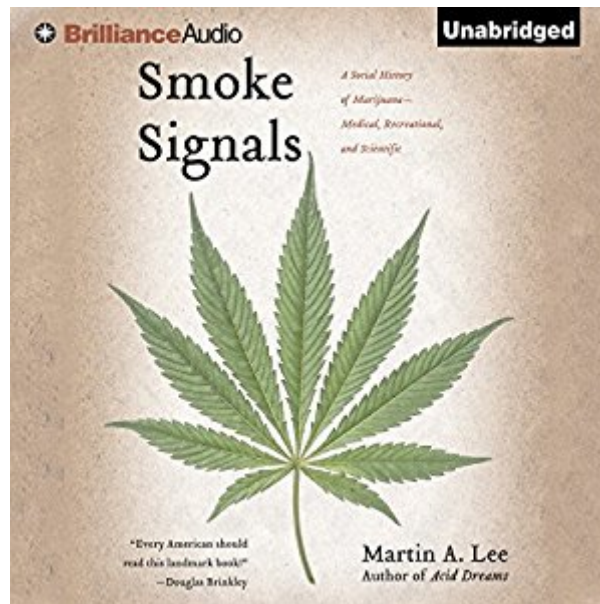


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# Smoke Signals: A Social History Of Marijuana - Medical, Recreational, And Scientific



## Synopsis

Martin A. Lee traces the dramatic social history of marijuana, from its origins to its emergence in the 1960s as a defining force in a culture war that has never ceased. Lee describes how the illicit marijuana subculture overcame government opposition and morphed into a dynamic, multibillion-dollar industry. In 1996, California voters approved Proposition 215, legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes. Similar laws have followed in more than a dozen other states, but not without antagonistic responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement. Lee, an award-winning investigative journalist, draws attention to underreported scientific breakthroughs that are reshaping the therapeutic landscape. By mining the plant's rich pharmacopoeia, medical researchers have developed promising treatments for cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, diabetes, chronic pain, and many other conditions that are beyond the reach of conventional cures. Colorful, illuminating, and at times irreverent, this is a fascinating listen for recreational users and patients, students and doctors, musicians and accountants, Baby Boomers and their kids, and anyone who has ever wondered about the secret life of this ubiquitous herb.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Before I write this brief review, it would be good for the reader to know that I'm a 53-year-old father of two teenagers and has been happily married for over 30 years. I've tried marijuana four times in my life: a few tokes off a joint in my late teens; two incidences when I unknowingly ate pot-laced pastries during my college years; and once getting seriously baked from unintentionally inhaling second-hand smoke at an Aerosmith concert in the early 1980s. At the last example, I wound up

eating an entire bucket of Dunkin' Donut munchkins in my dorm room. I maybe will have a beer or two per year and do not take nor have ever taken illicit drugs beyond the examples above. In other words, no one will mistake me for Charlie Sheen. With that said, after reading numerous respectable pieces about marijuana, I was at a loss as to why our federal government was freaking out about weed? A mountain of scientific reports over the past hundred years or so have repeatedly shown that it isn't a gateway drug, addictive, NO ONE has ever O.D. on the stuff, it has numerous medicinal benefits, and cannabis has many uses such as petroleum, food, clothing and paper. Mr. Lee's 'Smoke Signals' presents a very thorough history of hippie lettuce. Our laws demonizing it began because of racism towards Mexicans and blacks as well as religious zealotry then snowballed into a federal bureaucratic cash cow and political tool. The author repeatedly shows through heavily annotated examples that marijuana's reputation was and is tarnished due to moral and ideological attitudes. There is plenty of interesting trivia between these pages such as Sears & Roebuck used to sell it. Mr.

Edit 10/1/12 I have decided to edit this review in order to remove a few merely personal remarks not germane to the text. I found this in my library in hardcover. There is little new here barring recent research results, but it is very nice to see all the relevant material in one source. By that I mean the plant's background, the history of its use, the rise of prohibition in the U.S. and the idiocy of its continuation, have all been documented elsewhere as the (abundant) annotations show. But up until now it was necessary to go all over the place to get it. I was a little surprised the author allowed his own feelings on the matter to show so clearly. It is billed as a 'social history of marijuana' and historians are usually pretty good at remaining objective while basing their findings on facts. One assertion presented as fact may be found on page 287 in a discussion of PTSD, "...nearly twice as many [Vietnam vets] would kill themselves after the war..." than died during the war. This really struck me. He gives no reference for this figure unfortunately so I did a little checking. Yes, there are some who make the assertion but it looks like few reliable statistical studies have been done. The VA says the mortality rate among discharged vets was about 1.5 times that of non-vets in their first five years of civilian life. I suppose from that you can extrapolate. I find it hard to accept that over 100,000 suicides have occurred nonetheless. Suicide is hard to diagnose sometimes and you could wrap in accidental deaths, drug overdoses and such to reach that huge number. I know of no one who took their own life after serving fwiw. PTSD sure is wicked if you ever get it, like my wife did after getting hit by a car.

"Smoke Signals" by Martin A. Lee is an excellent social history of cannabis in America. Mr. Lee's experience reporting on marijuana science and therapeutics serves him well as he writes with great insight about the many contradictions between the plant, culture and drug policy. Published prior to the historic 2012 vote for legalization, this well-rounded book might be the best single source into understanding America's confounding relationship with marijuana. Mr. Lee recalls how the herb was used by the working classes including innovative musicians such as Louis Armstrong until racial anxiety led to a wave of anti-marijuana laws in the 1930s. We learn how Harry Anslinger poisoned the minds of an entire generation with his government-approved anti-weed propaganda. The author does a great job describing how the Beats opened the door to the rebellious 1960s when marijuana use and antiwar activism were inseparably linked in a movement that challenged the legitimacy of Cold War authority. Mr. Lee discusses the conservative backlash and the unjust puritanical war that was waged against the American people while the government looked the other way as it engaged in illicit wars in Central America and Afghanistan. We see how every credible government study intended to justify marijuana's illegality has instead demonstrated its efficacy as a therapeutic. The author talks about how progressive-thinking people like Dr. Lester Grinspoon, Dr. Tod Mikuriya and Dr. Andrew Weil dedicated considerable time and effort to the cause of reason, sanity and humanity. Mr. Lee documents how the just say never 1980s gave way to the medical marijuana activism of the 1990s. As people progressed from blunts to ballots, state laws were changed but federal policy remained the same.

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