has come with marijuana smoking dates back before prohibition even started. The government had no idea what the effects of the drug were and the first initial tests on the drug concluded that people will become almost instantly addicted and then become psychologically unstable, turning to a life of crime and drugs. It is very obvious today that this is untrue, and multiple studies have been done to disprove this from many different aspects. Dr. Jack Henningfeild of the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse reported after a study on marijuana addiction that it is no more addictive than caffeine (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 64). It has also been proven and should be quite obvious, knowing almost half the population has tried marijuana at least one time, that there is very little psychological harm that comes from the use of marijuana - even in extreme cases where users have smoked over 22, 000 joints over lifespan (Fox, Armentano, and Tvert 66). Some research is beginning to show signs that humans are actually hardwired to enjoy drugs such as marijuana. The article " Prohibition and Humanism" written by Brett Aho, a freelance writer with degrees in public policy and cultural studies, talks about this possibility. The author suggests that humans are actually made to use marijuana referring to the cannabis receptors in the brain that take in the chemical in marijuana, THC. He refers to countless studies done

to prove that users of some drugs are actually known to have a higher IQ, challenging activities that are considered to be dangerous (Aho 16). There are plenty of activities including Super Bowl Sunday and St. Patrick's Day that encourage people to consume large amounts of alcohol and they are not socially judged for it. Users of marijuana should be able to enjoy the same times with a drug that in many ways proves to be much safer. Prohibition of marijuana fuels black market violence, overcrowds jails, and sends the wrong message about the drug. Marijuana should be legalized because the government can easily regulate sales, increase tax revenue, and focus the time, manpower, and tax dollars elsewhere. Keeping marijuana illegal is simply refusing to look at the facts and acknowledge that prohibition is doing our country much more harm than good. Younger Americans are in favor of legalization and are voting on that basis on ballots across the country. Looking ahead, it is safe to say the debate of marijuana is going to be sticking around and intensifying as our country looks to Colorado and Washington to be the role models of what so many Americans find to be only right.

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