

What the POT PEOPLE are

Joel Meltz

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What are the pot people doing? They are doing the next best thing to changing the world: they are changing the chemistry of the brain that perceives the world, as people have done in one way or another in every culture we know of since we know not when. People will chew herbs, roots, leaves, sticks and stones, anything, to get high. There's no escaping it: getting high is apparently part of the human condition. It's the question of what people use to get high, and how they get when they are on high, that is so vitally intriguing, because if you know how someone likes to be high, you also know how and why he doesn't like not being high.

In our country the national high is alcohol. The alcohol high is a filthy and low thing in comparison with almost any high the world has to offer. It is a "high" of emptiness, not creation; it actually dulls the senses, instead of sharpening them, like most highs do; and alcohol has never made anyone happy for long. In addition, alcohol is potentially addictive, which potentiality is eagerly seized upon early in life by millions who suffer alcohol poisoning and bad nutrition for the rest of their lives. This sort of thing can bring pleasure only to a mind that is frightened so badly that it finds perception itself necessarily painful. To take comfort in such an inherently negative manner as alcohol is a practice so patently cowardly that alcohol is everywhere instinctively felt to be a thing of an immoral nature; and yet it is the national pastime. The whiskey drinkers do indeed have cause for shame. The biting irony is the juice-heads' widely successful attempts to project their own shame onto marijuana, a drug of vastly different properties.

There is a whole set of popular beliefs surrounding marijuana, almost all of which are completely false, but form the basis for laws anyway. M. is said to be addictive, which scientists' studies have shown not to be the case in any sense at all; it is said to lead to really dangerous drugs, such as heroin, morphine, etc., which it positively does not do because its effect is totally dissimilar to these drugs. These very widespread illusions were mostly planted in the late nineteen-thirties by a sensationalistic press, probably working in conjunction with the liquor industry. The liquor industry naturally desires to remain as prosperous as it currently is, and if marijuana were legal there would probably be a smaller liquor industry in a very short time, because if somebody needs to get high, and there's marijuana around, most people who have tried both won't settle for a drink.

Then too, there's the tobacco industry, grinding out its deadly dosage day after day, and it would lose, too, because pot tastes so very much better than tobacco that millions would rebel in disgust. As usual, the majority is wrong, because it is fool enough to allow itself to be led by the selfish few. However, what is unusual indeed, is that there is currently booming a minority that is rebelling against the majority and smoking pot right and left, high and low. The full extent of this group is something we can never fully grasp, but what we can glimpse of its size now and then staggers the mind. Busboys, corporation presidents—in fact whole corporations—as well as technicians, waiters, musicians, actors, cops, teachers and high school kids, all turn on.

The subculture that has thus taken form has become large enough to endure any policely efforts short of mass arrests. Within the somewhat constraining mores of pot culture, there is relative ease and freedom. Marijuana was never expensive, and it is getting cheaper by the hour, due to the rapidly expanding market. So it is often shared

freely among friends, much in the same manner that food is shared by the Eskimos. Pot smokers, like Eskimos, have to hunt for their sustenance: pot doesn't grow on trees, so to speak, and sometimes it can become very scarce indeed.

Pot smokers have little patience with selfishness. It is good to own a large amount of pot, but on the other hand, hoarding the stuff for one's private uses is considered almost criminal. Being a head is still a little like membership in a vast secret society with its rituals and passwords—and a whole new language that has been absorbed, often with changed meanings into the societal structure.

For sometime now pot terms have been creeping into everyday speech, a puzzle to law and lexicographer alike. "Turn-on," "score," "zonked" and the like, are often used by squares to mean things that only they, the squares, understand.

Indeed, pot is an easy habit to break, but how many do? Some do, and some don't. Sooner or later, anyone who has been smoking pot for any length of time asks himself if he should stop or go on, and this is a difficult and complicated question, simple though it seems to some.

The question of what is and what isn't addiction, is no easy thing to decide. Certainly marijuana smokers do not become ill or violent if deprived of pot, but on the other hand, those who smoke it tend to continue to smoke it, and very often to smoke it continually. The habitual compulsion to smoke tobacco or to drink alcohol, or to get a heroin fix, is far stronger than the urge for marijuana.

It is true, and inestimably unfortunate, that most of us must develop blocks to perception in order to survive modern "living." But it does not therefore follow that blocks and restrictions of perceptions are unnecessary. They are there, in one's mind, and they can't be erased nearly as easily as they can be quieted. Moreover, mental blocks are not inherited from our ancestors, but are created daily by us; they are not only part and parcel of the mind, but a function of it as well. Therefore, the only way to genuinely cleanse the mind of blocks is to eliminate the fear of life that maintains them. Marijuana can be used as a mind cleansing agent. It is no secret that it can also be used to clutter the mind with filth, delusions, and lies. Whether or not the inexperienced critics who put down pot can ever comprehend this, the strange truth about marijuana is that it brings not hallucinations and dreams, but illumination, comprehension, and truth.

Finally, pot is a paradox: it can destroy freedom, or liberate deliciously. The question for the future is this: when the world at large—the real world of maniacs, fools, and murderers that runs most of what runs at all—finds out what pot is about (and nowadays, they are hurrying to it in droves) how will pot be utilized? To what use can a murderously insane society put a drug of sanity and truth?

Joel Meltz is a composer, pianist, and conductor. His book *The Pot Smoker's Handbook* will be published this winter.

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