

# Legalization of Marijuana

The legalization of marijuana is gaining traction in some states: Colorado voters, for example, recently approved a measure that makes it legal to smoke marijuana.<sup>1</sup> Supporters of marijuana legalization often pose an economic argument. Because of the increasing cost and ineffectiveness of the “war on drugs,” states could tax and regulate marijuana thus making it safer for use while simultaneously creating significant revenue for state and local governments.

Supporters of marijuana legalization also claim that it is an issue of racial justice. Because African-Americans are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated for drug use, some feel that our current drug laws facilitate the mass disenfranchisement of African-American males. This disenfranchisement, they argue, results in forms of social control that are similar to those in effect during the Jim Crow era. According to advocates of legalization, the fact that these drug laws so disproportionately affect African-Americans is a gross injustice.

Those who oppose the legalization of the drug, however, argue that the government has an obligation to create active and productive citizens and that legalizing marijuana harms the attainment of that goal.<sup>2</sup> Former President Jimmy Carter recently said, “We must do everything we can to discourage marijuana use, as we do now with tobacco and excessive drinking.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, opponents argue that marijuana legalization is a “slippery slope” that could lead to the legalization of drugs such as cocaine and heroin. “Legalizing marijuana ... has the potential to set a dangerous precedent,” wrote Josh Divine, a recent graduate of the University of North Colorado, in an editorial for UNC’s student newspaper *The Mirror*. “Already, the legality of alcohol is used as an argument for legalizing marijuana. If marijuana is legalized, it too may be used to incrementally legalize more dangerous drugs. Once society grants one thing, it is not too far off [from granting] legality to something slightly more damaging or controversial, which can then be used to advocate for the legalization of still something worse.” “Keeping marijuana illegal,” Divine wrote, firmly “shuts the door.”<sup>4</sup>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should the fact that African-Americans are more likely to be arrested on non-violent drug charges affect state decisions to legalize marijuana use? To what extent should this factor be considered?
2. How much weight should state legislators give the “slippery slope” argument (i.e. that legalizing marijuana could lead to the legalization of dangerous drugs such as cocaine and heroin) when considering proposals to decriminalize recreational marijuana use?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/05/colorado-is-new-amsterdam\\_n\\_3390123.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/05/colorado-is-new-amsterdam_n_3390123.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/not-so-fast-a-case-against-legalizing-marijuana/article\\_4b7ffc76-5cab-5569-a101-fdba63e2c14.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/not-so-fast-a-case-against-legalizing-marijuana/article_4b7ffc76-5cab-5569-a101-fdba63e2c14.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/17/jimmy-carter-marijuana-legalization\\_n\\_3293861.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/17/jimmy-carter-marijuana-legalization_n_3293861.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.uncmirror.com/opinions/column-marijuana-legalization-fully-ripe-for-unneeded-slippery-slope-1.2848905>

