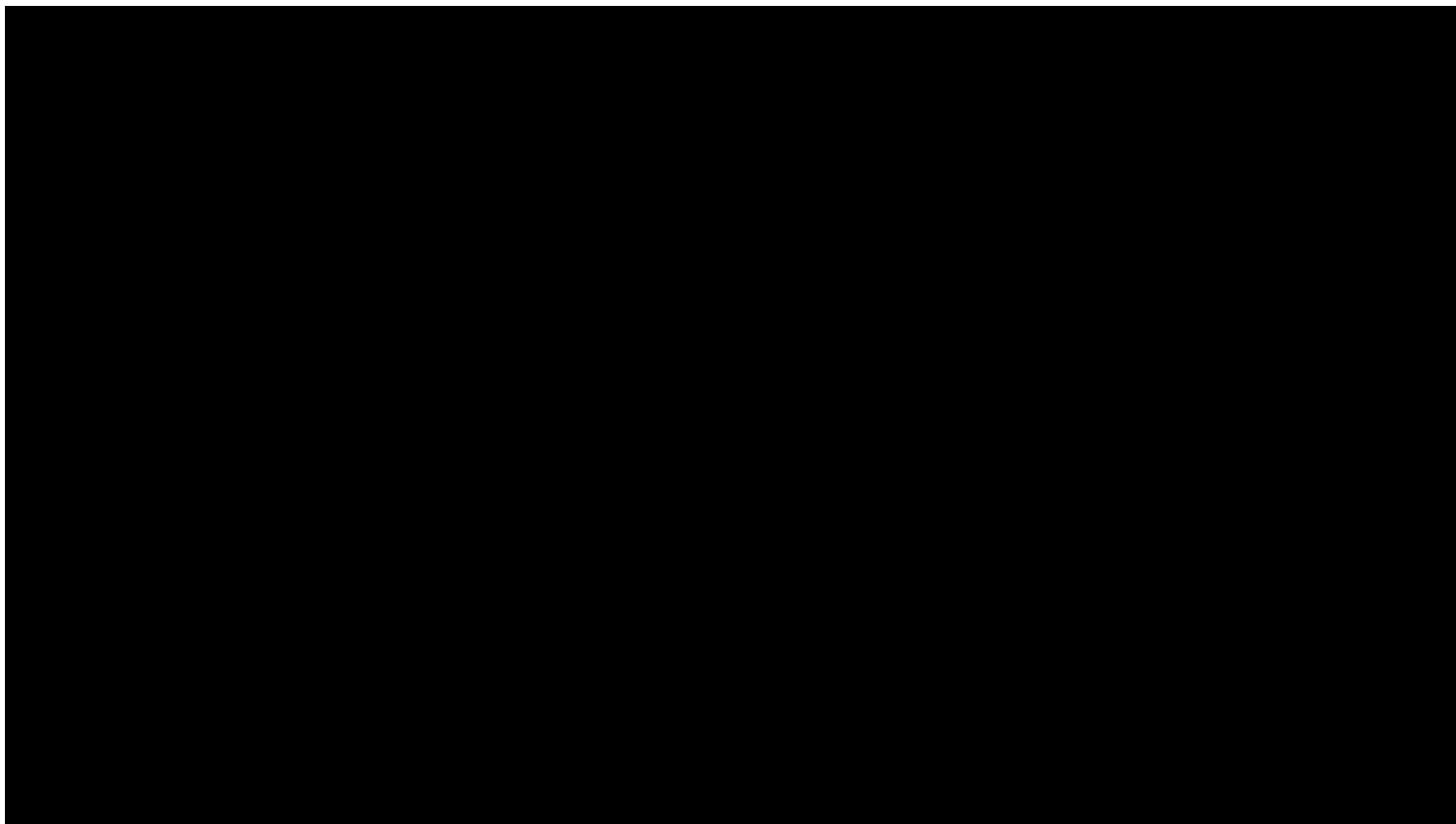




LOCAL / L.A. Now

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## Dude, you ever wonder, like, why people celebrate pot on 4/20?



Patients shop at the Harvest medical marijuana dispensary in San Francisco. Thousands of people were expected to converge on San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on Wednesday for the annual 4/20 marijuana holiday. (Haven Daley / Associated Press)



By **James Queally . Contact Reporter**

APRIL 20, 2016, 1:15 PM

**A**ny self-respecting stoner knows what to do on 4/20. But few seem to know how the otherwise innocuous date became an international celebration of cannabis culture.

The rumors about the origins of 4/20 tend to drift around like so much smoke from a tightly rolled joint: Is 420 the police radio code for smoking marijuana in public? Was it the day Adolf Hitler died? Or Jim Morrison of "The Doors"? Did it mark the day of death of someone else famous or infamous?

Nope. Negative. Try again. None of the names commonly associated with the origin of 4/20 actually died on April 20 (although Hitler was born on that day in 1889). In California, Section 420 of the penal code refers to the crime of barring someone from lawfully entering public land -- so that is not marijuana related either.

But most marijuana enthusiasts do agree that the 4/20 name has its roots in California.

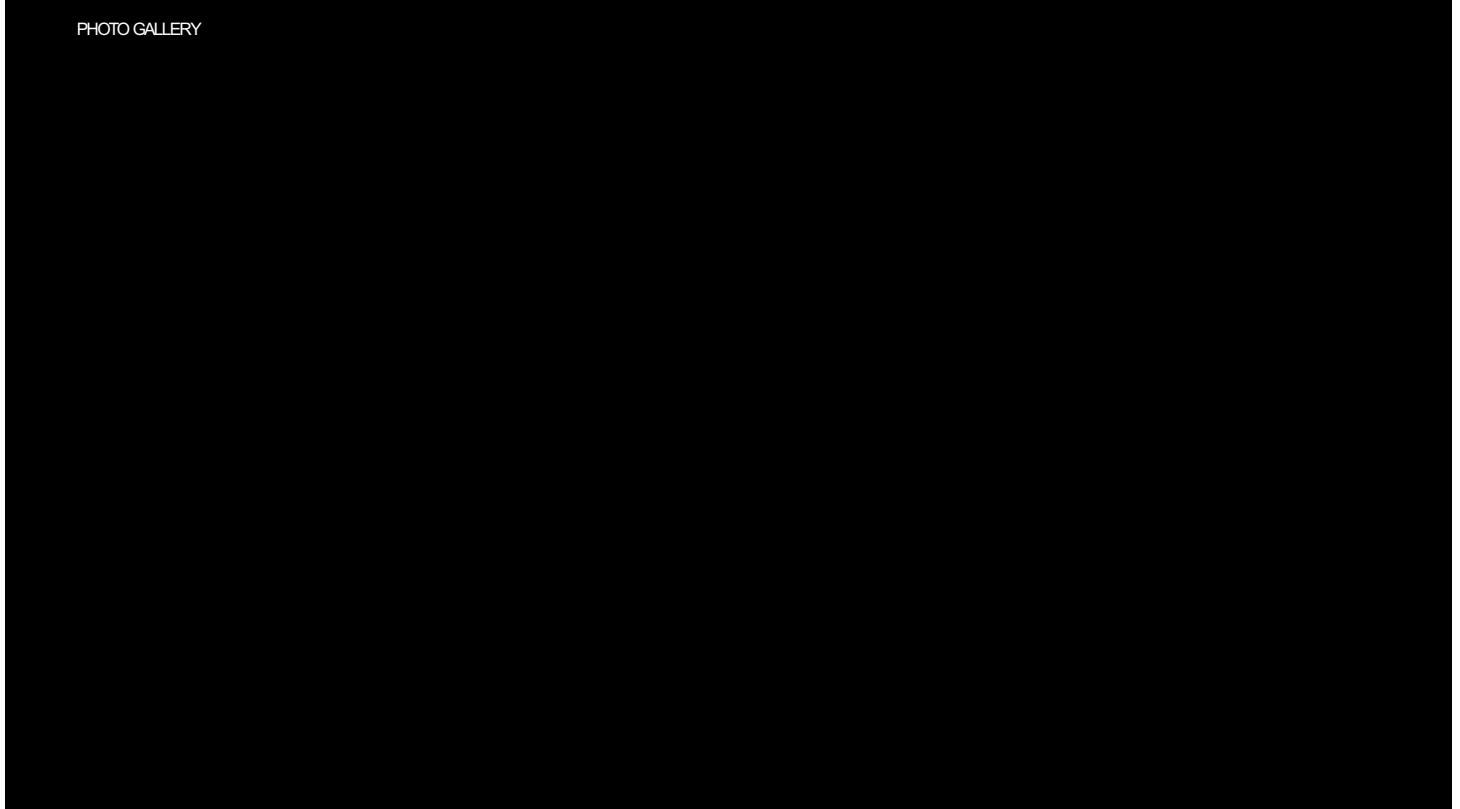
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According to [High Times](#) magazine, it was a group of San Rafael High School students, known now as "The Waldos," who first coined the 4/20 term. The students would meet at a statue on campus at 4:20 p.m. daily to smoke marijuana.

*Article continues below □*

PHOTO GALLERY



Pot advocates hold a 4.2-mile fun run in Santa Monica. Humor ensues.

The term didn't take on wider significance until 1990, according to High Times, when fliers promoting 4/20 began to surface at Grateful Dead shows.

Now the day has grown into a cause for both celebration and activism. While recreational marijuana use is now legal in four states, 4/20 has become a popular date for legalization demonstrations across the U.S.

"For most people, it's when they feel free to be out front in public about their marijuana smoking," said Keith Stroup, founder of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. "The rest of the year, we may have serious work to do, and we may have to

keep our smoking sub rosa, but on 4/20, it tends to be when marijuana smokers and marijuana organizations will have their major demonstrations."

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As for the secret history of 4/20? Stroup said the San Rafael origin story seems a little farfetched, but believes the offbeat holiday itself blossomed as authorities continued to lump marijuana in with other, more dangerous street drugs in decades past.

"When the government made all of us who smoked into criminals, they forced us into a subculture," he said. "Having our own holiday, and our own magic code words of 4/20, was how we communicated with each other."

While many pro-pot folks may choose to celebrate 4/20 at a special event, like a [Cannabis Carnival](#) set to take place in Los Angeles' downtown Arts District later today, others treat it as simply another day to sit back, light up and enjoy what they believe should be legal.

Stroup, 71, has no special 4/20 tradition. A smoker since he was 21, he said he plans to head home, pour himself a glass of wine, watch the news and smoke a joint.

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