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DAVE GIBSON

Medical marijuana - a haze or healing for our nation? From a medical perspective, cannabis answers pain relief issues with few side effects for those in chronic pain, plus has tax revenue potential. Or is this a step in legalizing pot for recreational use? **p7, 24**

Reefer Madness

Medical marijuana - healing or drugging the nation?

by Dave Gibson

On August 12th of 1930 Harry J. Anslinger was appointed the first Commissioner of the Treasury Department's Federal Bureau of Narcotics. With prohibition in force, legal and illegal drugs were gaining in popularity. Previously legal drugs heroin and cocaine's social ills were well recognized and legislation penalizing the non-medical use or distribution of those drugs enjoyed broad support. They were completely banned in 1924. With dangerous drugs addressed, marijuana became Anslinger's main target. In the United States, cannabis was mostly known as a bottled extract that one's grandfather used with little fanfare. Mexican immigrants were known to smoke marijuana as were jazz musicians. Anslinger along with newspaper magnet William Randolph Hearst began what could be described as a scare tactic campaign heavily inundated with racial overtones. The 1936 propaganda movie and cult classic "Reefer Madness" was the campaign's film counterpart. Besides a giggling man who played the piano very fast, it portrayed high school students being lured into a lurid world of manslaughter, rape, madness, and suicide. Hearst had lost 800,000 acres of timberland to Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. Having invested heavily in the timber and wood pulp paper industries that supported his newspaper empire, hemp (a product of the marijuana plant used in making paper) was financially threatening. Marijuana was known as cannabis in the early 1930's until Anslinger re-dubbed it "marihuana" to sound more Mexican.

Harry J. Anslinger wrote in his "Gore File," that "There are 100,000 total marihuana smokers in the U.S. and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz, and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers, and any others. The primary reason to outlaw marijuana is its effect on the degenerate races. Marijuana is an addictive drug which produces in its users, insanity, criminality, and death. Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as a white

man. Marijuana leads to pacifism and communist brainwashing. You smoke a joint and you're likely to kill your brother. Marijuana is the most violence-causing drug in the history of mankind." In 1937 the "Marihuana Tax Act" made marijuana effectively illegal under Federal Law.

Since then public opinion about marijuana use has mellowed, but Federal laws have not. Possession, cultivation, and distribution of marijuana remain a Class 1 felony. The recreational use of marijuana to attain its euphoric "high" is no secret, and can be debated endlessly. While marijuana doesn't appear to compare to the social and health problems that alcohol and cigarettes (both legal drugs) create, it still may be harmful to one's health. Marijuana's active ingredient THC may cause short-term memory loss. Marijuana is usually smoked and smoke contains chemicals some of which are carcinogens. Its smoke would seem innocuous compared to tobacco's as no known cases of lung cancer from inhaling the drug have been reported. The old argument of marijuana vs. alcohol is hackneyed. It is true however that I've never heard of anyone being so stoned that they caused highway deaths or beat their wife after leaving a pot party. Many believe in the beneficial uses of medical marijuana. In a completely different category than recreational marijuana, patients find it effective in treating glaucoma, neurological disorders like Multiple Sclerosis and Epilepsy, muscle spasms, AIDS, and countless types of chronic pain. Its medicinal uses in China date back five thousand years. Cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and experiencing nausea have found that marijuana restores their appetites at a time when they desperately need to regain their strength. It turns out that the "munchies" can be a good thing.

In 1996 California became the

first state to legalize medical marijuana. Since then, Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Colorado have followed suite. Fourteen states have laws pending. Fifty four percent of Colorado voters approved Amendment 20 to the state constitution on November 7, 2000, legalizing medical marijuana. With certain restrictions it removed criminal penalties for patients of at least 18 years of age using, possessing, and cultivating medical marijuana. Taking effect on June 1, 2001, the State of Colorado Dept. of Public Health began accepting applications for medical marijuana registry identification cards. As of mid-2009, around 15,000 patients had applied and met the requirement of a doctor's recommendation and received their confidential cards.

Providers for medical marijuana remained in short supply as federal laws supersede state laws. Providers mostly relied on their beliefs and a shortage of DEA agents. Representing a major shift in drug policy guidelines, in March of 2009 Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. announced that "It will not be a priority to use federal resources to prosecute patients with serious illnesses or their caregivers who are complying with state laws on medical marijuana, but we will not tolerate drug traffickers who hide behind claims of compliance with state law to mask

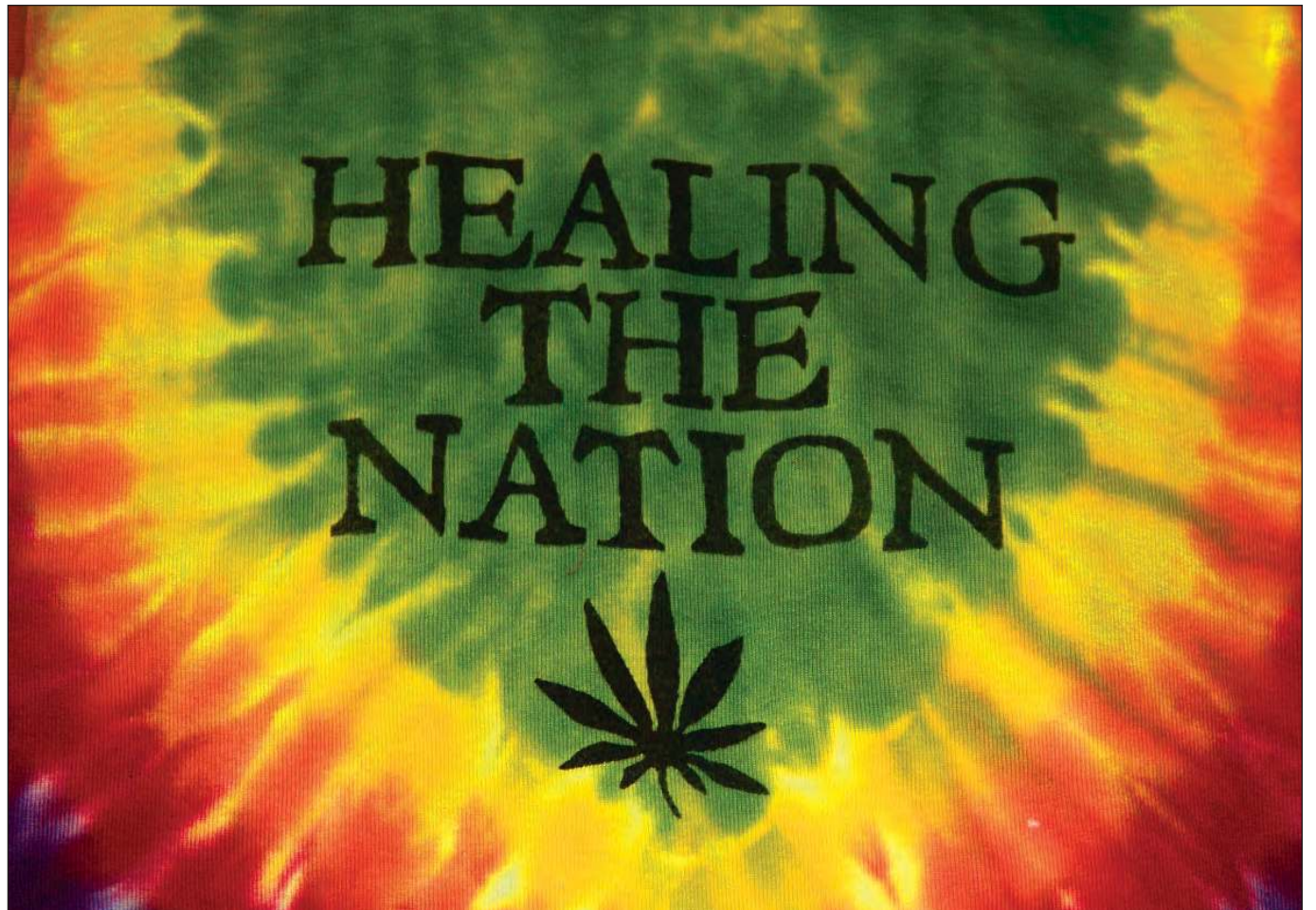
activities that are clearly illegal." In October President Obama instructed federal authorities "not to arrest or prosecute medical marijuana users and suppliers who are complying with state laws." In an ironic twist, the Mexican connection that originally helped make marijuana illegal now may have been a factor in making it technically legal. An ongoing drug war being waged and mostly lost on our country's southern border saps limited funding. Taxes collected from marijuana dispensaries and caregivers are a bonus. There are now estimated to be over 100 medical marijuana dispensaries in Colorado and more than 60,000 registered patients.

Nearby, Nederland has three public dispensaries and two grow shops. A few people have taken to calling Nederland "Nedsterdam" after Amsterdam and their legalized drug culture. Cannabis Healing Arts (formally located at the One Brown Mouse Boutique) has moved their operations down the street to the old Acoustic Coffee site at 95 E. First St. The owners have been marijuana rights activists for over 20 years. Its original location in a boutique was understandably like walking into a store. Patients were able to choose their medical marijuana from a series of trays holding jars of various strains of cannabis. Marijuana is classified in two types-Sativa and Indica. Each possesses different medicinal properties and most of the marijuana for sale is a

hybrid of both. The different strains listed on a chalkboard come with names like Northern Lights, Blueberry, Bubblegum, Purple Haze, Bubba Kush, Sour Diesel, Mango Afghanie, AK47, Maui Mist, Meltdown, Grape Ape, and Mr. Nice. Prices run between 14 and 18 dollars per gram. Marijuana edibles such as brownies, lollipops, baklava, and Obama cookies are also offered. For those wishing to "grow your own" marijuana clones can be purchased.

If Cannabis Healing Arts was akin to a store, then Grateful Meds at 110 Snyder St. (lower level) reminded me of a doctor's office. A buzzer must be pressed to gain admittance to the small waiting room which is almost always filled. Patients enter a second room to purchase their medicine which may include hash or tinctures. The inventory and services are comparable to those of Cannabis Healing Arts and prices are more than competitive.

The Tea Alchemy apothecary/dispensary at 98 Hwy 119, Suite 2 also carries some medical marijuana. The cannabis is locally grown and organic as it mostly is at the other dispensaries in town. Their retail space reminded me of a spa. The emphasis of Tea Alchemy's business focuses on overall wellness. Beneficial native roots and herbs of most kinds are for sale.



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