

The Devil Weed and Harry Anslinger

Harry J. Anslinger, a former railroad cop and Prohibition agent, is almost single-handedly responsible for outlawing marijuana. A law-and-order evangelist -- one biographer called him "a cross between William Jennings Bryan and Reverend Jerry Falwell"--Anslinger believed that alcohol prohibition could have succeeded if only the penalties had been tougher.

When he was named America's first drug czar in 1930 Anslinger initially tried to keep the Bureau of Narcotics clear of the marijuana issue because he knew eradication would be impossible. The stuff grows, he said, "like dandelions." But in the budget squeeze of the Great Depression he decided to create a little excitement by transforming marijuana from a low grade nuisance into an evil "as hellish as heroin." To add a little spice he played the race card.

"Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men," said Anslinger, **"...the primary reason to outlaw marijuana is its effect on the degenerate races."** To make sure nobody missed the point he offered this profile of the average

token: **"... most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz, and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers, and any others."**



Most Americans had never heard of the weed. Clearly Congress hadn't either. The transcript of the 1937 Congressional Hearings on the Taxation of Marihuana are "near comic examples of dereliction of legislative responsibility," according to one legal observer. The principal witness was Commissioner Anslinger and his evidence consisted of newspaper clippings. The solitary medical

expert, Dr. William Woodward of the American Medical Association, undermined Anslinger's testimony by pointing out that the facts in these newspaper clippings had originated with the Commissioner himself.

But the hour was late and it was time to move on. In a vote they didn't bother to record, on a matter of little interest, a handful of Congressmen forwarded a bill that would one day fill the nation's prisons to the roof beams.

Common Sense for Drug Policy
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