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pioneer and
political lightning rod
If the words “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” don’t include the right to experiment with your own consciousness, then the Declaration of Independence isn’t worth the hemp it was written on.

Terence McKenna

Live in New York

The Music Faucet

June 20, 1993
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Three men come up against a locked door. The first man is drunk out of his mind. The second man is tripping wildly on LSD, and the third man is stoned on really good marijuana.

The first man says, “Let’s knock down the Goddamn door!”

The second man says, “Let’s float through the keyhole . . .”

And the third man says, “Let’s sit down and wait for someone to show up with the key.”

After nearly a century of American marijuana prohibition – the first US anti-cannabis law passed in Utah in 1915 – it’s beginning to look as if someone is finally about to show up with the key.

In 2010 there are an unprecedented forty-plus marijuana law reform bills pending in twenty-three states. These encompass a wide range of reform including proposals for medical marijuana, decriminalization, and legalization. In January New Jersey became the fourteenth state to legalize the medical use of cannabis and full legalization will be included on the California ballot in November.

These are heady days indeed. Hyperbolic prohibitionists insist we stand on the high precipice of increased psychosis, and that the metaphorical door is really a gateway to a hard drug hell. Proponents of marijuana law reform oracular a more positive future filled with fiber, fuel, and fun, of miracle medicine and good vibrations. I suspect the upcoming reality will be far more nuanced than either side is willing to admit. The truth is no one knows what’s going to happen if and when marijuana finally becomes legal in the United States.
Will use rise? Will prices drop? Will madness or laughter prevail? Certainly, over 800,000 American arrests will fall off the radar and that can't be a bad thing. Medical patients will stop worrying about getting busted for medicine, which in itself will have a palliative effect. But will my teenage daughter be more or less likely to take up smoking pot after criminal sanctions disappear? I don't know the answer but I am bedeviled by the question.

Certainly, I worry more about other demons. I tell her that if she takes up hard drugs she may very well die because those vile pursuits have killed so many good people. I tell her to be very careful of spirits – of wine, whisky, and beer – because those habits very nearly killed me when I was young and perhaps the propensity lies nestled in her genes. I tell her that if she smokes cigarettes "I might kill you myself just for being that stupid," and then I smile (and we'll see how that works out). My many warnings regarding weed, however, are much less straightforward and far more faceted because I don't want to be a hypocrite and because that conversation is necessarily more . . . philosophical.

I believe that marijuana is not for children and as the associate publisher of *High Times* magazine I know something about the subject. I think it should be an honorable widespread activity among responsible adults – like sex or driving a car. I tell my young daughter that she could undoubtedly switch on the engine, put it in gear, and might even get someplace; but without that necessary judgment that comes with experience she might very well cause a terrible accident along the way that will hurt her or hurt someone else.

Then I warn her about driving.

I tell her of the Bashilange: in the nineteenth century, at the time of the dissolution of the great Luba Empire in Central Africa, a number of smaller kingdoms emerged. The Baluba chief, Kalamba-Moukengee, subjugated neighboring tribes at gunpoint and, struggling to unify his new confederation, ordered all the ancient fetishes to be burned in public, and in their place instituted the Bantu custom of smoking hemp to reincarnate the soul. The Baluba men gathered around the fire in the center of the village each night and solemnly smoked cannabis from a huge calabash, and a tribal offender was publicly punished by being forced to smoke hemp until he lost consciousness.

A tribal faction within this new coalition, the aggressive Bashilange led by Moamba Mputt, established the *Ben-Riamba* cult – the so-called “Sons of Hemp” – who quickly put down their spears and foreswore their