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# The Pros and Cons of Drug Legitimization in America

## Should Illicit Drugs Be Legalized?

When many people hear this question, they think that it means to make them available to everyone. That is not the case. I believe that through limited legalizations of illegal drugs, medicinal marijuana can be used to its potential, money can be saved, and the crime rate will decrease. . These are just a few things that will happen if legalization occurs. The costs for research and setting up bills for legalization may be costly but the rewards would be great.

The use of these now illegal drugs goes way back in history. Marijuana's first recorded medical use was in 2737 B.C. by a Chinese emperor by the name of Shen Nung. This emperor was the one of the first to use the drug to kill pain in his body. Marijuana was also used in A.D. 200 when a Chinese physician mixed cannabis resin with white wine to make a surgical anesthetic. Reports in the 1860s suggest that the use of opium was successful in numbing amputee patients. These drugs were early painkillers that work just as good and sometimes better than modern drugs.

Only a few illicit drugs have medical benefits when used. For instance, the drug, Marijuana, has been known to be an excellent painkiller. As stated in the June 1994 edition of *The World and I*, Lester Grinspoon argues that "18 months of scientific evidence on medical marijuana and hearing testimony from doctors and patients has revealed that the active components of marijuana appear to be helpful in treating pain, nausea, AIDS related weight loss, muscle spasms in multiple sclerosis and other problems." But these reports aren't decent enough evidence for legalization. Further steps need to be taken. Everyone needs to be aware of the effects of drugs and the feelings that happen when used. When smoked, marijuana causes the user to feel less pain and have a higher appetite. Feeling less pain is useful when it comes to victims of arthritis. Patients that are infected with HIV also can turn to marijuana for help. When a person is infected with HIV, they lose appetite and therefore lose weight. This is called "wasting" and can be eliminated by the smoking of marijuana. Smoking this drug can be harmful in its natural illicit state. It contains three times more tars and five times more carbon monoxide than tobacco. These chemicals are what hold back the legalization. If the active components of marijuana that alters the feeling of a person are harnessed, then the drug could be legalized as a Schedule II drug. A Schedule II drug is a drug that is classified for use in the medical field only where as a Schedule I drug is any illegal drug for all ages and uses. Not many reports have had confidence in saying that cocaine or any other illicit drugs beside marijuana have any medical benefits. Studies have shown that cocaine does have a use as a numbing

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agent but is also very harmful to the rest of the body.

Prohibition is the period in the early 20th century when alcohol was outlawed. From this, we can learn the effects of outlawing drugs and how people react. In the 1920s, after the 18th amendment was passed, the crime rate in the USA rose higher and so did the death rate. These same things happened with the ban of marijuana and other illicit drugs. In England, where alcohol was legal at the same time of the Prohibition era, alcohol use was dropping while in the US the use of alcohol was rising even though it was illegal. This shows how Prohibition did not work. Deaths have also occurred with the ban of cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy and other sorts of exotic drugs. People die all the time from these drugs and/or drug dealers either directly or indirectly. An article on [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org) tells about a mother who was killed by stray bullets that was a direct consequence on this so-called "War on Drugs." Of all the Prohibition era mistakes we are now repeating, the most serious is trying to free society of drugs by the use of force. Instead of approving bills that give drug addicts life in prison, we need to write laws that are specifically targeted toward the actual drug dealers.

A drug-free society is an impossible and probably undesirable dream. "The federal government should abandon or at least drastically reduce its effort to seal the borders against drugs and devote at least 90% of its drug-control funding (rather than the present 30%) to prevention and treatment," as supposed by Lester Grinspoon. A recent poll taken by the Drug Policy Foundation in 1990 suggests that 50% of Americans agree that legal alcohol is more dangerous than marijuana. This shows that current laws are in the wrong place. Marijuana hasn't caused nearly as many deaths as alcohol. In fact, there have never been reports of marijuana related cancer or death.

Actions need to be taken to make drugs legal. Marijuana needs to be made medically available immediately by reclassifying it as a Schedule II drug. Cultivation of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should be legalized. Another thing that needs to be altered is the federal law that imprisons persons with possession of drugs without the intent to sell. Too many drug offenders are being locked up in our already crowded prisons. Current laws that make no distinction between drug dealers and the possessors allow this to happen. Also, penalties for possession of marijuana should be reduced to a fine based on the volume of the drug rather than imprisonment. Under a legalized environment, addicts can recover easier with better care plans. Current rehabilitation centers aiming to remove drug habits from addicts have failed. Better addict recovery plans are seriously needed. If we take the actions that Lister Grinspoon has written about, we could use the unused money for better recovery programs that could actually work.

To assume that by legalizing drugs that I mean that everyone should get high is wrong. America needs to know about our system and how history has repeated itself. If something doesn't

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change then we can all count on a rising death and crime rate.

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