



# THE COMPLICATED LEGACY OF HARRY ANSLINGER

It's hard to overstate Harry Anslinger's influence on 20th century American culture. It's harder still to grapple with his legacy as father of the drug war.

*By Michael Weinreb '94 Com*

By Harry J. Anslinger,  
Commissioner Bureau of Narcotics, United States Treasury  
Department.

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Marihuana-- the "weed of folly and of dreams"--- has raised its big-leafed and flowered head into America's everyday life to strike with insidious venom at the country's youth through a new narcotic <sup>traffic</sup> approaching in effect and danger the illicit commerce in the better-known habit forming drugs.

Where the opium and heroin traffic deals chiefly with the older generations, marihuana peddlers are preying upon the younger people ~~boys and girls in the schools~~ tempted to new thrills of delight by the wily hawkers on the street corners. "Do you want to be happy, kids? Hey boy, Hey girl! Do you want to be happy?" That is the refrain.

American youth is jeopardized by the weed-- those who are lured into use of marihuana destined to be transformed into moral and mental degenerates-- some raving maniacs others violent criminals.

(more) -0-

# There are 13.23 cubic feet of material housed within Collection HCLA 1875 on the first floor of Paterno Library, boxes that draw researchers, scholars, writers, and historians from near and far to Penn State, all

seeking to further their narratives. There are books and transcripts and journals and manuscripts and personal and professional correspondence; there are six audiotapes and 20 reels of microfilm; there is a sheath of newspaper clippings and reports detailing supposed marijuana-induced crimes from the 1920s and beyond that is known in the vernacular as the "Gore File."

These are the papers of perhaps the most influential Penn State graduate of the 20th century, a man who steered public policy for more than three decades, and whose stances on federal drug laws had a massive impact on American society. It is very possible that until now, you have never heard the name Harry Anslinger; it's also very possible you have never heard of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the long-defunct agency that **Anslinger 1915a Agr** headed for 32 years. And yet in the midst of a massive reformation and re-evaluation of the precepts that Anslinger helped set down, the core of

his life's work draws a steady stream of viewers—not to mention would-be-thieves seeking valuable souvenirs—to the Special Collections archives at University Park. Because once you delve into the history of our nation's nearly century-long war on drugs, you cannot avoid colliding with Harry Anslinger, the hard-nosed law-and-order man who set it all into motion.

"I headed there on a Greyhound bus, and began to read through everything I could find by and about Harry Anslinger," British author Johann Hari writes on the first page of his bestselling 2015 book *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*. "Only then did I begin to see who he really was—and what he means for us all."

So what does Harry Anslinger mean for us all? Do a simple Google image search, and you'll come across dozens of quotes attributed to him, many of them inflammatory, many of them blatantly and horrifyingly racist (and at least a few that An-

### MEDIA MAGNET

Countless words by (previous spread) and about Anslinger can be found at University Park, where his papers are housed in the library's Special Collections.

## HARRY ANSLINGER GETS APPOINTMENT

President Hoover Names Al-  
toona Boy as Comm-  
of Narcotics Und-  
Porter Bill.

(By United Press.)  
WASHINGTON, D. C.,  
Appointment of Harry J.  
formerly acting commissio-  
cotics in the treasury dep-  
commissioner was made b-  
Hoover today.

This action was taken u-  
cently-passed Porter bill  
an independent narcotics  
Previously the narcotic  
carried on by Anslinger  
rection of Assistant Tre-  
tary Lowman.

Harry J. Anslinger is th-  
and Mrs. Robert J. Ans-  
this city.

## U. S. Will Act Today To End Doping Laxity

New Saliva Test Method  
to Be Demonstrated  
at Session Here.

U NCLE SAM cracks down on  
the States today, persistent  
and unrelenting in his efforts  
to eradicate from American race-  
tracks the evils of horse doping.

Called together by the long arm  
of the Federal Government, the  
foremost chemists and veterinarians  
of the country's racing States will  
assemble this morning at the office  
of H. J. Anslinger, United States  
Commissioner of Narcotics, in the  
Treasury Building, at a meeting of  
far-reaching proportions.

The conference will close once  
and for all the loop-hole through  
which certain States have been able



## DOPE RING DIES IN HOLLYWOOD

LOS ANGELES, July 6 (I.N.S.).  
With four secret arrests today,  
Federal narcotic agents announced  
they had broken up a gigantic  
dope smuggling ring that operated  
in Hollywood.

Those who were taken into cus-  
tody in a swift succession of raids  
were:

Pete Benson, 42, who Federal

## U. S. Scores Victory In Fight On Dope Smuggling

By KINGSBURY SMITH  
International News Service

The United States today scored  
one of its greatest victories in  
the fight to stamp out the illicit  
international traffic in narcotics.

As the result of exposures by  
the American narcotic representa-  
tive at Geneva, a death blow was  
dealt to the illicit manufacture

tional smuggling traffic in this  
drug.

The American Legation at  
Sofia notified the State Depart-  
ment the Bulgarian government  
had issued decrees prohibiting  
the importation, except under  
strict regulations, of a heroin-  
making chemical known as "acid  
acetic anhydride."

During the recent meeting of

slinger may never have said). Anslinger has become a pariah among marijuana legalization advocates, the man many blame for putting us on the path to prohibition, the man responsible for the incarceration of so many people of color for minor drug infractions. He is characterized by some of those advocates—and by many journalists and historians as well—as a bureaucratic tyrant, a blatant propagandist, a closed-minded and single-minded zealot who carried out a pointed crusade against Mexicans and Asians and (according to an early chapter of Hari’s book) even famed jazz singer Billie Holiday. He has become an internet meme in those activist circles, the words attributed to him serving as literal T-shirt slogans for what many view as the failed policies of the nation’s drug war.

But get beyond the simple characterizations, and you’ll find that the truth about Harry Anslinger is far more layered than anything that can be captured in a single photo or an incendiary quote. The pages in those archives, and the story of Anslinger’s career battling both drugs and organized crime in America, can be read in many different ways.

“No great leader is without detractors,” says **Charles Lutz ’67 Lib**, a retired Drug Enforcement Agency special agent who has spent years tracing Anslinger’s career and attempting to preserve his legacy. “They all make mistakes. But Anslinger has been treated very unfairly.”

At the very least, his was a complex life, and his is a complex legacy; as more and more states grapple with the potential ramifications of both medical marijuana laws and recreational marijuana legalization, it is one that scholars will likely continue to revisit, again and again.

“No other single individual had more influence or created a more durable legacy with respect to federal drug control than Harry Anslinger,” says John McWilliams, a retired Penn State professor who published what many regard as the definitive Anslinger biography, *The Protectors*, in 1990. “He was a smart guy. He knew his way around that world. He was the consummate bureaucrat.”

## IT IS A CLASSIC STORY: THE SON

of immigrants working his way up the ladder and straight into the heart of the American zeitgeist. It begins in Altoona, where Robert Anslinger—a barber in Switzerland who emigrated to America in 1881 in order to avoid



### AN UNRELENTING VOICE

Anslinger had the ear of Washington lawmakers and his fellow law enforcers: In 1934, he spoke at the Attorney General’s “Conference on Crime.”

service in the Swiss Army—wound up with his wife after shunning the urban lifestyle of New York City. Eventually, Robert took a job with the Pennsylvania Railroad. Robert had nine children and very little money, and his son Harry—born in 1892—would follow in his father’s footsteps, going to work at the railroad in the ninth grade and taking classes part-time in the mornings.

Early on, the use of narcotics—then legal—made an indelible impression on Harry. One moment in particular is vital to his legend: Hearing the bloodcurdling screams of a woman in a neighboring farmhouse. According to Anslinger’s 1961 book *The Murderers*, the woman’s husband then sent Harry to the drugstore to pick up a package. Harry got it and paid for it, a 12-year-old boy dispatched for a dose of morphine that, once administered, calmed the woman’s screams.

Those screams of a morphine addict would haunt Harry Anslinger. The fact that a kid his age could purchase such drugs with no questions—the fact that, in those days, one could order a syringe kit from Sears & Roebuck through the

mail—led him to the conviction that drugs that posed such a danger to the psyche should not be so readily available. At any moment, Anslinger came to believe, otherwise normal people could be turned “emotional, hysterical, degenerate, mentally deficient, and vicious.” The only way forward, in Anslinger’s mind, was a punitive approach, an all-out war against drugs.

In 1913, Anslinger was granted a furlough by the railroad and left for Penn State, where he enrolled in a two-year associate-degree program. He made extra money by working as a substitute piano player at the silent movie theater on Allen Street. In 1914, as Anslinger was in the midst of getting his degree, the war on drugs officially coalesced with the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act; originally designed as a revenue measure, the act was the first to essentially outlaw the use of several drugs, including cocaine, opiates, and heroin.

Harry spent the summers away from Penn State working on a landscaping crew, and this is where, he later said, he first encountered his other lifelong nemesis. Every so often, he would hear Italian immigrant workers discussing, in broken English, something known as the “Black Hand”—an Italian criminal enterprise that targeted recent immigrants. One day, Harry said, he found an Italian coworker badly beaten and lying in a ditch. After some prodding, the man told Anslinger he’d been beaten by someone he called “Big Mouth Sam,” to whom he’d been forced to pay protection money. Anslinger purportedly threatened to kill Big Mouth Sam if he came around the railroad again.

This story would set the tone for Anslinger’s vendetta against the mafia, an organization that U.S. law enforcement officials—and most notably, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover—refused to officially acknowledge as real until the 1960s. Anslinger understood the power of a good narrative, whether it was exaggerated or not. After finishing at Penn State, he became a railroad detective, and after saving the railroad \$50,000 in a negligence suit, he was promoted to captain of the railroad police. He was on his way.

**A**NSLINGER SERVED WITH THE State Department overseas at the tail end of World War I, gathering intelligence on Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm and others, and eventually moving on to the Bahamas to observe rum-runners during Prohibition. By the late 1920s, Prohibition was failing, and the Prohibition Bureau was rife with corruption and needed to be reorganized. A Pennsylvania congressman introduced a bill to create a new bureau to separate drug enforcement from liquor violations. And so, in 1930, eight weeks after being named acting commissioner of the newly formed Fed-

eral Bureau of Narcotics (FBN)—this after Anslinger leveraged the recommendations of old friends and colleagues to President Herbert Hoover—his position was made permanent.

Anslinger first became a lightning rod for controversy when he began zeroing in on marijuana. How much of this was his own doing, and how much of it was a result of forces already at work when Harry took on his job, depends on who you talk to. Hari, in *Chasing the Scream*—titled after Anslinger’s formative experience in that Altoona farmhouse—frames Anslinger’s anti-marijuana crusade as driven by racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, as a cynical attempt to consolidate the power of the FBN at a time when it was vulnerable. But not all scholars agree that it was so blatant.

“I do think Anslinger’s role has been overplayed,” says Adam Rathge, a Ph.D. student in the history department at Boston College who is completing a dissertation on the history of marijuana prohibition in the United States. “I certainly don’t want to come across as an Anslinger apologist, as he was not the most politically correct person, and I don’t think he’s off the hook by any stretch. But the level of angst and anger is easily channeled to him because he was head of the FBN for 30-plus years.”

Lutz, the former DEA agent, argues that Anslinger never wanted marijuana to be a federal crime—Anslinger feared that if it were, it would distract his agents from heroin cases. But since the marijuana was originating from Mexico, Lutz maintains, Congress demanded that Anslinger stop it.

Here is what we can say for sure: Certain forces were in place as Anslinger came into power, and those forces converged around marijuana prohibition. Some of those forces were indubitably driven by racial fears, in particular a fear of Mexicans; marijuana had made its way across the border and into New Orleans, and then up the Mississippi River and into the North and Midwest. A drug Anslinger and many others had previously viewed as a largely harmless diversion from more serious narcotics like morphine and opiates began to stoke public fears. It didn’t matter that a majority of Mexicans “saw marijuana as the most dangerous drug available,” Rathge says, and that Mexico had made it illegal years before America did. As Mexicans flooded into the country in the early part of the 20th century, those immigrants became targets.

This led to the compiling of Anslinger’s “Gore File,” his collection of clippings like the one from *The New York Times* in 1927, headlined “MEXICAN FAMILY GO INSANE,” about a widow and her four starving children who ate a marijuana plant, thereby supposedly dooming her children to death and ensuring her lifelong dementia. Reports like these came in from all over: A newspaper editor in Colorado cited “degenerate Spanish-speaking residents” and pleaded for assis-

# 'Murder Weed' Found Up and Down Coast

Deadly Marihuana Dope Plant Ready for Harvest That Means Enslavement of California Children

By Winifred Black

The murder weed is ripe—all over a honest judge in Ventura not long ago.

Dead ripe, and ready for harvest.

They call it marihuana in the police reports, but it's the murder weed just the same.

The dope victims used to send down to Mexico to get it.

That was five or six years ago. No more Mexican murder weed is needed now, it's growing all over our own country.

They've found farms of it, and down fields grow—across



The judge thought he had an unusually green and sweetly blooming hedge, but the marihuana users know what that hedge was and they were just waiting for the murder weed to get good and ripe so they could dry it and make it into cigars or into a snuff-like powder or brew it into a tea, or chew it like chewing gum, and drive themselves mad with wild dreams of cruel murder.

### OTHER STATES

And California is not the only state where the murder weed is fast ripening in the open fields today.

They've fighting it in Illinois, and in New York the peddlers are growing it in flower pots and selling it at such a low price that murders are one of the great problems of the New York police today.

Doceto Lichtenstein of the New York district attorney's force says that over half the criminals in the Tombs prison are murder-weed addicts.



# MARIJUANA Assassin of Youth

July 1937.

It had produced a few signatures of the usually mild "marijuana" fan. They had passed from one to another of young people, each taking a few...

The results were such. Some of the boys were like participants of madcap parties, or night law suits, or were in the hospital. Others were in the hospital because of their mental derangement...

Other cases followed, in which the boys were like participants of madcap parties, or night law suits, or were in the hospital. Others were in the hospital because of their mental derangement...



A weed that grows wild throughout the country is making dope addicts of thousands of young people

BY H. J. ANSLINGER  
WITH COUNTRY RYLEY COOPER

...the number of marijuana addicts in the United States is increasing rapidly. It is estimated that there are now over 100,000 addicts in the United States...

## Anslinger Calls for Stiffer Penalties on Dope Peddlers To Protect Youth of Nation

**FIGHTING "MURDER WEED"**  
Historians debate his intent, but there's no question that marijuana was widely vilified by the government and the media during Anslinger's tenure.

tance from Anslinger; another story cited "two Negroes" who reportedly held a 14-year-old girl for two days by keeping her under the influence of marijuana. Another report told of "colored students" at the University of Minnesota "partying with female students (white) smoking and getting their sympathy with stories of racial persecution. Result: Pregnancy."

The case of Victor Licata, in which a young man in Florida murdered his family with an axe while under the influence of marijuana, became perhaps Anslinger's most cited example of the drug's alleged dangers (though psychiatrists found that Licata suffered from "acute and chronic insanity," and didn't even mention his marijuana use in their files).

Was Anslinger an overt racist, as evidenced by his apparent targeting of renowned African-American jazz musicians like Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker over white drug users like the actress Judy Garland? Was his reference to a bureau informer as a "ginger-colored n----r"—a statement that led to calls for his resignation—a sign of his true self, or was it written by a staffer and signed off on by Anslinger? Was he driven by the media-fueled notion that Mexicans and African-Americans were evangelizing and providing marijuana to young white users? Or was he simply reacting to the public pressure that ballooned out of these reports? Either way, whether buoyed by true belief or cynicism or some combination of both, this is where Anslinger latched on to the notion of marijuana as both a menace and a political boon for his bureau.

"His focus was on the fact that America's youth was being threatened," Rathge says. "Did he singlehandedly manufacture the notion of making marijuana illegal in the United States? Absolutely not."

"But for the first time," Hari wrote, Anslinger gave these stories "the backing of a government department that would broadcast them to the nation at full volume, with an official government stamp saying they were true."

Combing through the limited medical studies of the time—many of which, Rathge says, were "fundamentally flawed and racist"—Anslinger clung to those that confirmed his newfound views and ignored those that didn't. He spoke to women's clubs and temperance groups and church organizations; Hari writes that Anslinger silenced doctors who argued for a more compassionate approach toward all kinds of drug addicts. In 1937, as often-apocryphal tales of marijuana's links to violence grew more frequent—and the year after the release of the propaganda film *Reefer Madness*, a film many associate with Anslinger despite no evidence he was involved—Anslinger co-authored a magazine article titled "Marijuana: Assassin of Youth." That same year, he testified before the Senate Ways and Means Committee about the inherent evils of this plant. He told Congressmen that it "incites the user to crime"; he told them of multiple reports of marijuana provoking violence.

"He created the image of a 'typical' marijuana user," McWilliams says, and among those users were Mexicans crossing

the border, black jazz musicians, and other marginalized minorities. "Legislators had no clue. It was easy for Harry Anslinger to create this myth."

In April of 1937, Congress passed the Marijuana Tax Act, setting the stage for decades of prohibition and increasingly punitive drug laws. But even this is only one element of Anslinger's considerable legacy, because as he was waging a crusade against drugs, he was also fighting what he considered an intertwined threat: The creeping specter of the "Black Hand" that he had encountered back in Altoona.

**EVEN AS J. EDGAR HOOVER,** Anslinger's powerful counterpart at the FBI, refused to acknowledge the existence of a mafia, Anslinger was targeting mafia-driven drug distribution rings in places like St. Louis and Kansas City. He is largely credited as the first federal official to have "discovered" the mafia, breaking up syndicates in Harlem and Chicago.

"He was right about organized crime," McWilliams says. "He started making arrests as early as the 1930s and 1940s."

After the exiled gangster Lucky Luciano wound up in Cuba, Anslinger—suspecting Luciano was moving drugs and seeking to control the island's gambling business, and fearing he would get back into the heroin business in the United States—announced the U.S. would stop shipping legitimate drugs to Cuba until Luciano was expelled. He was taken into custody the next day, and sent back to Italy. "When the Russians land on the moon," Luciano once said, "the first man they meet will be Anslinger, searching for narcotics."

Anslinger reached out to other countries, as well, working with INTERPOL to establish cooperation across borders. As the U.S. representative to the United Nations Narcotics Control Board, he created a convention that consolidated drug treaties; he established Federal Bureau of Narcotics offices in such far-flung cities as Beirut, Istanbul, and Bangkok, and sent agents overseas to aid drug investigations. "He was truly the founder of international drug enforcement," says Lutz, the retired DEA agent.

Anslinger's approach could be harsh. When Thailand refused to ban opium smoking, Anslinger threatened to cut off aid until the country complied with the FBN's operations. "Don't confuse me with facts," he would say when representatives of other countries tried to change his mind, according to Hari's book. But it worked—in the end, nearly every other country succumbed to Anslinger's big-stick policies.

He was, for better or worse, ferociously driven, to the point that many members of his extended family rarely saw him, to the point that the job took its toll on his health and appearance. Perhaps due to stress, he lost nearly all of his lush head of black hair soon after taking the commissioner's job. At one

point in 1935, according to author Jill Jonnes' 1996 book *Hep-Cats, Narcs and Pipe Dreams*, he had a mental breakdown and briefly had to step away from work altogether.

"He was always away on official business," says his great-niece, **Nanette Anslinger '64 A&A**, who recalls her uncle visiting her once while she was a student at Penn State and giving her \$50 to buy a bicycle, and choking down oysters Rockefeller with him during a visit to Washington. "But I was proud of my Uncle Harry. [His work] kept me straight during a time when many were experimenting with drugs. He may have been a little over the top in his approach, but I never wanted to disappoint him."

This was Anslinger's way: He testified that Communist China was seeking to weaken the morale of the free world by flooding it with heroin. In the 1950s he championed the Boggs Act and the Narcotics Control Act, which ratcheted up penalties for drug offenses. As early as the 1940s, Anslinger had joined other government agencies in highly classified drug experiments designed to "induce people to tell the truth against their will," McWilliams wrote. (Ironically, one of the primary drugs they experimented with was marijuana.)

His agents gained more reach and more power: One in particular, a renegade named George White, became involved in the CIA's Cold War mind-control experiments that provided LSD to unwitting subjects at safe houses in New York City and San Francisco. And while the extent of Anslinger's participation is unknown, a CIA pharmacologist testified after Anslinger's death that "Mr. Anslinger was knowledgeable of the safe houses that we have set up and why," and that he encouraged his agents to take part in the experiments.

Anslinger—who was named a Penn State Distinguished Alumnus in 1959—was nearing 70 by the time the 1960s dawned. He presumed he'd be replaced once John Kennedy came into office. Instead, he was reappointed to his position, and cultivated a strong relationship with Kennedy's brother and attorney general, Robert Kennedy. But his wife Martha was growing increasingly ill, confined to her room; she died in 1961. Facing increasing criticism of his methods from medical and legal professionals who believed in a more compassionate approach to drug addiction, Anslinger retired in 1962. He returned to the home he owned in Hollidaysburg, Pa., drinking coffee at the local luncheonette, going on occasional hunting trips, playing poker with friends—and continuing his personal crusade against marijuana use.

By the late 1960s, marijuana became a lightning rod once again, viewed as the preferred drug of the counterculture, venerated by the hippies that Anslinger saw as "such a great threat to American traditional values," McWilliams says. Anslinger, in a 1968 interview, called the hippies "the only persons who frighten me," and blamed "permissive parents, college administrators, pusillanimous judiciary officials,

# The Union Signal

February 3, 1940

A Journal of Social Welfare

*Social Welfare*

## MARIHUANA

*United States*

*Commissioner of Narcotics H. J. Anslinger.*



by H. J. ANSLINGER

United States Commissioner of Narcotics

*Marihuana Tax Act*

### FOREWORD

SINCE the enactment in 1937 of Federal control legislation, considerable progress has been made towards a solution of the nationwide marihuana problem. During the year 1938, Federal narcotic officers reported more than 1,000 violations of the Marihuana Tax Act. Federal and state seizures involved 8770 pounds of bulk marihuana, 2680 pounds of marihuana seeds, 18,700 marihuana cigarettes, and approximately 43,155 plants. In addition, United States narcotic agents, cooperating with state and municipal enforcement agencies throughout the country, conducted a program of eradication in which approximately tons of marihuana were destroyed.\*

*8770  
2680  
ma  
18,700  
ma  
Ciga*

The Public Can

*The Public Can*

*Help*

Help to Stamp Out

*Stamp out Marihuana.*

MARIHUANA



do-gooder bleeding hearts, and new-breed sociologists with their fluid notions of morality” for the proliferation of marijuana. This, he believed, was a fundamental assault on the foundations of Western civilization. Later, in a 1970 round-table debate with *Playboy*, Anslinger railed against nations who had succumbed to “moral laxity and hedonism.”

Soon after, his eyesight failed and Anslinger went blind, and he was already dealing with angina and a prostate condition that limited his mobility. Nanette Anslinger recalls visiting him and holding his hands and watching her great uncle run his fingers over her various rings while she described them. He died at age 83 in 1975, two decades before the tide of drug policy began to decisively turn against him.

“I’ve lived long enough,” he told Nanette on his deathbed.

**C**HARLES LUTZ SPENT THREE decades in federal law enforcement, much of it with the Drug Enforcement Agency, the heir to Anslinger’s Federal Bureau of Narcotics. When he retired, he needed a project to keep his investigative mind occupied. Combing through old books commemorating various anniversaries of the DEA, he found little mention of Harry Anslinger. He told the DEA it needed to include An-

slinger as part of its history. How could it be that a man who spent 32 years as the head of a major government agency could have disappeared entirely from view?

Lutz read every book he could find by or about Anslinger. He began to believe that Anslinger’s negative legacy was largely being shaped by marijuana activists “to further their own goals.” Digging deeper, he learned that Anslinger had hired 35 African-American agents at the FBN, and that in 1930 he had hired a Chinese agent, believed to be the first Chinese-American hired by any law-enforcement agency in the U.S.. He spoke to one of Anslinger’s hires, an African-American agent named Bill Davis, who told him that Anslinger treated him fairly and respectfully. He spoke to other minority agents and insists that none of them condemned Anslinger for his racial views.

“Anslinger,” Lutz insists, “was anything but a racist.”

There is a difference, of course, between hiring minorities and furthering policies that might disproportionately impact minority populations. Those things are not mutually exclusive, and Lutz admits that he doesn’t know whether Anslinger hired those minorities for “pragmatic reasons, to get the job done” by working in minority communities, or whether he “had some higher motive in mind.” But the way Lutz sees it, Anslinger has been “unjustly maligned by the pro-mari-



Harry J. Anslinger, U. S. Commissioner of Narcotics, inspects part of \$7,000,000 seizure by Federal agents. The shoe, held by the Commissioner, had secret compartment for narcotics.

#### DANGEROUS BOUNTY

Photo ops with seized drugs were powerful PR for Anslinger and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics.





juana legalization crowd.”

In 2014, Lutz helped to arrange for McWilliams to lecture at the DEA about Anslinger’s legacy; 18 members of Anslinger’s family attended, as did an aging Bill Davis, the African-American agent who served under Anslinger. Nanette Anslinger’s father donated several items of memorabilia to the DEA Museum in Virginia, and the DEA named a conference room after him. Lutz discovered that a plaque commemorating Anslinger that had been hung at the Blair County Courthouse in Hollidaysburg during a “Harry Anslinger Day” had gone missing, and he convinced the county commissioner to agree to replace it.

So what does Harry Anslinger mean for us all? It depends on whether, like Charles Lutz, you comb through Collection HCLA 1875 and believe Anslinger’s notions of prohibition and punishment are still the most valid tools we possess in the battle against drugs; or whether you think Anslinger preyed upon public fears to further his aims, and championed barbaric policies that marginalized minorities and criminalized addicts. His policies, McWilliams writes, were “oppressive and overly simplistic,” and he could be “tyrannical and inflexible,” but he also gathered valuable intelligence through his international operations, and he fought organized crime, and for his three decades in Washington, he was virtually omnipresent.

#### AN ENDURING FIGURE

First appointed by Herbert Hoover, Anslinger remained in charge of the FBN through the Kennedy administration.

As polls continue to show that an increasing number of Americans favor the relaxation of marijuana laws, Anslinger’s view of the world has begun to feel more and more like an anachronism, a throwback to an era when marijuana was first transformed from a nebulous social ill into something far more sinister (and political). “What would Anslinger think, I wonder, if he knew medical marijuana was now available in 18 [now 29] states?” McWilliams asked during his 2014 DEA lecture. “What would he think if he knew marijuana was available for recreational purposes in two [now eight] states? I suspect he would call it ‘reefer madness.’”

Despite his intensity, despite his often dictatorial means, Nanette Anslinger recalls that her great-uncle still had a sense of humor. When the *Village Voice* published a doctored photo of Anslinger wearing a wreath of marijuana leaves, it hung on the wall at the drugstore in Hollidaysburg where Anslinger used to while away his final years. He loved it. ♥

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*Michael Weinreb is a San Francisco-based writer and the author most recently of Season of Saturdays: A History of College Football in 14 Games.*