

Truth Addict

Drug War Critic

Mike Gray, author of *Drug Crazy: How We Got into This Mess and How We Can Get Out*, will be in Solana Beach on Sunday morning to discuss the War on Drugs. Three weeks ago he was doing the same thing in South Dakota. Besides lecturing around the country on behalf of Common Sense for Drug Policy, he writes for *Rolling Stone* about drug issues and has been involved in filmmaking since the 1960s. His script *The China Syndrome* was made into the 1979 film about an accident at a nuclear power plant. It was

released two weeks before the real-life

accident at Three Mile Island. "Turns out I know what I'm talking about," Gray says.

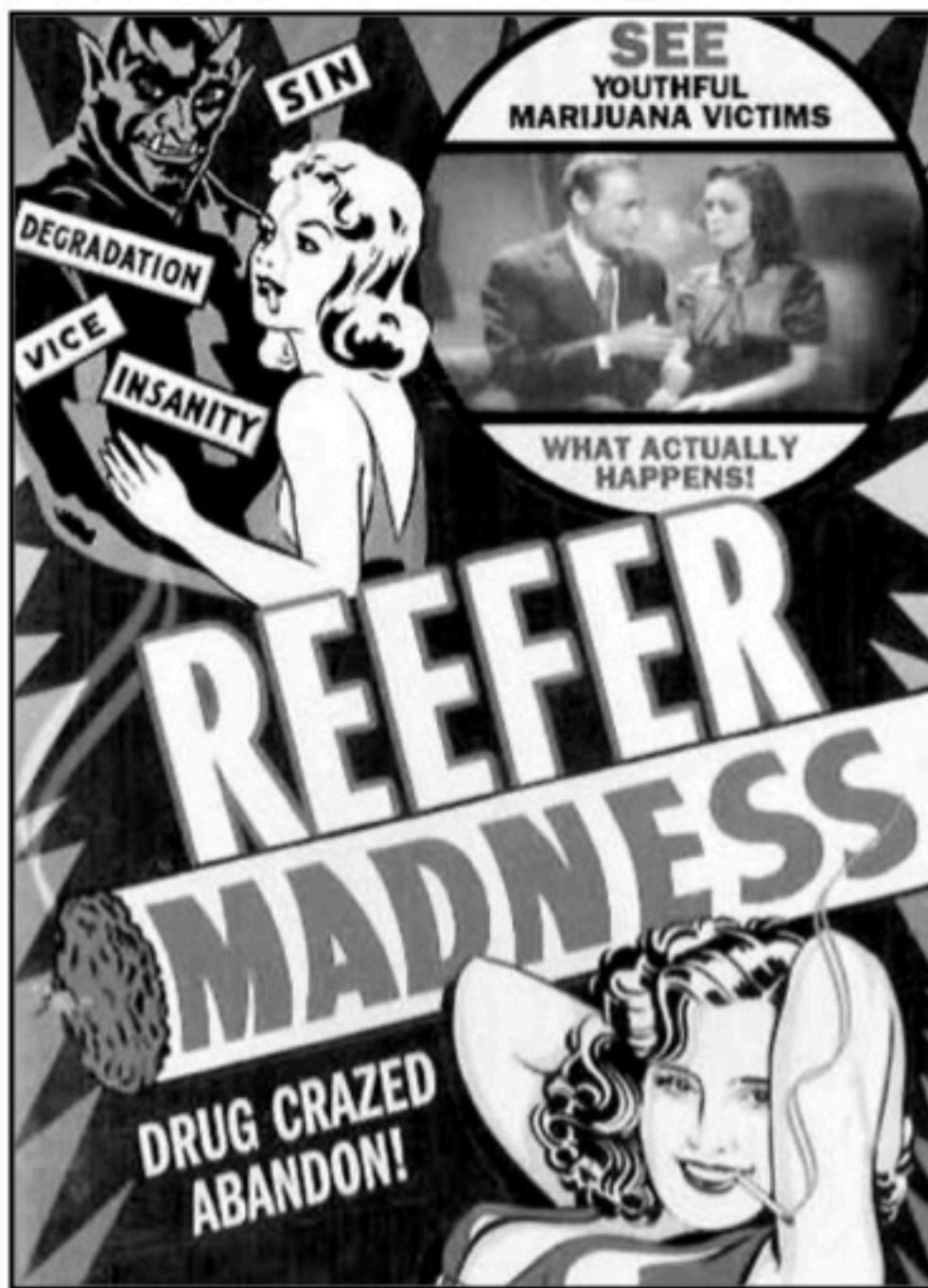
Gray was born 69 years ago in Racine, Wisconsin, but grew up in Darlington, Indiana. "At the time the population was about 800," he says by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "There were 14 in my graduating class." Was he number one? "No, number one became a lawyer, and a judge, and a Republican. But I passed him. He quit learning and I kept going."

Gray compares the failure of alcohol prohibition (1920-1933) with the failure of drug prohibition, which began with the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914. In his book he writes, "If drugs and alcohol are too freely available — or if they're prohibited — you increase consumption." On the phone he puts it like this: "If we got a roomful of NASA rocket scientists together and tried to figure out a way to get the most kids involved with drugs, we could not have come up with a better plan than the current situation." In one sentence, can he say what he thinks our drug policy should be? "We should treat marijuana the way we treat alcohol and medicalize the rest."

Medicalization means involving the pharmaceutical industry, which many perceive to be the new villain. "Well, we're much better off having these huge — and in some cases totally profit-motivated — drug companies in

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charge of the distribution of pharmaceuticals than we are the Mob." Merck is better than the Mob. Would that one sentence cover the issue? "Yes," Gray says, "and actually Merck is better."

Many of Gray's critics believe that new drug users would be created as a result of decriminalization, but it's not something that overly concerns Gray. "The truth is, there aren't that many people interested in being stoned all the time," he says, citing government statistics of 13 million addicts overall, with 10 million of them marijuana-only users.

"And if you can keep a serious drug addict alive until he's 40, chances are, he's going to resign from the addiction dodge, because he loses interest and energy. At some point, it becomes a drag."

Gray claims he has tried heroin once ("because I have tried every single drug in the illegal pharmacopoeia once — at least"). It's his way of saying that addiction doesn't necessarily follow experimentation. But he stops short of suggesting that some illegal drugs are good for us. In *Drug Crazy*, he tells the story of William Stewart Halstead (1852-1922), a surgical

pioneer who was apparently a high-functioning morphine addict. Gray is asked if he means to imply that the man accomplished all that he did because he used this drug — in measured doses. "The implication is that he couldn't have accomplished it without it," says Gray.

The last chapter of *Drug Crazy* is a 16-page "Prescription for Sanity," in which Gray advocates among other things the medical use of marijuana. On the phone he claims that 80 percent of those polled approve of the idea. "People are coming to their senses on this issue," he says. "It's probably the place to begin."

He acknowledges that the rest of what he proposes will be more difficult for a majority of Americans to accept. Is it because such a strong morality theme runs through the arguments of his critics — critics who, for example, disbelieve the mere five-percent cure rate he cites for addicts in *Drug Crazy* and who think that being cured is a matter of willpower? And what does he think of willpower, anyway?

"I think we should all have it, but I also think we should address the human beings who are actually on the planet, not the human beings we wish were on the planet. If this were an ideal world, we wouldn't have sin, or human frailty, or any need for stimulants. We'd be such wonderful people, we'd just sit around worshipping the face of God." Gray goes on: "Treating addicts as criminals has criminalized our society. 'What would Jesus do?' Would Jesus have assembled the world's largest prison population? It's like we've set our hair on fire and are trying to put it out with a hammer."

— Jeanne Schinto

Lecture by Mike Gray, author of *Drug Crazy: "War on Drugs"*
Sunday, August 22
10:00 a.m.
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Dieguito
1036 Solana Drive (off Lomas Santa Fe and Marine View)
Solana Beach
Free
Info: 858-755-9225

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