

Editorial

Shameful Decision

Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that it was within federal jurisdiction to punish anyone caught using marijuana, even if it is for medical purposes. The decision, passed by a 6-3 vote, made it clear that even growing it for personal use in your back yard, to keep you alive and healthy, can result in your prosecution.

We think this is a mistake.

The federal government has always struggled with the marijuana issue, due in part to its inability to regulate it. Detrimental substances such as tobacco and alcohol have been legal because the government can control their production, movement and sales.

And let's not forget, the government profits from those substances through heavy taxes. Thus, despite the dangers of legal substances like alcohol and tobacco, they remain on the shelves of every store. Millions of people die each year due to their harmful affects like drunk driving accidents and cancer, yet they're still sold everywhere. No one complains about those substances corrupting American society, but if someone wants to use a banned substance to improve their health, the federal government puts its mighty foot down.

Although federal law has stated for some time that marijuana is illegal, residents of the state of California have been using it for medical purposes, with medical marijuana providers popping up all over the state. There are several right here in our own city of Hayward.

Clearly, California is ahead of the federal government on this issue — as it can be with many topics — and has demonstrated that medicinal marijuana can help severely ill patients who gain no benefits from prescription drugs.

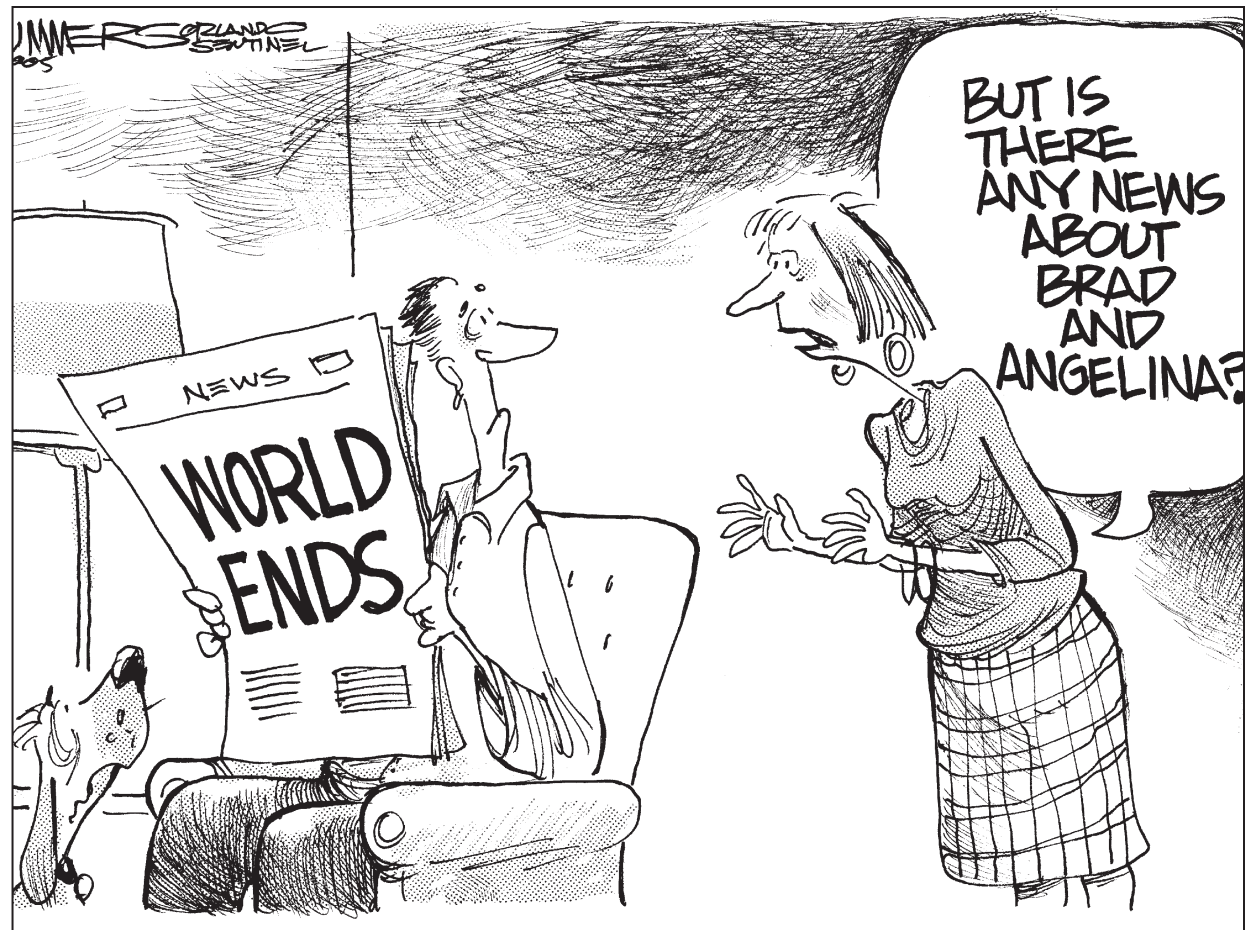
Studies have demonstrated that marijuana arguably causes fewer problems than tobacco and alcohol. And most medical marijuana users are not smoking pot to get high. They are cooking marijuana leaves into food to relieve pain and calm themselves. For most of the people who use it, there are no other solutions that match the effectiveness of medical marijuana.

If those who suffer from diseases such as cancer and MS can't afford the outrageous prices of prescription drugs, or find those drugs ineffective, the government has a responsibility to do whatever it can to ease their pain.

Tobacco and alcohol companies are among the largest special interest groups in the country, and they regularly line the pockets of those in Washington. The world is divided into the haves and have-nots, and obviously as long as the multi-billion dollar companies continue to provide money to those in control, those who are being hurt by it will have no say. It is the same with many other problems in American society.

It is true that people can lie about their ailments just to get marijuana, but people already abuse many different medical and non-medical substances. Even over-the-counter drugs are used often used improperly and irresponsibly. Is the government going to make every medication a prescription so that people don't abuse them? If medicinal marijuana were legalized, more restrictions and precautions could be put in place to prevent abuse and misuse. In fact, were it regulated, the government could make a buck or two by taxing it.

The court's decision to not allow medical marijuana while allowing many other more harmful drugs is simply shameful. But until the government can figure out how to profit from it effectively, people will continue to suffer and hide their use, hoping



Commentary

With Michael Acquitted, We'll Have to Settle for Real News

I read the news today, oh boy. No more Michael Jackson trial. What do we do now? The King of Muscle Relaxants has floated back to Neverland and the rest of us are stuck here in the real world. You know what that means: Real news. It's scary. There were 2,200 journalists credentialled to cover Michael's trial, and now they've all got to find something else to do. Some of them will stumble into real stories that actually affect the lives of their viewers and readers. It's inevitable.

Carl Hissen

All those acres of newsprint and eons of TV time devoted to the Jackson trial now must be filled with something else. Sure, there's always Brad and Angelina, or Tom and Katie.

But they make a red-carpet splash and then they're gone. Before you can say Kim Jong Il, the grown-up headlines start scrolling back through our lives.

Michael, you've no idea how much you'll be missed. You kept us so blessedly distracted from the serious events of the world.

Every evening we could safely switch off our brains, sit back and enjoy the freak show from Santa Maria.

Oh, how the fans would shriek when you emerged from that black Suburban — you in that wine steward's vest and the armband and the dragonfly shades.

No case could have been more insignificant to our everyday lives, our well-being or the future of the planet — which is why we couldn't get enough of it. We're hopelessly, hungrily hooked on squalid spectacle. We crave the inane and irrelevant. It's our national dope; a legal way to stay stoned.

Having a bodyguard carry your umbrella was delicious camp, Mary Poppins with a concealed-weapons permit. And that morning you showed up in pajamas! Priceless.

Wacky Iranians

But now the circus is winding down. The talking heads on the networks have run out of jurors and lawyers and lawyers-pretending-to-be-experts.

It's gotten so pathetic that Gerardo is interviewing himself.

And the news, Michael — talk about a bummer.

Five more U.S. Marines got blown up in Ramadi, which is a city in western Iraq. Another roadside bomb, the

Pentagon says.

That's 1,705 U.S. troops who have died since the war began. They printed the total in the newspaper. It made me sick to think about.

What else? Oh yeah, those wacky Iranians have admitted they've been messing around with plutonium. Apparently they're working on a nuclear device, which is just what the world needs.

Then there's some awful story about the Taliban — remember them? Well, it turns out that we didn't come close to wiping out all of those creeps when we bombed Afghanistan.

A Taliban gang broke into a medical clinic in Kandahar and murdered a doctor and six assistants. Later, the leader of the party went on TV to assure all aspiring suicide bombers that Osama bin Laden is alive and well.

Joe Camel's gift
So, if you're a jihadist, the news isn't all bad.

Likewise if you're a tobacco tycoon. The Bush administration just ordered the Justice Department to whack \$120 billion off the government's settlement demand in its case against cigarette makers.

An early Christmas present for Joe Camel, I guess.

See, Michael, you can't bail on us now. Don't disappear behind those gilded gates and leave us out here twisting in the un-surreal world.

Remember what happened after the O.J. Simpson trial ended, when the country spiraled into a mass depression? Reporters stared emptily at their notebooks; joke writers for Leno and Letterman were put under a suicide watch.

For nearly three dismal years there was nothing to talk about except important stuff, like soaring healthcare costs and welfare reform and the genocide in Africa.

But then came Monica Lewinsky and it was showtime — sex in the White House! Once again we were a nation intellectually at peace, blissfully obsessed by scandal. That's why we're begging, Michael. As arduous as the trial was for you, it was an opiate for the rest of the country.

Prisoners of Reality

Think of what you spared us. Every day for three months, 2,200 reporters who could have been digging up serious stories elsewhere were instead camped out with the tabloids at the courthouse.

No case could have been more insignificant to our everyday lives, our well-being or the future of the planet — which is why we couldn't get enough of it.

We're hopelessly, hungrily hooked on squalid spectacle. We crave the inane and irrelevant. It's our national dope; a legal way to stay stoned.

So, what depressing headlines are we left with today?

Body counts from Baghdad. The murder trial of a senescent ex-Klansman. Terri Schiavo's autopsy report. O where art thou, Macaulay Culkin? Whither goest Tito and LaToya?

You might be a free man, Michael Jackson, but the rest of us are prisoners of reality.

Come back soon. Before the civil trial.

Carl Hissen is a writer for The Miami Herald

Letter to the Editor

A Little Controversy is Palatable

Dear Editor,

I like spicy food. Even though I risk burning my mouth, the risk is worth it for the new experiences.

And so it is with public debate. Spicy is good!

Richard Rodriguez was a great choice for commencement. An intellectual speaker with controversial ideas and a track record of public engagement was something to look forward to. Best of all, some people opposed the choice and voiced their opposition.

Bravo! Ah, a passionate argument! We don't have enough of that here.

I care greatly about affirmative action and bilingual education (I actually went on a Freedom Ride

in the '60s and led Civil Service Commission efforts in the '70s to integrate the Sacramento Sheriff's Department) and disagree with Rodriguez on these issues, but I am fascinated with his perspective and respect his experience. I looked forward to hearing him.

It was not surprising that there was opposition to his speaking and an effort to silence him (by the way, does anyone else see irony in the fact that BI-lingual educators insist on a UNI-lingual voice on the subject?). They have a perfect right to oppose the speaker. And the rest of us have the right to ignore them.

What was surprising was that Rodriguez backed down in the

face of a little heat from a handful of people. Did he not consider the thousands who didn't even know what was going on? Rodriguez allowed a small minority to deny the majority a wonderful learning experience.

Looking ahead I hope the university doesn't draw the wrong lesson from this episode. Someone articulated the view that commencement speakers should not be controversial. I disagree. They should have a mind and ideas and something new to say. They should shake things up.

Don't play it safe next year. Speakers should be spicy.

Thomas Hoerber
Director, CSUEB Alumni Relations

Commentary

Stop the Bleeding: Shut Down Guantanamo Bay

Bill Press

Guantanamo Bay were built to house Cuban and Haitian refugees caught trying to sneak into the United States. But in 2002, the Pentagon selected Gitmo as the perfect place to store suspected terrorists rounded up in Afghanistan. Why? Because it was totally controlled by the United States, yet located on foreign soil. Therefore, argued then-White House Counsel Alberto Gonzalez, American laws did not apply. There was no need to offer detainees any legal protection or even treat them as prisoners of war. They were called "enemy combatants" instead.

The Supreme Court rejected that argument, but the Bush administration still refuses to budge. So today, Guantanamo Bay is a big black eye on the face of the United States, contradicting everything we supposedly stand for — in terms of human rights, human decency and respect for the law. No wonder Amnesty International has branded it "the gulag of our times." Some 550 prisoners have been held there for over three years with no charges filed, no chance to see a lawyer and no opportunity to defend themselves in a court of law. And many have been subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Vice President Dick Cheney defends the administration's policies, telling Sean Hannity on Fox News: "The important thing here to understand is that the people that are in Guantanamo are bad people." He's dead wrong. Even the Pentagon

admits that 40 percent of the original prison population didn't belong there in the first place. They weren't terrorists. They were innocent citizens of Afghanistan or, later, Iraq identified as al-Qaida sympathizers by bounty-hunting countrymen. So far, over 200 have been released. And in three years, not one Guantanamo prisoner has been charged with, let alone convicted of, terrorism.

Worse yet, stories from Guantanamo Bay now serve today as al-Qaida's best recruitment tools. Forget all the rhetoric about freedom. Show young Muslims the way we treat prisoners at Gitmo or Abu Ghraib and they're ready to sign up immediately — for the war against Americans.

Houston, we've got a problem, a serious image problem around the world. If we deny it, like Dick Cheney, or ignore it, like George W. Bush, it's only going to get worse. Instead, we must fix the problem, fast. As recommended by Democrats Joe Biden and Jimmy Carter and Republican Mel Martinez, it's time to close the military prison at Guantanamo, move all remaining prisoners to a military base on American soil — and begin to follow international law governing prisoners of war.

To me, that's the most important consideration of all. Reread the evidence of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo Bay. Then ask yourself: Is this the way we would want American prisoners of war to be treated? If your answer is no, there's only one answer: Shut Gitmo down!

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