

Understanding War on Drugs Statistics

2. Big Lies and Bullies Trump Research in the War on Drugs: The LaGuardia Commission

by Alexander DeLuca, July 17, 2004. *Originally posted 6/17/2004; Revised 8/26/2004*

In a scientific society we might expect that good epidemiological and medical research would, over time, dissolve myths and prejudices and generate basic scientific answers on which rational policy might be based. It is a sad, recurrent theme in the war on drugs that law enforcement repeatedly tried to limit what research is undertaken by denying permits to possess and use drugs for studies, and by vilifying and threatening the professional lives of those courageous researchers who do the necessary work despite the obstacles. What research is accomplished is manipulated and spun by various governmental agencies to suit predetermined national drug policy.

The LaGuardia Commission, 1939

A classic and well documented example of law enforcement misinformation and shameless bullying of politicians, doctors, and scientists is the story of NY Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and his 1939 blue-ribbon commission, which was established under the auspices of the NY Academy of Medicine to examine the absurd claims of the Narcotics Bureau Commissioner Anslinger expressed in hysterical press suggestions that New York City children were on the brink of launching “marijuana-induced orgies of theft, sex, and murder.” [Anslinger as quoted in “The Weed of Madness and the Little Flower” by Rufus King, 1972: [www.doctordeluca.com/Library/WOD/King-DHU10.htm]]



Commissioner Harry Anslinger, Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1930 - 1962

The Academy did excellent work documenting the physiological and psychological effects of marijuana including careful tests of IQ, memory, and learning which failed to reveal any significant pathological pattern. Further, the Mayor’s investigators found virtually no use of marijuana in high schools or junior high schools, and no observable association between juvenile delinquency and such marijuana use as they did find.

Alas, the LaGuardia Report was to be a case of winning the battle and losing the war. Anslinger did not challenge the findings but rather attacked the researchers for publishing them. “From [the enforcement] point of view it is very unfortunate that Doctors Allentuck and Bowman should have stated so unqualifiedly that the use of marijuana does not lead to physical, mental or moral deterioration.” [Harry Anslinger, 1942, in a letter published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*]

The Narcotics Bureau’s attack on the final release of the LaGuardia Report was far more insidious and damaging. Consider the following excerpt from an editorial in *JAMA*:

[A] book called "Marijuana Problems" by the Mayor's Committee on Marijuana submits an analysis [which] minimizes the harmfulness of marijuana. Already the book has done harm. One investigator has described some tearful parents who brought their 16 year old son to a physician after he had been detected in the act of smoking marijuana. A noticeable mental deterioration had been evident for some time... The boy said he had read an account of the La Guardia Committee report and that this was his justification for using marijuana. [Excerpt from AMA editorial as quoted in King, as above]

King reminds us that “this nonsensical frothing, which could not conceivably have come from anywhere but the Bureau,” was published under the prestigious AMA masthead. The message to doctors and to researchers was clear. Expect to be attacked by federal law enforcement and abandoned by your peers in the powerful AMA for your professional efforts and honesty.

The ultimate outcome of this brouhaha was devastating. Few reputable doctors and scientists would risk their professional lives in this sort of environment and law enforcement officials in the Bureau unhesitatingly denounced even the facilities of major hospitals and leading universities as inadequate for the conducting of responsible experiments, and hence unworthy of a Treasury license required for studying controlled substances. [“The Weed of Madness and the Little Flower” by Rufus King, 1972: www.doctordeluca.com/Library/WOD/King-DHU10.htm]

Treasury-approved research projects dropped from 87 in 1948, to 18 in 1953, to 6 in 1958.

An investigative reporter might want to ask of our elected officials:

“To whose council will you now turn in this ongoing American tragedy, to the voices of law enforcement or to doctors, and scientists and public health officials? Can we not expect that our educated and learned public officials be able to summons the expertise to tell good science from bad, and to turn a deaf ear to opportunistic ranting?”

Unfortunately the record of government leadership on these issues is as shameful as that of organized medicine. In Part 3, "[Junk Science Drives Policy](#)," we will very carefully trace the validity of "science" incorporated into the "Findings" section of a sordid piece of legislation known as the "Drug Free Workplace Act of 1998."

I hope you found this document helpful. The "[Understanding Drug War Statistics](#)" series continues with Part 3: "[Junk Science Drives Policy](#)."

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