

## CULTURAL COMMENT

## CANADA HAS MADE POT SUPER BORING

By Stephen Marche

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This 4/20 will be different, at least in Canada. It will be the first celebration of marijuana since the country made pot legal in October, 2018. The time passed since the end of prohibition hasn't been long enough to establish any direct consequences from legalization so far, but one thing has already become painfully clear from Canada's experiment. When you make pot legal, you make it super, super boring.



*The legalization of marijuana has raised a question: How much of the pleasure of the drug came from its illicitness?* Photograph by Alana Paterson / NYT / Redux



“Worthwhile Canadian Initiative,” a 1986 article in the *New York Times*, famously inspired a contest, held by *The New Republic*, to find the world’s most boring headline. Marijuana is now a worthwhile Canadian initiative, and the Canadian government has done its best to live up to its dull reputation. In the immediate aftermath of legalization, most government weed was only available by mail. This was not a problem, until there was a postage strike. Then, when the government weed did arrive, the containers, with their elaborate warning labels and massive quantities of plastic packaging, resembled, more than anything, home enema kits.

Other than new signs at the airport warning the more dull-witted Canadian citizens to dispense of their marijuana in the appropriate receptacles before leaving the country, it was hard to notice any real change after the passage of the marijuana laws. The pot dispensaries, semi-underground before the end of prohibition, were supposed to disappear, but went on just as before. They’ve just becoming increasingly polished. The place where I buy my weed looks like a Pottery Barn, and it was so busy the other day that they gave me one of those buzzers they hand out at Shake Shack to tell you when your order is ready. I had to wait twenty minutes.

It’s also money that’s making pot boring. Recently, I went to a champagne-and-hot-wings party—a superb concept, by the way—in a wealthy neighborhood in Toronto, and it felt like half the people attending were in the cannabis industry in one way or another; many of them had transitioned from hedge funds. Marijuana stocks have overtaken real estate as the standard conversational go-to of Toronto dinner parties. And you have not understood how banal marijuana can be until you overhear two parents watching their kids at a swimming lesson discuss how I.S.O. 9000 certification affects the marketing efforts for stocks of C.B.D.-extract companies.

“Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg are turning their lifelong passion into superior elevated products with the launch of Houseplant,” an e-mail informed me last month. “After five years of diligent hands-on work, Seth and Evan are proud to be delivering the highest quality cannabis products to Canadians in partnership with Canopy Growth Corporation.” “Superbad” is about to have its own brand of weed! And they’re proud of being attached to a corporation. It sullies the whole experience, never mind the movie.

Even a few months after legalization, I find myself wondering how much of the pleasure of marijuana came from its illicitness. When you used to pass around a joint, you were sharing a little

naughtiness, a tiny collective experience of rebellion. Now, at a party, when you pass around a joint, you're basically saying let's go stare at things for a while. When I see cops on the street today, there is nothing I do that might upset them. We are on the same side, utterly. It's pathetic.

There may still be dangers to marijuana, of course. The public-health effects of legalization are, as yet, unknown. Nobody knows whether legalization will lead to higher rates of teen-age mental illness, or to traffic accidents. But, already, it is unimaginable that marijuana would be made illegal again. Even with the brief distance of a few months since the end of prohibition, the sheer stupidity of the drug war appears absolute. Marijuana isn't worth the attention of the police. It's not even that good a drug. It wouldn't be in my top five, anyway.

One of the most important consequences of marijuana's legalization is that the drug can now be studied. We might learn how it works and what it does to people. Clinical trials will replace the loose collection of vague anxieties and promotional pseudoscience that have dominated discussions of marijuana up to this point in history. It will finally be possible to think sensibly about marijuana. And what could be more boring?

It has to be said, in boredom's defense, that it's the cure for a great number of evils. The cliché holds that America is losing the war on drugs, but it's not quite accurate. Cocaine and heroin have never been cheaper. Overdose deaths recently topped car accidents as a more likely cause of death for adults in the United States. But America is very much winning the war on drugs that are legal: tobacco use has declined sixty-seven per cent since 1965, and drunk-driving fatalities by forty-eight per cent since 1991. Of course, the way America reduced the use of these drugs wasn't by killing bad guys and arresting users en masse, but by treating them like social problems with collective solutions. Yawn. No one's going to make a season of "Narcos" out of that.

Canada is proving, once again, the deep political power of boredom: if you want to suck the power and glamour out of drugs, let the government run them.

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