

My drugs of choice are red wine and marijuana. One is legal, the other is not, and I have not heard a rational reason why. There is no logic that one should be benignly supported while the other makes criminals of its users and producers.

A friend has recently been arrested and charged with growing marijuana. A helicopter sent aloft by the Oregon National Guard to capture marijuana farms spotted her agricultural endeavor. Other friends have been invaded by squads of drugbusters who claimed to act on telephone tips that marijuana was growing in their homes. Why shouldn't they also attack grape vineyards and arrest the vintners of wine?

I love wine. I am half-Sicilian (Irish rye distills the other half), a Mediterranean. I believe the wheel is overrated; the discovery of the fermentation of grapes is among the greatest of human achievements. So also is the cultivation of cannibas in its infinite varieties. The wheel might have sent Humanity off on its course of exploring the mechanical universe; acidulation of grapes and harvests of cannibas have been indispensable to the exploration of intellectual and spiritual cosmos.

Next only to sex, drinking wine and puffing on a joint are ambrosia. Yet these two wonderful human pleasures and expanders of intellect and sometimes of love are falsely wrenched apart. The wine is stamped with public approval and cognoscenti appeal. Marijuana is stained with depravity and its users are portrayed as irresponsible lawbreakers condemned to become addicted to heavyweight narcotics.

Perhaps it is time for those who like a little smoke of euphoria or bake galactice brownies to speak out against these distortions of truth and the spurious injustice of laws that punish pleasure. Our ancestors, who were not allowed many pleasures either, had to wrest liberty from kings and tyrants and from powerful institutions that grew up in their place. If we do not want these hard won liberties to go up in smoke we had better wake up, quell our trembling and refuse to be denied our pleasures and privacies or we will have neither.

The War on Drugs so blithely heralded is nothing more than a cynical assault on our civil liberties by a government that would increase its power by dissolving the bonds that hold us together. Public hysteria is whipped up against a few euphoric chemicals that like food or sex are dangerous only when gluttony overcomes moderation. The society is infected with fear, in particular its vulnerability to crime which is associated with drug use instead of social conditions which produce both the obsessive consumption of drugs and the lucrative market for them. The smarmy pieties of political ayatollahs decry the use of drugs while, in classic tongue/hand duplicity, pocket payoffs to keep the trade profitable through legal oppression. The big money is the real addiction; it has made bribe junkies of the nation's lawmakers and many of its enforcers. Spacing out once in awhile is not what is enervating our decaying society: Corruption, the crazy compulsive pursuit of cash and power regardless of source and heedless of the pricetag are the historical indicators of societal decline. The pursuit of wealth by any means fair or foul which leaves ever greater numbers of people impoverished and wrecks the productivity of a society is the true sign of decay and decline. It is usually then, when everything starts falling apart, that large masses search for opiates to escape their crumbling lives.

Overuse of anything is dangerous. Coffee, hamburgers, butter and sugar are knownkillers. Alcohol not only addicts millions, it is a direct cause of the automobile deaths of hundreds of thousands more; alcohol also is responsible for violent behavior (even wine) that results in thousands of beatings and deaths of wives, children, friends and strangers. Cigarettes kill more slowly, more certainly, but I have yet to hear a tobacco company acknowledge any form of responsibility for the lingering often agonizing deaths of the very people (about 400,000 a year, which is about one of every six persons who die annually) who provide its wealth.

Moderation is the genius of Shangri La — moderation in all things pleasurable, philosophical and political. American culture is instead founded on excess. The United States, aside from its passionate addiction to money and shopping, is also the world's largest consumer of addictive chemical substances. The usual blame is placed upon a malaise of spirit of the seekers of chemically-induced nirvana, not the incessant values of rapacity and greed of the society itself. Money, sex and drugs have been the American corporate dream since the advent of hucksterism. For the weavers of the dream to absolve responsibility by placing guilt on the buyers of the mesmerizing visions is pure mendacity.

Drug Free America? How absurd! No more pharmaceutical compounds? Valium banned? Prohibition once more of alcoholic beverages? Defoliation of grape vineyards and hops fields? The arrest and conviction of tobacco farmers and their government lobbyists? You've got to be kidding!

This nation consumes more drugs of infinite variety and purpose on a daily basis than the rest of the world combined. Our real problem is not the drugs we ingest, or our reasons for

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REEFER MADNESS

requiring or wishing for them, but our capacity for acquiescing to zealots who corrupt the public tolerance with hysterical exaggerations, proclamations and demands that we deny our pleasures of flesh and flora. (H. L. Mencken once defined Puritans as those who are afraid that someone, somewhere, is having a good time). We allow people to have power over us who assume we are collectively as stupid and avariciously deceitful as they are — and so far in regard to the trampling of our civil rights in the Drug War we have not shown them any reason to doubt their misconceptions. We permit these pathological simpletons to intrude their gross appetites for power upon our forms of relaxation and bliss. As a result we are separated not only by class, sex and race, but also by our choices of pleasure. We are separated by intimidation and edict. We are compartmentalized, broken into segments of suspicion and fear like three-person communist cells. Instead of rallying to our friends and neighbors who are assaulted by improper police invasions of their homes and selves, we shun them in fear our own vices might also be investigated if we demonstrate support or solidarity. The War on Drugs is balkanizing us.

Perhaps you have not noticed the squelching of opposing views to the War on Drugs, the fearful disinclination of public protest to the government's juggernaut against civil liberties disguised as a moral crusade against drug use. Four years ago Oregon was almost among the most progressive states regarding cultivation and personal use of marijuana. But the big guns of suppression, who kept the matter off the ballot by improperly disregarding initiative signatures several times, mounted a large and expensive (not to mention ample use of hysteria and misinformation) campaign to defeat allowing cultivation of the evil weed for personal use in 1986. Perhaps, with the same pressure and money, an initiative to outlaw the use and distribution of alcohol could also triumph (which might be an idea for marijuana supporters to think about trying in 1992).

The very sad accommodation of fear and intimidation by those who are criminals only because they prefer marijuana to the legally sanctioned abuse of alcohol is clearly evident by the lack of a marijuana decriminalization initiative petition for the November 1990 ballot. Thousands of Oregonians are not represented this election year, and as a result their freedoms and personal lives are in jeopardy simply because they enjoy the celestial hemp more than (or alongside) the intemperance of whiskey or wine. The repressive atmosphere surrounding the right to choose one's own poison has sent scurrying out of view the very people who could preserve their liberties and freedom from harassment and jail by openly insisting that the electoral process (which has so far failed them because they seemed too optimistic about public awareness to effectively combat the drug lords of alcohol and tobacco) fairly represent their point of view. Dr. Fredrick Oerther, long a strong voice for legalization of marijuana and 1990 Libertarian candidate for Governor of Oregon, said when arrested earlier this year for growing marijuana for his personal use, "I see a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is the Bill of Rights burning."

So what shall we do? Sit on our fannies in fear and helplessly watch our friends disappear until at some point, for some reason, we are also victims of an increasingly repressive government, or shall we finally rise up and tell the ministries of fear to go to hell?

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