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Kara Ware ([00:00](#)):

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Kara Ware ([00:34](#)):

Nathan, you've got that new season glow about you. Are you excited?

Nathan Morris ([00:39](#)):

Oh yeah, Kara. I'm not pregnant, so it must be the new season. That's where the glow's coming from. This season is going to kick some major butt. It's time to break down the merits, the mysteries, and misunderstandings of cannabis so that you-

Kara Ware ([00:53](#)):

Wait, wait, wait. Nathan, cannabis? That can be a kind of tricky thing to talk about, don't you think? There are a lot of complicated feelings towards this plant, even in medical communities.

Nathan Morris ([01:04](#)):

Yeah, Kara, that's what's been amazing about this season, and how naive we were when we started. Little did we know how tricky this topic was going to be, and seeing a lot of strong opinions for and against cannabis, especially in medical communities. But, Kara, what are the facts, and where do these strong polarizing opinions come from?

Kara Ware ([01:25](#)):

Exactly. Exactly, Nathan. Let's start from the beginning. In today's episode, we'll take a look at the complicated history of cannabis in America, talk to a drug historian and an endo cannabinologist, and discover whether our longstanding prejudice towards cannabis is based on fact or fiction.

Kara Ware ([01:51](#)):

Hello and welcome. I'm Kara Ware, a National Board Certified Health Coach and Business Advisor.

Nathan Morris ([01:59](#)):

And I'm Nathan Morris, a medical doctor also certified in functional medicine.

Kara Ware ([02:02](#)):

Cannabis sativa is a plant with a long history of medical and religious use. Recorded use of cannabis dates back roughly three to 4,000 years in ancient China, Egypt and Greece. More recently, in the United States, cannabis tinctures were also pretty common.

Dr. Janice Knox ([02:22](#)):

You get into the 1800s, where it's commonly used by everybody, men, women, and children. No one smoked it at that time. They're all tinctures. And 50% of medicines used contained cannabis, both prescriptive and over the counter. And in 1850, that's when it made it to the American Pharmacopia.

And some of our well known pharmaceutical companies like Eli Lilly, back then Parke Davis, which is today's Pfizer, they were the main manufacturers of cannabis concoctions.

Nathan Morris ([02:56](#)):

That's Dr. Janice Knox, a Board Certified Anesthesiologist, Cannabinoid Medicine Specialist, and Clinical Endocannabinologist. Say that three times fast, Kara. Endocannabinologist. There we go. You can find a link to her website in our show notes.

Nathan Morris ([03:12](#)):

In the late 1800s, therapeutic cannabis tinctures were pretty easy to find for the average American. Who knows if they were actually helping, or what else was in the tincture, as it really was a wild time for medicine. But generally speaking, cannabis was well respected by the medical community.

Kara Ware ([03:27](#)):

For better or for worse, all that soon changed because of one man, Harry Anslinger.

Nathan Morris ([03:35](#)):

Dum, dum, dum. That just sounds ominous. Harry Anslinger. Kind of like, Luke, I'm your father moment.

Kara Ware ([03:50](#)):

In a small town in rural Pennsylvania, Harry Anslinger is born into an immigrant family. After working on the railroad, he launches his career as a US Consul stationed in Nassau in the British Bahamas, where he tackles the problem of rum smugglers.

Kara Ware ([04:07](#)):

Anslinger begins to thrive. During the prohibition era, he regulates heroin and opium, and even stockpiles morphine that would later save thousands of lives in World War II. By 1930, he's appointed Director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, a precursor to today's DEA. Anslinger is appointed to this position by his uncle in-law and the Secretary of Treasury, Andrew Mellon.

Nathan Morris ([04:36](#)):

Nothing like nepotism, Kara. In merely a decade, he goes from a railroad worker to one of the most powerful and respected men in charge of a new federal bureau.

Kara Ware ([04:46](#)):

Right, right. The prohibition of alcohol bolstered Anslinger's career. But as it comes to an end, he worries for his position in the future of his department.

Nathan Morris ([04:56](#)):

Drug historian, Emily Dufton, who the Boston Globe calls, "an oracle of all things marijuana," says this about Anslinger.

Emily Dufton ([05:03](#)):

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And he is doing really great until prohibition's revoked and repealed in 1933. And he has to justify the continuance of his office. He's now kind of the head of it. And so, he determines that other drugs will be a great way to institutionalize the power of his office, and turn a drug war into a permanent expense of the Federal budget. And he does that by targeting anything he can. And he is getting a boatload of these reports from Southwest cities and New Orleans saying, "We have this problem with this drug and this is terrible."

Nathan Morris ([05:43](#)):

Interesting. What could this drug be, Kara?

Kara Ware ([05:43](#)):

Right. I think you could probably guess, but we'll find out right after this.

Kara Ware ([05:55](#)):

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Nathan Morris ([06:34](#)):

It's cannabis, Kara. Isn't it?

Kara Ware ([06:37](#)):

You're so on it today, Nathan? Yes. The drug that Anslinger hears rumors of is cannabis. The Mexican Revolution in 1910, causes a flood of Mexican immigrants into the Southern states. And with them, the practice of smoking cannabis recreationally.

Emily Dufton ([06:58](#)):

This practice of using marijuana as a recreational substance, not as a medicine, but as a recreational substance, is coming and it's coming through acts of migrancy. People coming from other areas. And these local laws start getting past because, hmm, let's see. A new drug is being used by minority populations, always pretty much results in anti-drug laws. So, these intensely punitive and intensely racist laws first start being passed in the jurisdictions most affected by these early days of marijuana trafficking.

Kara Ware ([07:34](#)):

Despite the existing use of cannabis and therapeutic tinctures, it becomes closely associated with Mexican immigrants. Did white Americans understand that their cannabis tinctures contain the same plant that Mexican immigrants were smoking?

Nathan Morris ([07:50](#)):

Well, fear and racism toward these non-white groups is exacerbated by the Great Depression in the early 1930s. And Anslinger finally sees an answer to his shrinking position, marijuana, local fear, and non-white immigrants. Emily Dufton explains it like this.

Emily Dufton ([08:07](#)):

He's like, well, I'll focus on that instead. So, marijuana and this intensely virulent punitive stance against it, I would say, was institutionalized by Anslinger, but has absolute local origins. I always like to say that the drug war was racist before Anslinger, and it was racist after Anslinger. He was just the one to kind of turn it into a federal legislative agenda item.

Kara Ware ([08:33](#)):

With his crosshairs on cannabis, Anslinger has a new problem. Public concern for cannabis was largely limited to border towns and ports. And in order to justify his job and the entire department, Anslinger needed the fear around cannabis to go national. So, Anslinger is collecting, creating, and broadcasting anti-cannabis propaganda using sensational newspapers and film across the nation to warn against the encroaching marijuana menace. Here's drug historian, Emily Dufton, again.

Emily Dufton ([09:08](#)):

A lot of the stories that he would tell and broadcast to congressional hearings and to newspaper reporters was stuff that his staff had compiled. He called it his gore file. Isn't that lovely? Where he would keep all the clippings from other newspapers across the country of, let's see, I think a very famous one was a teenage boy of Mexican heritage who had chopped up his family with an ax. He was an ax murderer and he had gone crazy, because he had smoked marijuana. Isn't this dangerous drug terrible? Anslinger would have these articles collected, and he would hold onto them and then promote what he had found.

Nathan Morris ([09:48](#)):

And that's another thing. While the medical community uses the term cannabis to describe the plant, he uses marijuana for his stories, the Spanish word used by Mexican immigrants smoking marijuana recreationally. Anslinger's position was, quote, "All Mexicans are crazy and marijuana is what makes them crazy." End quote. Using the term marijuana made the plant sound foreign and threatening to American values. In doing so, he transformed the medicinal plant into dirty drug in the minds of white America, a legacy that still lingers on today.

Kara Ware ([10:21](#)):

Right. But Anslinger is just getting started. Now that he has convinced the general public that cannabis is harmful. Next, he'll need to convince the government.

Nathan Morris ([10:31](#)):

Anslinger is determined to enact a federal level mandate on cannabis, and takes his fight all the way to the top. With the support of prominent figures, such as Carnegie, Mellon, and DuPont, Anslinger drafts a piece of legislation called, The Marijuana Tax Act, to Congress in 1937.

Kara Ware ([10:47](#)):

This act includes penalty and enforcement provisions to which marijuana, cannabis, or hemp handlers were subject. It also as physicians and pharmacists to complete heavy paperwork, register with the Federal Government's IRS, and pay a tax. Violation of these procedures could result in a fine up to \$2,000 and five years imprisonment.

Nathan Morris ([11:12](#)):

Though the act does not criminalize cannabis per se, it heavily controls and surveils it, as well as those who grow and administer the plant. Under the act, the taxes on cannabis become more expensive than the drug itself.

Kara Ware ([11:27](#)):

Right. And in creating the bill, Anslinger again uses the Mexican word marijuana instead of the name used by the medical field, which is cannabis. He also interviews 30 doctors until he finds one that would testify before Congress, a Temple University pharmacologist who is happy to claim that marijuana use leads to murder.

Nathan Morris ([11:53](#)):

In the congressional hearing, Anslinger's expert takes a stand and gives a shocking testimony under oath. He says that when he got high, marijuana turned him into a bat and he flew down a 200 foot deep inkwell.

Kara Ware ([12:07](#)):

Right, right. And Congress listened to that.

Nathan Morris ([12:10](#)):

Yep. Man got some bad weed, and then everyone becomes a bat and starts heading down inkwells. Okay. That's great logic.

Nathan Morris ([12:22](#)):

To oppose the Marijuana Tax Act, the American Medical Association, or AMA, sends their legal counsel, William C. Woodward to testify before Congress.

Kara Ware ([12:31](#)):

Due to Anslinger using the word marijuana, the AMA only realized a day before this congressional hearing that the Act is talking about cannabis. The AMA's legal representative, Williams C Woodward, is a physician, attorney, educator, and public health advocate with a distinguished career spanning 50 years. At the time, he is the Director of the Bureau of Legal Medicine and Legislation. Woodward believes that cannabis should be regulated, however, he and the AMA opposed the Marijuana Tax Act, especially the propaganda that it causes violence.

Nathan Morris ([13:11](#)):

Before Congress, Woodward says that, "There is no evidence of excessive use or prescribing of cannabis by doctors or pharmacists." Number two, "The plant has so much untapped potential, but this Act would prevent us from further studying cannabis and finding out all of its medicinal uses." And number three, "The tax itself would only punish farmers, the sick, and those trying to help them."

Kara Ware ([13:34](#)):

During the hearing, Congress tells Woodward that marijuana is a habit that is spreading, particularly amongst youngsters. Congress says, "We learn that from the pages of the newspapers, the number of

victims is increasing each year." And Dr. Woodward replies, "There is no evidence of that." Because after all, he is an attorney and a doctor.

Nathan Morris ([13:57](#)):

And a doctor. And 50 years of experience. We know Congress always gets it right though, so what does he know?

Nathan Morris ([14:05](#)):

Anslinger wilted yellow journalism so effectively in his propaganda campaign that Congress continues to reference their misinformation in the hearing. Fed up, Woodward, who is an attorney as mentioned, and did his homework, finally sets the record straight. Here's a piece from his congressional testimony response to Anslinger's claims of violence and murder.

Nathan Morris ([14:26](#)):

We are referred to newspaper publications concerning the prevalence of marijuana addiction. We are told that the use of marijuana causes crime, but yet no one has been produced from the Bureau of Prisons to show the number of prisoners who have been found addicted to the marijuana habit. And an informed inquiry shows that the Bureau of Prisons has no evidence on that point.

Nathan Morris ([14:47](#)):

You have been told that school children are great users of marijuana cigarettes. No one has been summoned from the Children's Bureau to show the nature and extent of the habit among children. Inquiry of the Children's Bureau shows that they have had no occasion to investigate it and know nothing particularly of it.

Nathan Morris ([15:03](#)):

Inquiry of the Office of Education, and they certainly should know something of the prevalence of the habit amongst school children of the country, if there is a prevalent habit, indicates that they have had no occasion to investigate and know nothing of it.

Nathan Morris ([15:17](#)):

Moreover, there is the Treasury Department itself, the Public Health Service, with its Division of Mental Hygiene, and no one has been summoned from that Bureau to give evidence on that point.

Kara Ware ([15:29](#)):

As Woodward points out in a statement, even the Federal Government agencies report nothing about any addictions, violence, or deaths caused by cannabis. The only evidence they have against the plant comes from Anslinger and his sensational news. And that oddly biased bad doctor.

Nathan Morris ([15:50](#)):

On one side, we have Woodward's testimony that points out an utter lack of evidence proving marijuana causes madness. He is backed by the AMA who believe in State regulation, but not punishment for the sick and those who try to help them with a hefty tax, paperwork, and fines. On the other side, we have Anslinger, a man with no medical background, but he is backed by the entire country's media, local fears, and xenophobia.

Kara Ware ([16:14](#)):

So, Congress passes the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937. The plant and all its potential medicinal practices were now behind proverbial locked doors, where it still largely remains to this day.

Nathan Morris ([16:31](#)):

Interestingly, some push back on this decision. In 1940, Fiorella La Guardia, the Mayor of New York City, investigates cannabis on his own terms. Janice Knox tells us his story.

Dr. Janice Knox ([16:44](#)):

He did a report using the New York Medical Society to try to refute some of these allegations by Anslinger, that it was dangerous. It caused crime and rape and murder from the blacks and Hispanics. And of course, those awful jazz musicians. His report came back to say, that wasn't true and that it should be allowed to be used.

Kara Ware ([17:05](#)):

The report ran 220 pages and La Guardia's own forward summarized the results.

Kara Ware ([17:13](#)):

I am glad that the sociological, physiological, and medical ills commonly attributed to marijuana have been found to be exaggerated, in so far as the City of New York is concerned. I hasten to point out, however, that the findings are to be interpreted only as a reassuring report of progress, and not as encouragement to indulgence.

Kara Ware ([17:41](#)):

While he may have convinced the government, he still did not have the medical community on his side. In order for his department to still be allowed to regulate and control cannabis, this could not continue.

Nathan Morris ([17:55](#)):

Later, when explaining or defending his policies, Anslinger said, "The best cure for addiction, never let it happen."

Nathan Morris ([18:03](#)):

In only a few years, he erased thousands of years of history and hindered any future medical research. This was effectively the end of cannabis as a medical intervention. But as we know, it continued to be used recreationally.

Kara Ware ([18:17](#)):

So in conclusion, the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, was a major tipping point. Cannabis went from a commonly used medicinal intervention to being synonymous with murder and violence. Anslinger's campaign against cannabis was born from the need to maintain his department after the prohibition of alcohol ended. And he succeeded, despite pushback from the American Medical Association and the New York Medical Society. The Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, effectively ended the use of medicinal cannabis, and prevented us from researching it for over six decades.

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Kara Ware ([19:04](#)):

So to answer the question we posed at the beginning of today's episode, our long standing prejudice towards cannabis starts here in the 1930s, and had nothing to do with science. The actions of Anslinger are continuing to affect our perception, access, and research of cannabis today.

Nathan Morris ([19:27](#)):

In episode two, we'll take a look at the 1960s, where smoking marijuana became a symbol of youth, freedom, and the counterculture movement. We'll see how figures like Nixon took Anslinger's agenda and pushed it even further, with the war on drugs, mass incarceration, and more.

Kara Ware ([19:44](#)):

Thank you for listening as Nathan and I re-imagined the functional medicine journey, as we explore how to include cannabis in our functional medicine toolbox. I would like to thank our writing team, Kelsey Stafstrom, Paul Larkin, and [Isabel Manjo 00:19:58], and our audio engineer, [Isadore Neavaz 00:20:01].

Kara Ware ([20:00](#)):

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