

Program Title	California High: The Great Marijuana Debate
Program Subject(s)	Marijuana; Drugs; Legislation; Social Problems
Year Produced	2015
Directed by	Barnaby O'Connor and Matthew O'Connor
Produced by	Matthew O'Connor
Distributed by	Ivy Film Productions
Reviewed by	Timothy Hackman, University of Maryland
Running Time	52 minutes
Color or B&W	Color
Awards Received	None
Audience Level	General Adult
Review	

In 1996, Californians voted in favor of Proposition 215, which legalized limited cultivation and possession of marijuana for medical use. Since that time, twenty-three other states and the District of Columbia have passed medical marijuana laws, and three states, Washington and Colorado in 2012 and Oregon in 2014, have legalized marijuana for recreational use as well. In 2016, Californians will likely have the chance to vote on a similar measure which, given California's size and cultural influence, could create a wave of legalization across the country. Allen St. Pierre, spokesperson for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), lays out the importance of the state for legalization advocates: "Strategically speaking, we are obsessed with California. If you can flip California, you can flip America, and the world, on cannabis."

*California High* provides an overview of the debate around marijuana legalization in the Golden State, beginning with the history of Proposition 215 and the current state of the medical marijuana industry. In television newsmagazine style, it presents interviews with representatives of various sides of the issue, beginning with NORML and the opposition, the Coalition for a Drug Free California (whose spokesperson bewilderingly brags that he "spent *ten years* working on [a] doctoral dissertation on drug cartels.") These talking heads generally say predictable things: the doctor who makes his living writing medical marijuana prescriptions is opposed to legalization, saying it would be "another defeat for small businesses;" the Sheriff of Humboldt County, three hundred miles north of San Francisco, talks about the difficulties of breaking up large growing operations in the rural areas his deputies patrol; the addiction and recovery therapist stands ready to help clients whether or not their drug of choice is legal. Two interviewees stand out, however. The first is Dr. Emanuel Epstein, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who pioneered solution culture (also known as hydroponics.) Intended to allow food production in areas where the soil is poor or thin, hydroponics in the United States is used extensively for the cultivation of marijuana, allowing plants to be grown to full size in weeks instead of months. The second is Robert DuPont, the White House drug chief under Presidents Nixon and Ford, who discusses the changes in drug policy and youth drug use he witnessed under those administrations. Other interview subjects include two founders of the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, the Humboldt County District Attorney, the director of the 420 Collective marijuana dispensary, and the president of the California Society of Addiction Medicine.

One major omission is any serious discussion of the economic effects of legalization. The issue is addressed superficially through the inclusion of Justin Hartfield, CEO of WeedMaps (slogan: "Find Your Bud!"), a website and app that allows users to locate marijuana dispensaries. More nuanced reporting on tax revenues in a state like Colorado, or on economic incentives for marijuana growers on both sides of the law, would have added a valuable layer to the debate.

In general, *California High* accomplishes its goal of providing a balanced look at a complex issue, even if it is unlikely to change any minds on either side of the debate. The accompanying website, [www.provsanti.com](http://www.provsanti.com), includes a poll currently showing 1,216 in favor of legalization and 1,123 opposed. The film is recommended for high school or college students as an introduction to the marijuana legalization battle, and could also be used as an example of how to research and write on such controversial issues.

Reviewer Rating      Recommended