

Morning Mix

The strange story of how the pot holiday '4/20' got its name

By Terrence McCoy April 18, 2014

It's still days away, but the energy on college campuses across the nation is already palpable. It's pulsing on Facebook, too, where [420 Magazine](#) has netted 1.1 million likes, where a group called "[420 Girls](#)" is considered a "political organization," and where a page that has done nothing more than [post a picture of a clock showing 4:20](#) has nearly 40,000 followers.

In its many manifestations — as a date, as a time, as a state of mind — the term "4/20" has come to symbolize an entire marijuana movement. The numbers were a call to arms for activists pushing marijuana's legalization in Colorado and Washington. And right now, [according to the Associated Press](#), "thousands of people" are expected to arrive in Colorado and Washington this weekend to celebrate April 20 — the unofficial holiday for smoking weed.

"4/20 is the national stoner holiday, for lack of a better word," [Dan Skye](#), the editorial director of High Times Magazine, said last year. "It gets bigger every year, and this year, after the legalization votes, it's going to be absolutely huge."

But perhaps because recreational marijuana use is still illegal in most places, there's little explanation of why or how 4/20 came to be. For example, Mark Kleiman, Washington state's pot guru, has no idea how the holiday got its name, according to the [Daily Beast](#). [Neither does Warren Haynes](#), an Allman Brothers Band guitarist who sometime tours with surviving members of the marijuana-friendly Grateful Dead.

Some [think](#) "420" is the dispatch code for smoking pot. Others [think](#) there are 420 active ingredients in marijuana. Some even [hypothesize](#) "it has something to do with Hitler's birthday," which is April 20.

So where does 4/20 come from?

According to the [Huffington Post](#), which [took a deep dive](#) on the issue, and [High Times](#), the authority on all

things weed, the tale of 4/20 winds back to the year 1971 and a group of high schoolers nicknamed the “Waldos.” The kids, pot smokers all, attended [San Rafael High School](#) in Northern California, and heard rumor of a wild patch of herb somewhere nearby for the taking.

Every day, the kids would meet at the Louis Pasteur statue outside their school to embark on a fresh search for the weed trove. “We would remind each other in the hallways that we were going to meet at 4:20 p.m. at Louie,” one of the Waldos [told the Daily Beast](#). “We’d smile and kind of salute each other saying, ‘Remember, 4:20 Louie.’ We kept that for weeks.”

Eventually “4:20 Louie” just became “4:20.” Then — incredible but true — the Grateful Dead [moved to town](#). The Waldos fell in with a crowd of managers working with the band, members of which eventually heard the term “4:20” and loved it.

Soon there were “4:20” T-shirts and flyers. [One of those flyers](#) eventually found its way into the hands of Steve Bloom, then a reporter for High Times. According to his blog at [Celebstoner](#), it said this:

There’s something fantastic about getting ripped at 4:20, when you know your brothers and sisters all over the country and even the planet are lighting up and tokin’ up right along with you. Now there’s something even grander than getting baked at 4:20. We’re talking about the day of celebration, the real time to get high, the grand master of all holidays: 4/20, or April 20th.

In a 1991 issue of High Times, he published the flyer and introduced a national audience to 4/20. The magazine [called it](#) “the grandmaster of all holidays: 4/20, or April 20th.”

The holiday caught fire. Clocks in “Pulp Fiction” [were set to 4:20](#), High Times [launched 420.com](#) and a new holiday — albeit an unofficial one — was born.

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