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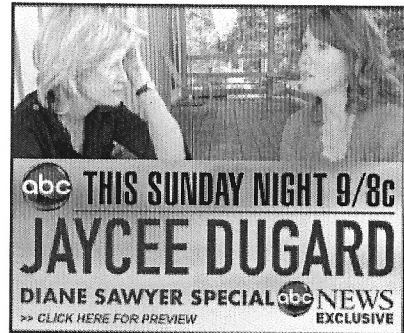
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420 Pot Holiday: Myths and Truths Behind the Celebration

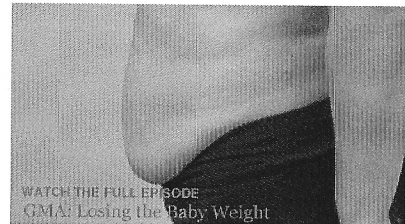


420 Day: Truths and Myths

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By ELLEN TUMPOSKY
April 20, 2011

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At 4:20 p.m. today—in whatever time zone they happen to be in—pot-smokers will be lighting up to celebrate an unofficial holiday whose origins are debated by stoners with time on their hands.

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Does 420 refer to a police code for illegal marijuana use? Is it a veiled allusion to the number of chemicals in cannabis? Or maybe it's teatime in Amsterdam, the global spiritual home of marijuana smokers. Don't forget that April 20 is Hitler's birthday, so that must have something to do with it.

And how do you spell this holiday anyway—420, 4-20, or 4/20?

Grammarians can debate the punctuation issue, but according to Dan Skye, executive editor of High Times magazine and an expert in all things weed, the true origins of 420 have been researched and are laid out in a Wikipedia entry largely composed by High Times savants. "People tried to create their own myth about this," he says, but adds: "The start of 420 is fairly clear at this point—the kids back at San Rafael High School."

He's referring to some teenagers who back in 1971 reportedly invented the term, referring to the time of day when they would meet to smoke under the school's statue of Louis Pasteur. Their password for the gathering was "420 Louis." The kids were known as the Waldos, maybe because there

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was a wall near the statue. The term went viral the way things went viral in the 1970s, gradually over years.

The Origins of 420

"Some of their parents were associated with the Grateful Dead," says Skye, and the term became common among Deadheads. Around 1990, High Times published the term and later it bought the web domain 420.com.

The mystique of 420 grew when the clocks in Quentin Tarantino's film "Pulp Fiction" were set at 4:20, a practice that Sophia Coppola paid homage to in her later movie "Lost in Translation."

"It's basically just a celebration of cannabis. It's mushroomed into our unofficial national holiday," says Skye.

Not everyone sees it that way. At the University of Colorado Boulder, where 420 gatherings draw up to 10,000 participants in the main quad, officials see 420 as a downer. "It's the biggest 420 celebration in the country, regrettably," says spokesman Bronson Hilliard. "Facebook and Twitter certainly fuel it."

The university sent students an email this week "outlining the safety, security and reputational issues for the institution that are at stake for this event," Hilliard said. "It doesn't really represent what our student experience is. This is an elite American public university. It's just a party in the sunshine."

Other big celebrations occur at college campuses around the country, in New York's Central Park and in Minneapolis. Some of the events focus on the drive to legalize medical marijuana, but the festivities are overwhelmingly recreational, says Skye. At High Times, he says, everyone's going to be working. "There's no pot smoking in this office. It's illegal!" he says.

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'Happy 420'? How Did Marijuana Holiday Get its Name?



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By LIZ HERON

April 20, 2010

Has someone wished you a Happy 420 today? It's probably not because he or she is celebrating Hitler's birthday, although he was born on April 20, or 4/20. More likely they're marking the counterculture holiday unofficially known as National Weed Day.

There are all sorts of rumors about how the term 420 came to be associated with lighting up a joint, but according to the myth-busting website Snopes.com, it was born in the 1970s at San Rafael High School in California, where about a dozen students gathered each day at 4:20 p.m. to smoke pot.



Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Attendees look at marijuana related... [View Full Caption](#)

Over the years, theories about the meaning of 420 have pointed to California's penal code section for marijuana use, the police radio code for smoking pot, and the best day to plant cannabis, according to Snopes.

Dozens of rallies around the country were planned today to call for the legalization of marijuana. The executive director of the pro-pot organization NORML, Allen St. Pierre, is urging supporters to donate \$420 to support a ballot initiative in California that would effectively legalize cannabis.

The issue is gaining ground in the age of President Barack Obama, writes Ryan Grim, the author of "This Is Your Country on Drugs: The Secret History of Getting High in America." In a roundup of efforts across the nation to decriminalize marijuana, Grim says the "momentum is thanks to Obama's announcement that he would not raid shops or patients operating within state laws."