

Can You Tell Me – What Happened?

So, with all these uses and benefits, why is cannabis cultivation illegal in the United States today? Here is a brief history of cannabis prohibition:

Hemp was a primary source of paper, textile, and cordage fiber for thousands of years until just after the turn of the 20th century. It was at this time that companies like DuPont first developed chemicals that enabled trees to be processed into paper.

DuPont's chemicals made wood pulp paper cheaper than paper made from annual crops like hemp. At the same time Wm. Randolph Hearst, the owner of the largest newspaper chain in the United States, backed by Mellon Bank, invested significant capital in timberland and wood paper mills to produce his newsprint using DuPont's chemicals.

DuPont also developed nylon fiber as a direct competitor to hemp in the textile and cordage industries. Nylon was even billed as synthetic hemp.

DuPont was also manufacturing chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers useful in the cotton industry, another hemp competitor.

Mellon Bank, owned by U.S. Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, was also DuPont's primary financier. Mellon's niece was married to Harry Anslinger, deputy commissioner of the federal government's alcohol prohibition campaign. After the repeal of Prohibition, Anslinger and his entire federal bureau were out of a job. But Treasurer Mellon didn't let that happen. Andrew Mellon single-handedly created a new government bureaucracy, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, to keep his family and friends employed. And then he unapologetically appointed his own niece's husband, Harry Anslinger, as head of the new multimillion dollar bureaucracy.

At the same time, a machine was developed that was to hemp what the cotton gin was to cotton: it allowed hemp's long, tough fiber to be mass processed efficiently and economically for the first time. Popular Mechanics, in February 1937, predicted hemp would be the world's first "Billion Dollar Crop" that would support thousands of jobs and provide a vast array of consumer products from dynamite to plastics.

This potential rejuvenation of hemp was a major threat to Secretary Mellon's friends and business associates, especially Randolph Hearst with his wood paper industry and Lammont DuPont with his petrochemical and synthetic fiber conglomerates. After all, hemp farmers wouldn't need DuPont's chemicals to grow their hemp because the crop is self-sufficient. The hemp-based ethanol fuel that was mentioned in the Popular Mechanics' article probably didn't sit too well with the oil companies of the time. They also couldn't have been too thrilled to learn that this same plant produced high-strength plastics without a petroleum base. The hemp-based plastics developed at the time were stronger and lighter than steel, which we can imagine wasn't the best news for the steel industry.

In addition, the growing pharmaceutical companies were producing synthetic drugs to replace natural medicines. Hemp extract was used for thousands of years to effectively treat everything from epileptic fits to rheumatoid arthritis. Chances are, hemp's resurgence wasn't good news for these drug companies either.

What we see is that the potential revival of the hemp industry was a threat to almost all the corporate giants of the time, and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon was at the top of this food chain.

So Commissioner Anslinger, Mellon's appointee, begins researching rumors that immigrants from Mexico are smoking the flowers of the hemp plant. Racism was rampant at the time, and there was a government movement to curb the number of immigrants crossing the U.S. border at Mexico. Anslinger plugged into the racist sentiment, and began referring to the "hemp" that Americans knew cannabis to be, as "marijuana," the Mexican slang word for the plant. He labeled it as a "narcotic" even though cannabis flowers cannot cause narcosis, and spread exaggerated stories and outright lies that Mexicans and blacks became violent and disrespectful to whites when they smoked the "evil menace marijuana."

This slander of cannabis was all just fine for Anslinger's friends, the Mellons, the DuPonts, and the Hearsts. In fact, Hearst's newspapers picked up on the propaganda and fueled the fire by publishing hundreds of lurid stories about people raping and murdering while under the influence of marijuana. The sensationalism sold lots of newspapers, and the people of the country actually based their opinions on this one-sided information. Of course the stories never mentioned the hemp that people used everyday as rope, paper, medicine, and more. The stories always referred to cannabis by the Mexican slang word, marijuana.

With the moral and prohibitive fervor of the time duly stirred, Anslinger took his show to Congress. At the proceedings of the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, Anslinger didn't mention that marijuana was hemp. And because anti-marijuana propaganda didn't mention that basic fact, hemp industries found out almost too late about the effort to criminalize cannabis cultivation. Testimony was heard from the full gamut of hemp companies and advocates, from birdseed suppliers to cordage manufacturers, from farmers to physicians, all touting hemp's importance in American history and the many industrial, agricultural, medicinal, and economic benefits of cannabis. Only after their testimony, was the wording of the bill changed to allow for the continued legal cultivation of industrial hemp. Anslinger even backed off on hemp prohibition in a very cunning maneuver.

After the Act was passed, Anslinger single-handedly usurped congressional power by mandating hemp prohibition. He justified his action by saying that his agents couldn't tell the difference between industrial hemp and marijuana in the field, so hemp cultivation made enforcement of marijuana prohibition impossible. This unconstitutional usurpation of congressional law is still in effect today as the Department of Justice and the DEA still cling to Anslinger's unjust and unjustifiable prohibition on domestic hemp cultivation.

Hemp for victory

With the United States entering World War II only four years after hemp's prohibition, and the synthetic fiber industry still in its infancy, the armed forces experienced a dangerous shortage of fiber for the war effort. In 1942, the U.S. government performed a convenient about-face on the hemp issue. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produced and distributed a motion picture called "Hemp for Victory" in which the federal government not only promoted the many uses of cannabis hemp, but also detailed the most efficient cultivation and harvesting methods. The picture pronounced, "Hemp for mooring ships! Hemp for tackle and gear! Thread for shoes for millions of American soldiers! And parachute webbing for our paratroopers! Hemp for Victory!"

By the end of the war, hemp was no longer needed for strategic purposes and synthetic fiber was being produced more efficiently and abundantly than ever. The same soldiers that hemp had supplied with ship's rigging, rope, tackle, gear, shoes, and parachutes turn against their recent ally. The Marines themselves, armed with flame-throwers, and Air Force pilots in crop dusters are ordered to destroy the same million acres of hemp that were recently planted for the war effort. These actions were the beginning of the modern war on hemp.

The war on hemp

This is a war that Harry Anslinger took to the United Nations. As U.S. representative on the UN's drug committee, Anslinger initiated a series of conventions to prohibit the plant worldwide. To this day, most nations (especially the poorer ones) cannot get aid from the United States unless they have a government plan to eradicate hemp.

For example, Bangladesh. "Bang" means marijuana; Bang-la-desh means marijuana-land-people. The U.S. government went into Bangladesh and crop dusted their country with toxic herbicides. Not only did we poison the people of Bangladesh with our "War on Drugs", but we killed all the hemp that was holding the hillsides together. There was massive flooding and landslides as a direct result of America's global drug policy.

Another example is when we paid King Hassad of Syria to go into the camps of Lebanese Bedouin nomads and cut down their hemp fields, their food and fiber, with tanks! Harry Anslinger's modern-day successors, true to his irrational and fanatical methods, are waging a global genocide war against a plant!

It's not about drugs

The DEA and Department of Justice's claim that the prohibition of domestic hemp cultivation should continue because of its relationship to marijuana is a farce. There are strains of industrial hemp that are entirely drug-free. Law enforcement's contention that high-THC cannabis could be hidden in a hemp field is also erroneous, as cross-pollination would ruin the marijuana.

Their claim that it's too difficult to tell the difference in the field is also a lie. Industrial hemp looks more like bamboo than marijuana, and the other 30 industrial nations that cultivate hemp legally have no problem identifying the types of cannabis in their

fields. The fact that the Drug Enforcement Agency is prohibiting a drug-free plant is proof positive that the hemp issue is not about drugs. There is no drug in the plant.

It's all about money

The prohibition of domestic hemp growth is about what everything is about in this country. It's about money. The drug war is big business huge business. If hemp cultivation were legalized, there would be an awful lot of DEA agents out of a job.

Consider this: of the one-and-a-half billion cannabis plants found and destroyed by U.S. drug agents between 1993 and 1997, only fourteen million were marijuana. That's 0.9 percent. That means that 99.1 percent were low-THC hemp. Legalizing hemp would translate to laying off 99.1 percent of all agents of the War on Marijuana, 99.1 percent fewer guns, helicopters, automobiles, flack jackets, etc. That's a lot of money in government contracts.

Hemp is a plant that can naturally and sustainably provide many products presently available only from corporate giants like DuPont, International Paper, Texaco, BASF and the like. They could lose billions if hemp was grown in the United States for fiber, paper, fuel, and plastics. They have millions of dollars to back anti-hemp propaganda. They sponsor programs like D.A.R.E. and The Partnership for a Drug-Free America that equate hemp's cousin marijuana with deadly drugs like heroin and methamphetamine to prevent Americans from learning the truth. The cannabis leaf has even become the poster child for the drug war. Corporate-backed programs such as D.A.R.E. and The Partnership for a Drug-Free America are teaching our children that this incredible Earth-friendly plant is as dangerous as heroin and methamphetamine. These corporations slander cannabis while promoting themselves as lovers and supporters of the environment. They run TV commercials that would have us believe that they are environmental activists with deceptive claims and scenes of pristine streams and forests. But what they really do is clear-cut pristine rainforests, poison our air with ozone-depleting greenhouse gases, and produce tons of toxic chemicals that end up in our drinking water.

Hemp's comeback is in our hands

So how do we change it all? What can we do to show the multinational mega-corporations that we care about our environment even if they don't?

Remember, it's all about money. If we continue to buy the same old products from the same old companies that have gotten us into this mess, we can expect more of the same destruction. But, we can affect positive change by buying products produced from sustainable sources by environmentally responsible companies.

Of all the sustainable sources for consumer products, hemp is uniquely suited to provide the widest variety of life's necessities and comforts. In this way, hemp is nature's gift to humanity.