

Weed on TV: Just Say ... Why Not?

A 4/20-INSPIRED LOOK AT THE EVOLUTION OF POT AND PLOT

BY LESLIE JAYE GOFF

In HBO's season-two trailer for *Silicon Valley*, a hulking, Birkenstock-wearing computer programmer grabs an enormous bong and fires it up to the relentless strains of Danny Brown's "Smokin' & Drinkin'."

The series, which returned April 12, is but one of many premium, basic-cable and broadcast shows in which weed plays into the story line in one form or another. In Comedy Central's *Broad City* and *Workaholics*; Showtime's *Episodes*; IFC's *Maron*; and even A&E's *Bates Motel*, where the local town is run by a weed cartel, getting high is just something people do. On a fairly regular basis. And the act is not just implied or covered by a jump-cut to the after-effects; characters are casually toking away on screen.

With 23 states and Washington, D.C., having legalized marijuana in one form or another, TV programming has gone to pot as well. Since the earliest references to weed in scripted TV shows to today, pot-related story lines have evolved from "Protagonist smokes weed — with disastrous results" to "with nostalgic results" to "with comic results" to, essentially, just "Protagonist smokes pot." It's tangential to the results.

Is TV merely reflecting the nation's changing attitudes about pot or are we a nation under TV's influence? In an effort to answer this 4:20-inspired question — that being the legendary time of day stoners would gather after school to get high, making the date April 20 a totem on the stoner calendar — *Multichannel News* presents this "4/20 Timeline" looking at the concurrent evolution of pot and plot.

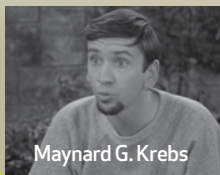


HBO's season two *Silicon Valley* trailer, with its prominent bong, epitomized the evolution of pot and plot on TV.

POT ON TV

1955: Seven years into the first Golden Age of Television (1948-60), programming is far from going to pot ...

1959: Two years after Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation become household names, series TV's first



Maynard G. Krebs

beatnik — Maynard G. Krebs, played by Bob Denver — emerges on 1959's *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*.

1963: TV viewers say goodbye to Krebs, who over four seasons evolved from a stereotypical beatnik to a proto-typical hippie, when *Dobie Gillis* goes off the air.

1967: In *Dragnet*'s "High Times" episode, two young pot smokers think weed is harmless — until they find their baby dead in the bathtub! While the outcome is decidedly slanted, the script also includes a vision: "In a couple of years," stoner dad predicts, "marijuana's gonna be just like liquor — packaged and taxed and sold right off the shelf."



Dragnet, 1967

1969: Hanna-Barbera's *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* premieres on CBS featuring Maynard Krebs-inspired Shaggy, an animated stoner never explicitly identified as a stoner.

1969: *HR Pufnstuff*,

with life-sized puppets and magical talking flute, premieres in ABC's Saturday morning lineup, prompting years of speculation about subversive drug references in the show, which series creator Marty Kroft denied.

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1973: *The Midnight Special* premieres on NBC, bringing

a post-counterculture vibe to late night on Fridays.

1975: *Saturday Night Live* premieres on NBC, bringing drug-infused humor to late-night TV (and giving stoners a good reason to stay in on the weekend).

1975: In primetime, viewers are having a love affair with cops like *Kojak*, *Columbo*, *Baretta*, *Starsky & Hutch* and *Barney Miller*.

1978: In the "Days of Beer and Weeds" episode of *Three's Company*, Chrissy

(Suzanne Somers) gives Mrs. Roper (Audra Lindley) some weeds to use in her flower-arranging class, not realizing they are pot plants. Hilarity ensues.

1983: Nancy Reagan appears in a preachy "very special episode" of NBC's *Diff'rent Strokes* in which Arnold (Gary Coleman), reporting for the school paper, uncovers kids dealing drugs on campus.

1988: Larry King, interviewing medical marijuana patient Robert Randall

1955

1955: Hemp farming is outlawed. More than 20 states have enacted harsh penalties for marijuana following passage of the Boggs Act in 1951, increasing federal penalties four-fold.

1957: The publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* makes using "tea" part of the conversation among intellectuals and would-be Beatniks.

1964: Bob Dylan gets the Beatles stoned for the first time in New York on Aug. 28. On returning home from the North American tour, the band writes and records

1960

Rubber Soul, released in 1965 and considered one of the top albums of all time.

1965: News coverage of the Vietnam War and the growing protest movement brings more attention to weed. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg convenes one of the first organized public protests against cannabis prohibition laws; hand-written signs around his neck read "Pot is a reality check" and "Pot is fun!"

1967: In San Francisco, the year starts off with a Human Be-In, billed as "a gathering of tribes," where Harvard

1965

professor Timothy Leary tells the crowd to "turn on, tune in and drop out."

1967: Subsequently, nearly 100,000 young people flock to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury over the next six months, leading to the iconic Summer of Love.

1969: President Richard Nixon establishes Operation Intercept to stop Mexican weed from entering the U.S.

1969: In August, 300,000 people attend the Woodstock Festival on Max Yasgur's farm in Bethel, N.Y.; *The New York Times* reported the crowd was "well-behaved," with only 75 ar-

1970

rests — "mostly on charges of possessing narcotics."

1969: The October issue of *Life* magazine features someone toking a joint on its cover, declares 12 million Americans have tried marijuana and poses the question, "Should it be legalized?"

1970: As part of the Controlled Substance Act, the Nixon Administration establishes the DEA and forms the Shafer Commission to review cannabis laws.

1970: Public-interest attorney R. Keith Stroup founds the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

1975

1970: The Yippies organize their first "smoke-in," drawing 25,000 to Washington, D.C., to counter President Nixon's Honor America Day festivities with the Rev. Billy Graham and Bob Hope.

1971: President Nixon's administration declares a "war on drugs," coining the phrase and sealing its use in American politics.

1972: President Nixon's Shafer Commission — officially the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse — recommends that weed be decriminalized. The administration rejects the advice.

1980

1973: Oregon is first state to decriminalize weed since the 1930s.

1974: Underground journalist Tom Forcade founds *High Times* magazine featuring a monthly bud centerfold; by 1977 it had a circulation rivaling *Rolling Stone's*.

1976: Glaucoma patient Robert Randall wins a landmark Supreme Court case, becoming the first medical marijuana patient since the 1937 Marijuana Tax Law was enacted.

1976: President Gerald Ford bans medical marijuana research.

POT CULTURE IN THE U.S.



Roseanne's "Stash From the Past" episode in 1993 showed the Connors rolling a joint, but not smoking it.



On IFC's *Maron*, comic Marc Maron's fictionalized family (actors Sally Kellerman, Judd Hirsch and Troy Ruptash) lights up together.

on CNN's *Larry King Live*, challenges Randall to demonstrate his unique right to inhale, which he does, on air.

1990: Primetime TV is an odd mix of '80s leftovers in their last seasons (*Alf*) and surreal premieres (David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* on ABC).

1992: In a live town hall meeting on MTV, Democratic candidate for president Bill Clinton tells the young audience he tried pot in college but didn't inhale.

1993: *Roseanne*'s "Stash From the Past" episode on ABC marks a turn from preachy to practical in how TV parents deal with pot when *Roseanne*, Dan and Jackie fire up an old bag of weed. Broadcast primetime shows the baggie with loose green herb and Roseanne rolling the joint, but does not show them smoking.

2000: In a subplot of the *Will and Grace* episode starring Cher, "Gypsies, Tramps and Weed," Grace (Debra Messing) discovers her new assistant is dealing pot

on the job. Cher made the headlines; pot did not.

2002 In *The Simpsons*'s "Weekend at Burnsies" episode, Homer, after using medical marijuana for his eyes, asks, "Could Jesus microwave a burrito so hot that he himself could not eat it?"

2005: Showtime premieres original series *Weeds*, starring Mary-Louise Parker as a widowed suburban mom who becomes a pot dealer; in a Season 2 (2006) episode, Snoop Dogg dubs her strain MILF

Weed. Over the next 10 years, premium and basic cable networks will develop a potpourri of weed-themed reality and scripted shows.

2007: Showtime premieres *Californication*, which over seven seasons took a liberal, cavalier attitude toward drug use in general and weed in particular.

2009: HBO premieres *Bored to Death*, starring Jonathan Ames as a would-be P.I. and Ted Danson and Zach Galifianakis as his friends who share a love of cannabis.

2010: The first medical marijuana TV ad, for a Sacramento, Calif., dispensary, runs on local Fox stations in the area, according to a *Time* magazine report on Sept. 1.

2011: Reality show *Weed Wars* premieres on Discovery Channel.

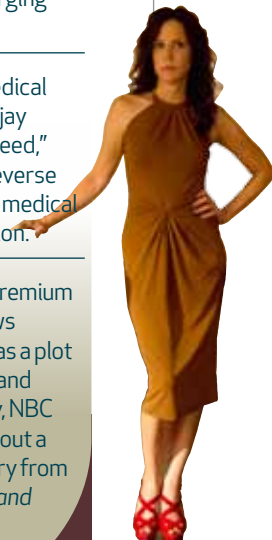
2012: Docu-series *American Weed* premieres on National Geographic Channel.

2012: The eighth and final season of *Weeds* finds Nancy Botwin and family

navigating the emerging marijuana industry.

2013: CNN chief medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta produces "Weed," prompting him to reverse his position against medical marijuana legalization.

2015: Basic-cable, premium and broadcast shows regularly use weed as a plot device in comedies and dramas. In February, NBC orders a comedy about a California dispensary from Adam Scott (*Parks and Recreation*).



1985

1977: In an Aug. 2 speech to Congress, President Jimmy Carter advocates accepting the recommendations of the Shafer Commission and calls for decriminalizing weed.

1980: Former California Gov. Ronald Reagan defeats President Carter; he would go on to tighten drug laws with the "three strikes, you're out" mandatory-sentencing rule.

1982: The term "drug czar" was introduced in the U.S. Senate.

1983: Nancy Reagan launches her "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign.

1990

1989: President George H. W. Bush asks the nation to join him in the War on Drugs, creates the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and appoints William Bennett as his first "drug czar."

1991: San Francisco is the first city to pass an ordinance in favor of medical marijuana; 79% of citizens vote yes.

1992: Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton is the first U.S. presidential candidate to acknowledge having used weed in the past.

1993: U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders causes an

1995

uproar when she suggests the legalization of drugs "should be studied."

1996: California voters pass Prop 215 enabling legal medical cannabis use, possession and cultivation. The first dispensary opens in 1997.

1997: Arizona voters pass medical marijuana legislation, but it is never implemented.

1998: Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Arizona (again) pass medical cannabis laws.

1999: Maine voters pass a medical marijuana initiative.

2000

2000: Voters in Nevada and Colorado approve medical marijuana initiatives while the Hawaii legislature passes medical cannabis legislation.

2002: In May, 200 pro-pot rallies calling for marijuana decriminalization take place as part of the Worldwide Million Marijuana March.

2004: Montana and Vermont OK medical marijuana.

2006-2010: Rhode Island, New Mexico, Michigan and Massachusetts join the states in which legislators, voters or both have approved medical marijuana initiatives.

2005

2006: The Food and Drug Administration declares it has found "no sound scientific studies" to support the medical benefits of marijuana.

2009: Calling it "counterproductive," ONDCP director Gil Kerlikowske signals the Obama administration will not use the phrase "war on drugs" in its policy approach.

2010: While 19 states have followed California's lead into legalizing medical marijuana, the state's voters reject Proposition 19, which would have allowed recreational use in the state.

2010-2015

2014: *The New York Times* runs a series of editorials reversing its previous position and calls for the decriminalization of marijuana.

2015: Washington, D.C., and 23 states have laws legalizing marijuana to some extent, including Alaska, Washington, Colorado, Oregon and D.C., which have legalized its recreational use.

2015: A survey by Pew Research in March find the majority of Americans — 53% — favor legalizing pot vs. 44% who are opposed, and 69% believe alcohol is more harmful than weed.