

THE BLUE RIBBON REPORT RICHARD NIXON CHOSE TO BURY

After Richard Nixon flattened the Democrats as soft on crime in the '68 election, the President-elect faced a dilemma. There's not much the White House can do to impact crime. The thugs people are afraid of — burglars, robbers, rapists, murderers — are the business of state courts. Then somebody mentioned drugs.^{1*}

In a textbook example of fear manipulation, Nixon warned the country that a plague of unimaginable proportions was about to engulf the nation. "The problem has assumed the dimensions of a national emergency," he said.² To fight the pushers on their own terms, he would need emergency powers — preventive detention, unorthodox strike forces, more freedom to search, wire tap, and arrest.

For scientific support, he appointed former Republican Pennsylvania Governor Ray Shafer to head a National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse. He told Gov. Shafer to treat marijuana just like heroin despite the "obvious differences between marijuana and other drugs."³ He was even more direct with



chief of staff Bob Haldeman. "I want a Goddamn strong statement about marijuana...that just tears the ass out of them."⁴

But after months of testimony from academics, medical experts, lawmen and health professionals, the facts overwhelmed the myths. The report was devastating: "Marijuana use, in and of itself, is neither causative of, nor directly associated with crime..."⁵ It found no basis for the gateway theory. Alcohol, it said, was probably a greater danger, and the report concluded that personal use of marijuana should no longer be a crime.⁶

The President hit the roof. He complained to Haldeman, "...every one of the bastards that are out for legalizing marijuana is Jewish."⁷

In the face of the shooting war in Vietnam the Shafer Commission was quickly forgotten but the consequences of that cover-up are with us still. Since the 1972 release of that official report recommending legalization, we have arrested more than 14 million Americans⁸ at a cost of over \$100 billion⁹ and the use of marijuana is undiminished.¹⁰

Common Sense for Drug Policy
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* Visit <http://www.cspd.org/publicservice/nixon06notes.htm> for citations, including full text of the Shafer Report