

The Great Cannabis Scare - Harry J.

Anslinger in the 1930s

Marvin Däumichen

September 6, 2016

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Cannabis in the U.S.A. prior to 1930	3
2.1	Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century	3
2.2	Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth	5
3	Cannabis in the 1930s	6
4	Anslinger’s work, symbolism and rhetoric	9
4.1	Assassin of Youth	12
4.2	Cannabis Exploitation Movies	17
4.3	Posters and Images	19
4.4	Cannabis in Music	19
5	The Horrific Consequences of the Weed-Scare	20
5.1	The Prison Industrial Complex	21
5.2	The Violent Drug Fiend Myth	22
6	Conclusion	23
7	Bibliography	26

Abstract

The puritanical demonization of Cannabis in the United States began in the 1930s and has to this day caused dire consequences in the failed war on drugs. New outlets, Harry J. Anslinger, and other prohibitionists employed incorrect and oftentimes racist symbolism and fear mongering which in turn have created laws and a middle-class habitus that to the present day ensure a plethora of wrongful convictions, incarcerations, and deaths both within the United States of America as well as beyond national borders. Especially ethnic minorities suffer from racial profiling and high incarceration rates for non-violent crimes involving cannabis.

Based on a close reading of cultural artifacts from the 1930's I will argue that the rhetoric and symbolism that emerged in that decade persist to the present day and perpetuate social inequality.

1 Introduction

When we think of the United States of America in the 1930s, periods, events, and names that first come to mind make a formidable list to the inquisitive mind: the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, T.D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, Woody Guthrie and the Swing Era, the Golden Age of the radio, a burgeoning film industry, the American Prohibition on alcohol. This very list already makes a point that the 30s were a decade of upheaval, unpredictability, insecurity, and change. Economic turmoil led to high rates of unemployment and mass migration - xenophobic sentiments were at a high point. Politics were taking on new and unprecedented routes to provide stability and social security – often certainly not without a backlash of criticism especially on corporate ends. The entertainment industry, despite all economic adversity, skyrocketed, more than twelve million households had radios while the film industry grew steadily. The young Orson Welles ingeniously broadcasted *The War of the Worlds* on radio and effectively caused a mass hysteria in the gullible public in '38. And to finish this closer look at the list: the American Prohibition on alcohol that went into effect in January 1920 with the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was finally repealed by Roosevelt in December 1933 with the Twenty-first Amendment.

This change in law may have freed alcohol from the grip of a thriving black market and countless speakeasies, but without a doubt it failed to free the zealous, if not downright puritanical prohibitionists from their ambitions to prevent the American population from their arguably inherent desire for inebriation. However, the repeal only took place after the first third of the

decade and alternatives to alcohol had emerged in the 1920s and gained much popularity in the meantime. A range of psychoactive substances had found their way into American recreational use, some of them as non-indigenous as the exotic opiates – documented particularly among the Chinese population in the form of opium. Amphetamines sold as over-the-counter Benzedrine provided an “extra kick” to overworked laborers and youth looking for a quick high. Peyote and its hallucinogenic alkaloids had emerged as a sacrament in religious ceremonies in the Native American Church by the 1880s, and cannabis sativa, a crop with a long history of use gained popularity notably first in the Mexican population by the beginning of the 20th century and then spread through the social circles of black neighborhoods and the Jazz scene in the 20s into larger scale recreational use by the 30s. The racial dimension in this list indicates the basic assumptions that would lead to racialized conceptions of drug users.

Thus the pretense to find a new enemy, a menace to society unheard of, was given and prohibitionist efforts to repress other drugs than alcohol gained momentum. But which of the above mentioned substances would make the race? Which one was considered most threatening to a healthy and functional people? It was the soon-to-be-called *Assassin of Youth*, cannabis. In June 1930 the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) was established. Headed by Harry J. Anslinger, once an avid alcohol prohibitionist, they sought out the evil weed to present a major threat to his America. From thereon much public attention was cast upon cannabis. The smokable blossoms of the plant were named marijuana, a word borrowed from Mexican Spanish. Their psychoactive effects were twisted and misrepresented to the aim of turning a

once useful crop and medicinal plant into a major threat for society. Despite evidence to the contrary, Anslinger and his associates employed print and film to serve their tactics of fear mongering and misrepresentation in order to create a powerful image of a hazard that continues to inform public perceptions today.

The goal of this paper is to provide a detailed image of the far ranging damage done by the anti-marijuana hysteria of the 1930s. With the help of an in depth investigation of Anslinger's methods and rhetoric I will argue that the blatant lies about cannabis as propagated then have set the groundwork for what is now the failed war on drugs, the U.S. American prison industrial complex and a social stigma that threatens the cannabis users' resiliency and excludes them from various spheres of successful navigation within society. Gender, race and class stereotypes continue to inform the disparaging ambitions to repress the use of cannabis, which has nevertheless succeeded in finding its way into a a growing larger-scale popularity in the U.S.A and worldwide today.

2 Cannabis in the U.S.A. prior to 1930

2.1 Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century

The history of hemp, or cannabis sativa, in the United States dates as far back as to first traces of cultivation in the colonies around the early 1600s in Jamestown. The crop was almost exclusively grown for its fiber, which had a wide range of application from paper, via textiles, to hardy rope –

especially for the navel industry goliath, the British Empire, the crop proved indispensable. In the year 1611, long before the trajectory of what would become the United States of America was foreseeable, King James I. decreed every colonist to grow 100 cannabis plants that were designed for export – thus the claim can be laid that we are speaking of a hemp-based part-franchise colonialism within the settler colonialist frame of Jamestown to supply the enormous demand for cannabis fibers in Europe, Britain in particular.¹

Given this decree, the colonies focused extensively on hemp cultivation which only started seeing a decline from 1793 onwards. It was Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin that marked a shifting emphasis onto the cultivation of cotton, which from thereon represented a source of fiber even cheaper and more easily processible than hemp.

Noteworthy, nevertheless, are for instance the Founding Fathers' large hemp plantations and the fact that hemp paper was commonly used for various types of documents. Texts such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and the original draft of the Declaration of Independence from July 4, 1776 were printed on hemp. Only the final document of the Declaration, signed on August 2, 1776 was printed on the even more durable animal skin based parchment paper.²

George Washington was already aware of the higher content of the psychoactive ingredient Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in the blossoms of female hemp plants and noticed differences between strains of cannabis. Thus, apart from his hemp farm for fiber at Mount Vernon, he cultivated that particular

¹Deitch, Robert. Hemp – American History Revisited pp.13-4

²Miss Cellania. Was the Declaration of Independence Written on Hemp? web.

sort designed to be ingested, or more commonly smoked. Other significant figures in American history did enjoy the effects of smoked hemp as well: among them Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and even Abraham Lincoln are reported to have indulged and enjoyed their hemp-pipes.³

2.2 Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth

In the 19th century cannabis rose in application for medical purposes and was sometimes, but still rarely, smoked in recreational use for its psychoactive effects and to replace tobacco.

More than any other preparation, tinctures became widely used - *Dr Poppy's Wonder Elixir* and similar labels would be assigned to the seemingly endless list of medical possibility in the work with cannabis extracts. These tinctures were used to treat a range of ailments, among them colds, rheumatism, headache, gout, influenza, glaucoma, and arthritis. They were applied to aid patients suffering from a loss of appetite, used as a sleep inducing agent, and more. In this way, cannabis made it to be among the most frequently prescribed medical preparations in the 19th Century.

As from then on to this present day, there has been "*not one reported death from cannabis extract medicines, and virtually no abuse or mental disorders reported, except for first-time or novice-users occasionally becoming disoriented or overly introverted.*"⁴

I deem it highly interesting to mention that the psychoactive effects of many of the tinctures were hardly documented or discussed as "*due to the*

³Deitch, pp.25-6

⁴Patients for Medical Cannabis. Marijuana History. web.

*psychological set of the patients; they were taking a medicine, not indulging in a vice*⁵, negative experiences were most uncommon. Psychoactive properties were regarded as regular side effects as common-place with most prescription drugs. The "set" is made up of the entirety of sentiments towards a substance and the personality of the user. In other words: negative experiences are much more likely to occur if a person ingests an illegally obtained criminalized substance, whereas in a controlled and favorable habitus surrounding the drug, adverse psychological effects are highly unlikely. Thus the habitus of this class of drugs largely informs their effects.

For this most ample evidence of the utility of cannabis as a medical agent, pharmaceutical companies frolicked at the extraordinary sales of their natural medical preparations. Soon the AMA (American Medical Association) developed a strong point toward the use of cannabis as a medical plant and the groundwork for a solid pro-cannabis lobby was given.

Until the passing of the Harrison Act in 1914 that regulated narcotic substances, cannabis was not even considered as such. Only toward the end of the 1920s with a growing number of recreational users and the installment of the FBN, negative publicity began to spark.

3 Cannabis in the 1930s

The use of cannabis as a recreational drug first came to attention in the U.S.A in the early 20th Century. Especially along the borders to Mexico and in the southwestern states it was attributed particularly to minority groups.

⁵Sloman, Larry. *Reefer Madness*. p. 23

Mexican immigrants and field laborers were said to have brought the custom of smoking marijuana cigarettes up north and it is argued that among the first group to adopt this habit was the black community in the southern states. However, there are reports of African slaves having smoked cannabis dating as far back as to colonial times.

As Mexicans were mostly held responsible for using, popularizing, and distributing this "new drug", a rise in xenophobia and negative sentiments towards this minority grew. Before this backdrop, the press and the FBN capitalized on this issue as the Great Depression progressed and led as many as 400.000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans to be deported in the early 1930s.⁶ At any rate, recreational cannabis use, soon to be framed as abuse, was attributed to minority groups. It may be worthwhile noting that customary use of cannabis has also had a long tradition among early immigrants to the United States that came from Eastern Europe.

Between the years 1915 and 1933 the issue was considered a local problem in some regions and for example California was among the first few states to pass laws prohibiting recreational use.⁷ Ironically the same California was the first state to re-engage in medical marijuana prescriptions in 1996.⁸

Fears of stoned minorities mingling with middle-class white youth began to spread in the Southwest and newspaper articles presenting cannabis for the first time as a dangerous intoxicant started circulating. Yet, still in 1929, Surgeon General Cummings declared that including cannabis in the

⁶Provine, Marie Doris. *Unequal Under Law*. p.83

⁷Sloman p. 30

⁸Hanfmuseum Berlin: *Cannabis in California*

Harrison Act *"would be a factor in nullifying the constitutional law."*⁹ In other words, at the cusp of the 1930s, the head spokesperson of the nation's public health service (PHSCC) strongly discouraged prohibition of the plant and its preparations. By this time reefers (marijuana cigarettes) had become a staple among minorities and the Jazz and Swing community in particular. It was widely and easily available and sweetened many a night for musicians and enthusiasts alike.

The marijuana cigarettes could be purchased in a number of different settings. Be it on the street or in venues at jazz shows, bars, or clubs. Another popular route of access was to visit one of the many *tea pads* that could be found in large numbers in most bigger cities, especially along the East Coast. In essence, these tea pads were an early and unofficial equivalent to the coffee shops we find in the Netherlands nowadays. Private apartments were open to customers to come in, buy marijuana cigarettes and either smoke on site or take home. Some sources argue that as many as 500 tea pads were open in New York alone in the early 1930s,¹⁰ which is a quite staggering number compared to roughly 150 coffee shops in Amsterdam in 2016.

In any case, most Americans still hardly felt concerned, but little by little the issue started to gain nationwide attention in the tumultuous 30s as Anslinger and his cohorts commenced the great marijuana scare which finally led to the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937. This act imposed the first federal regulation of cannabis and set the groundwork for a subsequent ban

⁹Sloman p. 37

¹⁰A Social History of America's Most Popular Drugs. web.

of the plant.

4 Anslinger's work, symbolism and rhetoric

"Anslinger, with his reefer madness and all his other bullshit, laughable except for his power at the time. And the press, who faithfully reported and verified his outrageous flood of disinformation and sensational rubbish."

- William S. Burroughs, November 1982

Harry Jacob Anslinger, born in May 1892, was 38 years of age when he was appointed head of the newly established Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Having made a reputation as an insurance investigator and bureaucrat in foreign office (Den Haag and Germany), he also featured a longstanding zealous contempt for narcotics and alcohol and had functioned as *Assistant Commissioner of Prohibition*.

Shifting from his efforts to prohibit alcohol to the repression of marijuana in 1930, Anslinger found leeway in chiming in with already existing sensationalist articles asserting the dangers of the herb. While he had an *"obvious concern for the individual as opposed to the statistic"*,¹¹ Anslinger managed to conjure up horrible and generalized images that defied better knowledge and cautioning by actual experts.

Dr. William C. Woodward, for example, Director of the Bureau of Legal Medicine and Legislation of the AMA criticized Anslinger and his inaccurate depiction of the dangers contained in the use of cannabis. One of his correspondences with Anslinger clearly illustrates his distaste for the FBN's

¹¹Sloman pp. 33-4

work in the field.¹² Furthermore, concerning an annual report by Anslinger, titled *Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs for the Year Ended Dec. 31, 1935*, Woodward decidedly opposes Anslinger's allegations of medical cannabis preparations harboring heavily addictive potential.¹³

Others, such as Senator Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania, voiced their disaffection with Anslinger and even went so far as to call for his dismissal from the FBN by cause of racist working ethics and mindset: *"I am being deluged by complaints from our colored population because Mr. Anslinger has been so indiscreet as to refer to one of their race as a "ginger-colored nigger." [...] I doubt very much that one so indiscreet should be allowed to remain in such a responsible position."*¹⁴

This racist attitude within the FBN also became evident in Anslinger's work together with political agitator Dr. A.E. Fossier who announced that the most advanced and intellectual societies would indulge in alcohol, whereas those races that use cannabis would only degenerate mentally, physically, and culturally. Moreover he was one of the proponents to claim that marijuana was violence inducing.

The violent crime myth was strongly objected by many American psychiatrists. In a clinical study conducted in 1934 assistant psychiatrist Walter Bromberg presented sound scientific data on the psychological effects of the drug. In the following year he would continue to contest the violence theory and made a clear statement in saying that: *"[...] alcohol is at least as responsible for crime as is marijuana. [...] From the material quoted and*

¹²Sloman pp. 38-9

¹³Taxation of Marijuana. web.

¹⁴Sloman p.46

the experience with users, it is clear that marijuana cannot be considered a primary cause of crime."¹⁵

And yet, despite much evidence to the contrary, the FBN's scare tactics prevailed. The uninformed public and legislators swallowed their bitter pills, as Anslinger and his cohorts had the news on their side. Influential magazines and newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Hearst* played a crucial role in spreading the misinformation and backing up Anslinger's effectful stories.¹⁶ The dangers herein were that a reciprocal picking up and disseminating of each other's stories would give credibility and increased range of influence to both the FBN and news publishers. Soon Anslinger's notorious "*gore file*", full of shocking horror stories concerning marijuana, became his staple.¹⁷

As Roosevelt's New Deal just barely spared Anslinger and the FBN from oblivion, a massive amount of letters reached the White House in 1934, containing complaints and accusations demanding Anslinger's dismissal. His fear mongering tactics of distorting public imagery were apparent to experts and intellectuals alike, yet succeeded in appalling his audience.

Anslinger was integrally involved in the production of anti-marijuana motion pictures, some of them predominantly sponsored by religious communities, one of them directly based on his 1937 article *Marijuana: Assassin of Youth*.

He remained in office until 1964 and to little surprise collaborated with the CIA in their notorious MK-Ultra mind-control drug program in the early

¹⁵Sloman pp. 44-5

¹⁶Beach, Bob. Finding the Tea Pad. web.

¹⁷Provine. p.84

50s.¹⁸

4.1 Assassin of Youth

The following section is dedicated to a close reading of Harry J. Anslinger's sensationalist article *Marijuana: Assassin of Youth*,¹⁹ first printed in *The American Magazine*²⁰ in 1937. The article aims at presenting fiction as facts and facts contorted into fear-mongering prohibitionist rhetoric. It has been reissued in various magazines such as *Reader's Digest* and continues to be referenced to this day. Nowadays, however, more frequently with regards to its detrimental influence to drug policing. A propaganda movie under the same name was released and shown in theaters shortly after the article's publishing and will be explored along other anti-marijuana exploitation films of the 1930s at a later stage of this paper.

The article opens with the apparent rectification of the tragic story of a young girl that is understood to having committed suicide. Anslinger effectively claims that it would be more appropriate to call the case murder, as he goes on to argue throughout his paper that marijuana is a killer of youth. He proceeds by relating marijuana use to "*many murders, suicides, robberies, criminal assaults, holdups, burglaries, and deeds of maniacal insanity [...]*" Since all these claims cannot be supported by evidence, Anslinger notes parenthetically that these assumptions may only be "*conjectured*".

Given this opening for the article, the officially foremost authority in the

¹⁸Lee, Martin A., and Bruce Shlain. Acid dreams: The complete social history of LSD: The CIA, the sixties, and beyond. p. 32

¹⁹available at Redhousebooks. web.

²⁰Volume 124, number 1

United States makes a strong claim about the allegedly inherent dangers of recreational cannabis use. Be they true or not - to the larger part of his audience these arguments proved convincing for lack of better knowledge.

The following lines are dedicated to another charge of unfounded balderdash, indicating an allegedly terrible potential for addiction, which time and again has successfully been refuted by medical research. As a matter of fact the only possible addictive potential of marijuana remains in the psychic domain. In other words there is no physical addiction or severe withdrawal from regular cannabis use as one would commonly understand the term. It would be more appropriate indeed to speak of a "*marijuana use disorder*",²¹ which may occur as a consequence to long time and frequent habit-forming use. While identical or worse effects of dependency are seen in most over-the-counter pharmaceutical products, it is more than inappropriate to lead a discussion on addiction in which marijuana is related to other drugs, especially narcotics such as opiates and amphetamines. The latter two evidently have the potential to cause severe physical and psychological addiction.

It might be interesting to mention on a side note that the human brain produces cannabinoids endogenously and cases in which there is talk of dependency on the use of marijuana are caused by frequent long term administration of marijuana, which can lead to a reversible reduction in endocannabinoid production.

At the end of the paragraph Anslinger states that particularly youth are the prime targets of "*peddlers of the poison*" and thus efficiently employs the rhetoric of protecting American children by appealing to concerned parents

²¹Is Marijuana Addictive? web.

- clearly, this trope permeates the entire article, from the very title onwards.

In the following he goes on to make miraculous claims about the unforeseeable effects of marijuana consumption. He argues that some users "*of mediocre musical ability became almost expert*" under the effects, which plain to see is utter nonsense. Learning to play a musical instrument without a doubt requires much discipline and dedication and there is no such short cut as presented here. This misconception is only underlined by his argument that the effects may range from turning the user into a philosopher, a madman, or even a murderer.

A racist dimension comes into play when Anslinger goes on to present "hot tamale" vendors on the street as potential drug peddlers. Since Mexican Americans were already being scapegoated as having introduced recreational marijuana use, which obviously is not entirely true, to the American public this ethnic minority is hereby officially cast in mistrust and suffered another negative stereotype. Mexican immigrants and field laborers were already being victimized and confronted with sentiments of animosity in the era of the Great Depression when unemployment was high and wages hit the bottom. Thus, connecting Mexicans to marijuana use became a lasting and fateful negative stereotype that prevails to this day.

Anslinger's next massive scare stems from the distortion of a case of murder in Florida in 1933. He states that "*An entire family was murdered by a youthful addict in Florida. [...] The officers knew him ordinarily as a sane, rather quiet young man; now he was pitifully crazed.*" The then 20-year old Victor Licata who indeed killed his family with an axe was never proven to having used marijuana; his psychiatric reports never made any reference to

it, and there had been attempts prior to the murder to place him in a mental institution for his mental illness had been a known fact.²² The media and Anslinger nevertheless capitalized to a great extent on the obscurity of these redeeming facts and employed the story of the "drug-addict-axe-murderer" for a series of headlines.

The document continues to alarm the reader of a steady and recently dramatic burst of growth in drug trafficking and calls marijuana an "*enemy, which has a record of murder and terror running through the centuries.*" This leads the author to a brief and sensationalized history of cannabis and an elaboration of the terms hashish and assassin. He claims that the original Assassins, a secret band of murderers active in Persia in the late 11th Century, "*were confirmed users of hashish, or marijuana, and it is from the Arabic "hashshashin" that we have the English word "assassin"*

This in part is true, but yet again facts are distorted to make the propagandist's arguments most compelling. It is true indeed that etymologically the term Assassin can be related to "hashish-eaters"²³ among other possible explanations, but there is a consensus in the scholarly discussion that the term was used metaphorically to denounce social outcasts such as the Ismailis, a Shiite irreligious minority to which the Assassins belonged.²⁴ Moreover, experts assert that the Assassins were not users of hashish, as argued by scholars such as McCarthy (1973).²⁵ Therefore Anslinger's linking

²²Sloman, pp. 60-3.

²³hashish: An extract of the cannabis plant, containing concentrations of the psychoactive resins. (OED)

²⁴Daftary, Farhad. A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community. pp. 12-3

²⁵McCarthy, Kevin M. Origin of Assassin. pp. 77-83

of the Assassins' "*cruelty, barbarity, and murder*" to their use of marijuana is simply incorrect.

The subsequent line in *Assassin of Youth* states that "*Marijuana was introduced into the United States from Mexico,*" which I have unambiguously refuted in previous sections of this paper, yet I want to point it out at this point again to underscore the racist implications of Anslinger's article. The racist undertone of the paper is summoned again one last time towards the end: Anslinger mentions an entire Italian family in Louisiana as a center of cannabis cultivation and distribution of course predominantly among youth.

The paragraphs following this statement are dedicated to violent crimes committed both under the influence of and attributed to marijuana. Anslinger gives a range of examples in which allegedly normal adolescents suddenly turned aggressive and would assault police officers and civilians because of drug induced insanity. This claim has historically proven to be particularly harmful to the judicial system. It established a pretense for many criminals in the years to come to claim insanity in court hearings from the use of drugs and thereby plead not guilty in an attempt to trade imprisonment sentences for treatment in mental institutions. Again, the cases Anslinger mentions here are not backed by hard facts. In a later section of this paper I will illustrate how the image of drug users suddenly turning violent and attacking police forces continues to claim lives in the present day.

The remainder of the article goes on to show how deeply embedded marijuana use is among musicians of "hot" music, which in those days would refer to Jazz and Swing, and therefore predominantly people of color. He quotes Cab Calloway's swinging ode "Reefer Man" and makes it known that

marijuana may be obtained in *"almost any low-class dance hall or night spot in the United States."* This casts a dark shadow upon predominantly African American Jazz musicians of the time. Certainly, as in the above quote, a dimension of class is involved here. This class dimension in the social stigma concerning cannabis persists to this day, yet above I have illustrated that even among upper-class, white, genteel circles such as the Founding Fathers, recreational marijuana use was enjoyed dating back centuries of American history.

Given this close-reading examination of the article, we have sufficiently seen that Anslinger's methods and arguments are no less than demoniacal. It can be claimed that they serve to stir the masses against marijuana users and to legitimize the work of the FBN, which as noted above, was indeed endangered by New Deal politics. Taking into consideration the background information provided by previous sections of this paper, his agenda is clear and it should be evident by now that his very work as head of the FBN can be seen as a crime in and of itself. Anslinger is substantially responsible for a severe misconception of the effects and the character of cannabis based preparations.

4.2 Cannabis Exploitation Movies

The second half of the 1930s saw a significant rise in activities condemning the recreational use of cannabis. Especially sensationalist newspaper articles, tremendously exaggerated imagery in posters, and the production of anti-marijuana films were the among main outlets that worked towards the goal

of prohibition.

The most notable films concerning the issue are called *Reefer Madness*, *Marihuana*, and *Assassin of Youth*. These B-movies were full-length films of about 90 minutes and always depicted the same plot: unwitting, innocent, and promising white young middle-class Americans fall victim to the vicious drug that is marijuana. Mirroring almost perfectly Anslinger's article, the movies illustrate how these youngsters are lured into *tea pads* (the cannabis equivalent to speakeasies) and first experience the exhilarating effects of the substance. Then, oftentimes after smoking only once, their lives pretty much go down the drain. Some commit suicide, others kill unsuspecting pedestrians, some turn to prostitution to finance their horrid habit, and some (especially females) lose any sense of moral inhibition and become undesirable sex fiends. Particularly the last motive relates to the time-tested *Cult of True Womanhood*.

While both sexes are displayed in the movie, people of color are entirely omitted. Although the motion pictures claim to provide a truthful rendition of the social settings in which marijuana is consumed, even scenes on the streets, in clubs and in bars only display white people.

Bearing in mind the frame of this paper, I will state no more regarding these films than that they underlined and supported all of the FBN's claims. It is true that they played a crucial role in making accessible the demonization of cannabis to a yet larger audience than the reading public.

4.3 Posters and Images

Consistent with the tropes of the era, anti-marijuana posters would often-times showcase young females in lascivious posture and lingerie that fall victim to the evil weed. In some depictions the plant is personified as a green devil and some speak of the *Devil's Harvest*. Most of the images feature captions such as "*The Truth About Marijuana.*" Consistent themes are the tragic effects of the drug, loss of female domesticity and purity, promiscuity, and murder. A strong claim for truthful information on the drug is made and many images feature religious themes, mostly relating cannabis to the devil.

Here, again, we never encounter PoC, as it seems the only group to be concerned about and to be protected are white youth. PoC are imagined as perpetrators and vile addicts, sometimes more pronounced, sometimes less. In any case, they are never mentioned as victims of drugs. Provine argues that "*one senses pervasive racism that excludes nonwhites from concern, except as a danger to white lives and white sensibilities.*"²⁶

4.4 Cannabis in Music

In this brief section I want to provide a glimpse into the image with which cannabis was depicted in popular music of the 1930s. Since the most popular genre of the time was the Swing, it may come as little to no surprise that the image of cannabis in Swing music was rather positive as opposed to other cultural artifacts investigated in this paper. The predominantly black musi-

²⁶Provine. p. 86

cians cherished the herb and some of them went so far as to write swinging odes to them. Among them, as mentioned above in Anslinger's article is Cab Calloway and the *Reefer Man*. The person described in the song is a peddler and a user of marijuana at the same time. In a swinging fast paced rhythm Calloway sings: "[...] *Have you ever met that funny reefer man?*" Other artists such as Bessie Smith in *Gimme a Reefer* and Hancock Wayne in his song *Viper* praise marijuana for its liberating and inspirational effects. Many more songs concerning cannabis were written in the era - the majority of them shedding a positive light on cannabis.

5 The Dire Consequences of the Weed-Scare

This paper has amply illustrated how the great marijuana scare of the 1930s was strongly influenced by racist and class ideology. I will dedicate the following section to an outline of the legal and social consequences of Anslinger's work that still to this day continue to claim lives and bear hardships for many actually healthy users.

The social stigma surrounding drug use, here marijuana in particular, informs various spheres of public life. Many job application procedures feature drug tests that need to be passed for admission. Employment in public service is only possible without any legal record of drug use, and individuals who choose other methods for inebriation than the almost globally accepted and celebrated alcoholism suffer from marginalization and scorn. If a person actually does suffer from drug habits, who will they turn to? They are not considered unhealthy, but commonly rather criminal, which shoves them

into the margins of society and may have dire emotional and psychological consequences.

A fully functional and ubiquitous black market supplies anything one could ask for. Yet, prices are unregulated and may vary according to the whims of the dealers, in most countries quality checks are non-existent and the users have no means of testing their products other than by ingesting them. Especially with regards to other drugs than marijuana this is an issue that must not be overlooked.

5.1 The Prison Industrial Complex

As the FBN and news outlets framed drug use and addiction as a crime instead of an ailment, a progression towards punitive prohibitionism soon emerged. Even minor non-violent and thus most frequently drug offenses have placed millions of American of all ages in prison. To this day, the United States have the highest number of prisoners worldwide. Almost two and a half million Americans are currently incarcerated. Out of this staggering number, 50% of male prisoners and 59% of all female inmates serve time in federal prisons for drug offenses.²⁷

As if that wasn't enough already, racial profiling becomes extremely apparent with regards to drug offenses: in a study on drug law enforcement and race by the *Human Rights Watch*, researchers discovered that blacks were 10 times as likely to be sent to prison as whites.²⁸

The failed War on Drugs, which was officially started by ex-President

²⁷Carson, E. Ann. Prisoners in 2014. web.

²⁸The Human Rights Watch. Targeting Blacks. web.

Richard Nixon in the early 70s, has finally been declared to have failed,²⁹ yet harsh prohibitive and punitive policies prevail. These destroy countless American lives and families and the structure of the prison industrial complex prevents rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society. The living conditions in prisons are often absolutely substandard and degrading, rather leading to more severe trauma and mental and physical deterioration instead of recovery.

5.2 The Violent Drug Fiend Myth

The myth of drug users suddenly turning insane and murderously violent was established in the 1930s and was henceforth carried on to the present day. In many cases of police brutality and shootings of minorities, police officers would claim that they were attacked by crazed and drug-fueled beasts. This notion in recent years has become more commonly geared toward the effects of the drug PCP, which apparently stimulates aggressive behavior and imbues the user with seemingly super-human strength. Given this concept of a dangerously violent drug user, cases like the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014 have been linked to this idea. In his defense, the responsible officer claimed that he was under the impression that Brown was under the influence of drugs and charging him despite being riddled by as many as 6 bullets. This issue goes so far as to lead the editor in chief of *The American Spectator* to state two days after the shooting: "*My guess is that Brown's senseless death was brought on by... psychosis and permanent brain injury.*"³⁰ A dangerously

²⁹Doward, Jamie. The UN's war on drugs is a failure. web.

³⁰Sullum, Jacob. The Shooting of Michael Brown and the Phantom Menace of Drug-Crazed Blacks. web.

simplistic claim that explains this tragedy as caused by drug use.

Many similar cases have been reported throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, even the case of Rodney King was linked to police officers assuming a colored person would turn erratic and highly dangerous under the influence of drugs.

6 Conclusion

As I have organized this paper to trace the use and history of cannabis in the United States from its early heyday to its vilification in the 1930s, ample evidence has been provided for the menacingly dangerous power of misinformation. Like with so many other areas of life, it is easy to steer a crowd by means of fear, as we have seen in the FBN's and Anslinger's work. Coupled with various media outlets, like the press, film, and posters, a complex mosaic of scare tactics has been revealed and examined. By means of reciprocal affirmation and dissemination, the FBN's sensationalist stories from the "gore file" gained more attention and apparent validity than any of the actual scientific studies by medical experts who would encourage more regulatory approaches than merely punitive policies.

The racist undertones of many a cannabis prohibitionist may sometimes seem implicit but become apparent once closer attention to detail is paid. These tropes are linked to many other spheres than mere street security: first, the concern for social order with white Americans at the top is perceived to be threatened by minorities using drugs and second, the risk of white upwardly mobile youth engaging in such. Provine makes an interest-

ing additional point about the assumed dangers in rebelling youth: *"Young people, scholars observe, are inherently threatening to the established order. They are one of civilization's "dangerous classes" because they can be tempted to challenge their subordinate status. (Gordon 1994, and see Cohen 1972)"*³¹ This potential is finally revealed in the New Left and political student movements in the 1960s.

In sensationalist discourse the menace marijuana is construed straightforwardly on the basis of racism and xenophobia, which in the 1930s and up to the present day have proven devastatingly effective. Combined with a punitive approach to drug regulation and the ambition to entirely abolish drug use from (white) society, the prison system was informed and shaped. Actual drug incarceration rates defy reason as examined in the previous section. More than one million Americans are currently in prison for drug offenses, many of them minor marijuana cases.

Harry Jacob Anslinger has certainly made his grand entrance among the most notorious Americans of the twentieth century - his name rings with fear in the ears of drug users and activists alike. His legacy leaves agony, his work strikes ripples worldwide as many governments still to this day follow the punitive prohibitionist approach so widely proclaimed by the great "city upon a hill" - about two thousand Filipino drug war victims were claimed this year alone as a consequence of the recently elected head of state encouraging police brutality against drug users and dealers alike: *"all of you into drugs, you sons of bitches... I will kill you."*³²

³¹Provine. p 89

³²Murloch, Lindsay. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte 'could face international court'. web.

To come to a close, racist and classist implications have played and continue to play a major role in drug enforcement in the United States. Although various states have recently undertaken promising steps towards reform and reasonable regulation of marijuana, federal laws still place the legal marijuana market in a gray zone that is threatened to be forcefully swept away at any given time. Politics do not seem to be interested in the public, the economy, or even state executive branch savings and many more advantages, but adhere to old pre-WWII rhetoric.

7 Bibliography

Works Cited

- [1] Anslinger, Harry J. *Marijuana: Assassin of Youth*. Redhousebooks.
<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/taxact/woodward.htm>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [2] Beach, Bob. *Finding the Tea Pad: The Social Spaces of Casual Marijuana Use* pointsadhsblog.
<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/taxact/woodward.htm>.
Accessed 2 September 2016
- [3] *Cannabis in California*. Hanfmuseum Berlin. Berlin, Germany.
- [4] Carson, E. Ann. *Prisoners in 2014*. U.S. Department of Justice.
<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p14.pdf>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [5] Daftary, Farhad. *A short history of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim community*. Vol. 25. Edinburgh University Press, 1998. pp. 12-3
- [6] Deitch, Robert. *Hemp: American history revisited: the plant with a divided history*. Algora Publishing, 2003. pp. 13-4, 25-6
- [7] Doward, Jamie. *The UN's war on drugs is a failure. Is it time for a different approach?*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/02/un-war-on-drugs-failure-prohibition-united-nations>. Accessed 2 September 2016

- [8] *Is Marijuana Addictive?* National Institute on Drug Abuse. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [9] Lee, Martin A., and Bruce Shlain. *Acid dreams: The complete social history of LSD: The CIA, the sixties, and beyond*. Grove Press, 1992. p. 32
- [10] Miss Cellania. *Was the Declaration of Independence Written on Hemp?*. neotarama, <http://www.neotarama.com/2013/07/04/Was-the-Declaration-of-Independence-Written-on-Hemp/>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [11] *Marijuana History*. Patients for Medical Cannabis, <https://patients4medicalmarijuana.wordpress.com/marijuana-info/marijuana-history/>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [12] McCarthy, Kevin M. *The Origin of Assassin*. *American Speech* 48.1/2 (1973): 77-83.
- [13] Murdoch, Lindsay. *Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte 'could face international court'*. The Sydney Morning Herald. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/philippine-president-rodriigo-duterte-could-face-international-court-over-drug-war-casualties-20160901-gr6an0.html>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [14] Provine, Doris Marie. *Unequal under law: Race in the war on drugs*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. pp. 83-4, 86, 89

- [15] Sloman, Larry. *Reefer madness: a history of marijuana*. Macmillan, 1998. pp. 23, 30, 33-4, 37, 38-9, 44-6, 60-3
- [16] *A Social History of America's Most Popular Drugs*. pbs. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/buyers/socialhistory.html>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [17] Sullum Jacob. *The Shooting of Michael Brown and the Phantom Menace of Drug-Crazed Blacks*. Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacobsullum/2014/08/21/the-shooting-of-michael-brown-and-the-phantom-menace-of-drug-crazed-blacks/#76a95e4516fc>. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [18] *Targeting Blacks: Drug Law Enforcement and Race in the United States*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0508_1.pdf. Accessed 2 September 2016
- [19] *Taxation of Marijuana*. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/taxact/woodward.htm>. Accessed 2 September 2016