

REEFER MADNESS THE MUSICAL

A Guide to *Reefer Madness*

Book by Kevin Murphy & Dan Studney

Music by Dan Studney

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The Story of *Reefer Madness*

There is a new menace sweeping the nation, ready to ensnare and seduce the youth and drag them down into a life of sin: Reefer Madness!

Inspired by the 1936 propaganda film of the same name, this raucous musical comedy takes a tongue-in-cheek look at the hysteria caused when clean-cut kids, Jimmy and Mary Lane, fall prey to marijuana,

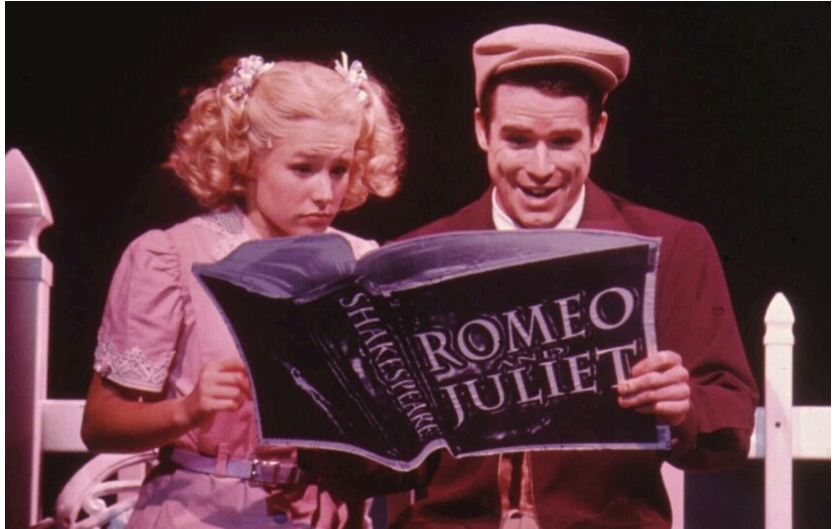
leading them on a delirious downward spiral filled with jazz music, sex and violence. Full of camp, hilarity, and mayhem—if you get high on laughter you have come to the right place!



Origins of the Musical

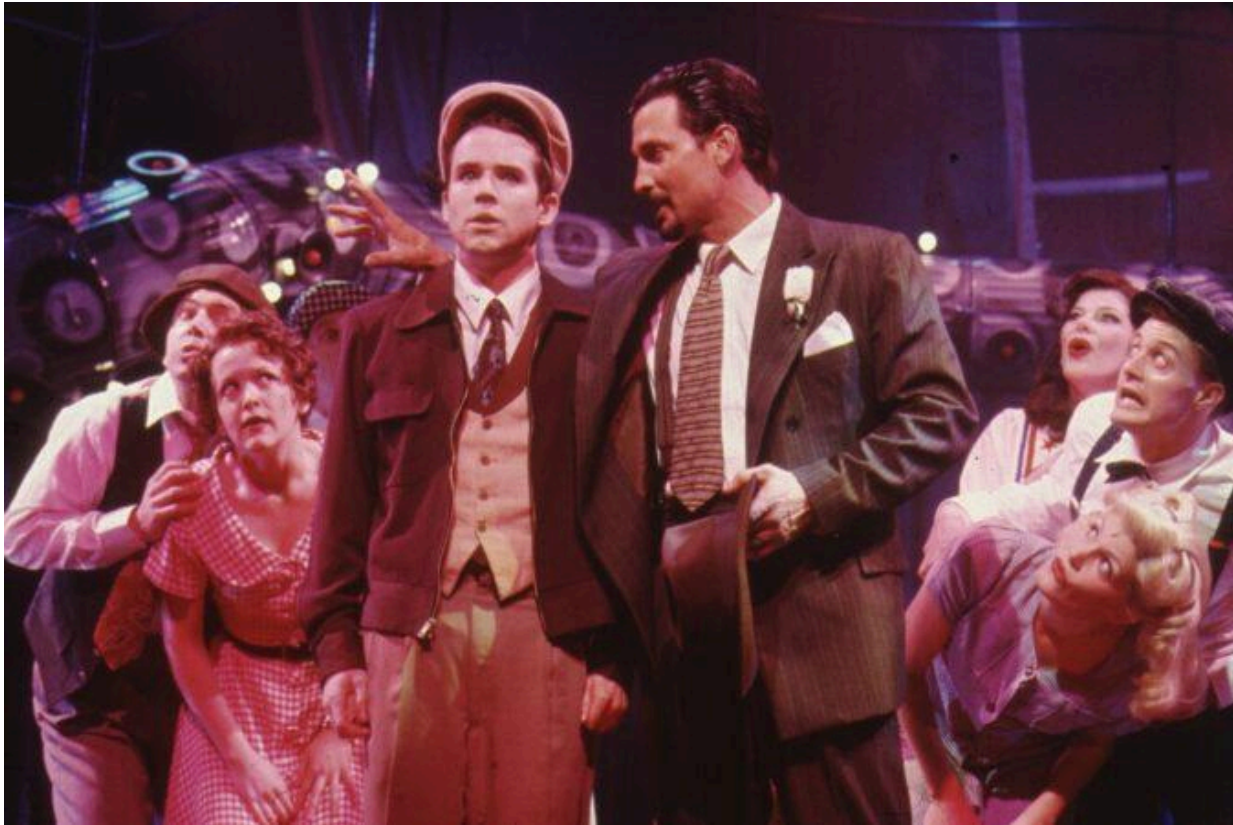
After meeting at Drew University in New Jersey, Kevin Murphy and Dan Studney were driving from Oakland to Los Angeles and listening to Frank Zappa's "Joe's Garage". Studney remembers, "So I started picturing it in my head,

Frank Zappa's concept of a musical and then it just hit me. I turned to Kevin and said 'What about doing *Reefer Madness* as a musical?'" . The pair began writing right away and already had a song completed by the time they finished their drive.



In 1998 the Original Los Angeles production of *Reefer Madness* played at The Hudson Theatre, directed by Andy Flickman. The Original production of the musical had Harry S. Murphy, Christian Campbell, Jolie Jenkins, Lori Alan, Robert Torti, John Kassir, Erin Matthews among the cast. The

production received five Ovation Award wins. The wins were Best Ensemble, Best Translation/Adaptation, Best Director, Best Costume Design in a Smaller Theatre, and Best Musical in a Smaller Theatre. *Reefer Madness* also received seven L.A. Drama Critics Circle Awards. These included Choreography, Musical Score, outstanding production (a tie with a production of *The Cherry Orchard*), and Lead Performance- Christian Campbell.



An Off-Broadway production of *Reefer Madness* played at The Variety Arts Theatre from September 15 to October 28th, 2001. The cast included Christian Campbell, Kristen Bell, Gregg Edelman, Michele Pawk, Robert Torti, John Kassir, and Erin Matthews.

Other Notable Productions

The musical was performed in Canada by Hart House Theatre in 2006. There have also been notable productions in Sydney, Australia, and the UK. A Washington, D.C. production in 2008 won two Helen Hayes Awards, for outstanding Resident Production and directing.

A 2024 Revival of *Reefer Madness* was produced in Los Angeles by Alan Cumming, Christian Campbell, Kristen Bell, Andy Fickman, Olivio Campbell,

Dan Studney, and Kevin Murphy. It was directed and choreographed by Spencer Liff, and music directed by David Lamoureux. It ran from May 30th to October 6th, extending past its originally planned eight-week run.

Adjustments and Evolution

Through its several productions and evolution into a movie musical, songs and moments have been cut, changed, or added to create the final, currently licensable version of *Reefer Madness*.



“We Know Best”, sung by Jimmy’s parents, was cut shortly into the original Los Angeles production. “The Monkey Song” where Jimmy fought a monkey during his withdrawal, was removed and replaced with “The Brownie Song”. “Dead Old Man” was removed before creating the film version, and was replaced with the Emmy-winning “Mary Jane/Mary Lane”. “Lonely Pew” was written and added to the show during its original production. Numerous other songs were altered either temporarily or for all future productions. Some characters changed or went away entirely, and plot points changed, such as Ralph joining Jimmy for the Church break-in scene.

The Movie of the Musical



On April 16, 2005, a movie version of the musical was released through Showtime. The film starred Alan Cumming, Christian Campbell, Kristen Bell, Steven Weber, Ana Gasteyer, Amy Spanger, John Kassir, and Neve Campbell. *Reefer Madness: The Movie Musical* was directed by Andy Flickman and the screenplay was written by the musical's original writers, Kevin Murphy and Dan Studney.

The film was nominated for several primetime Emmys. Mary Ann Kellogg was nominated for Best Choreography, and Victoria Down and Joann Fowler were nominated for Outstanding Makeup for a Miniseries, Movie, or a Special (Non-Prosthetic). Dan Studney (music) and Kevin Murphy (lyrics) won an Emmy for



Outstanding Music and Lyrics for the song Mary Jane/Mary Lane. The song had been specially written for the film, and hadn't appeared in past productions, but is now a permanent part of the musical.

The high school in the film was named after the first Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics, Harry J. Anslinger, who is known as the Father of the Drug War.



The Original Reefer Madness Movie

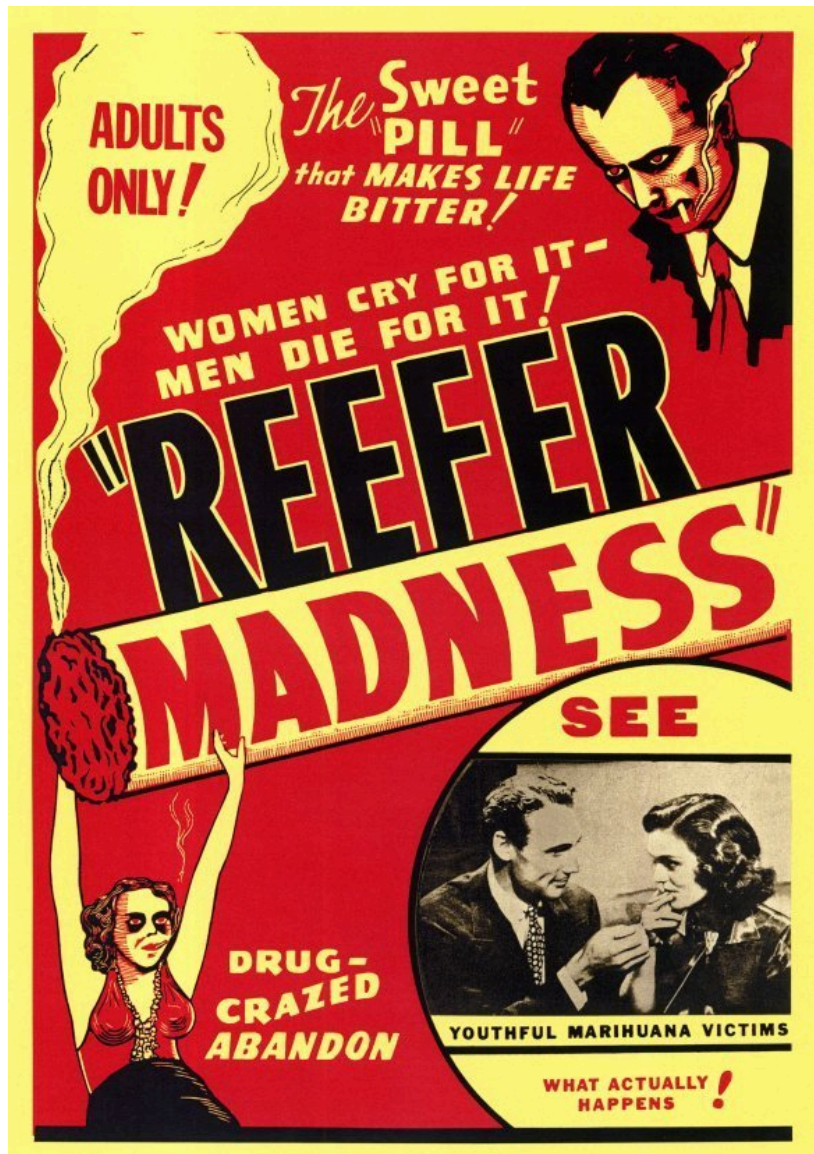
The 1936 film *Reefer Madness* is an American Exploitation film directed by Louis J. Gasnier. The film has had many names including *Tell Your Children*, *The Burning Question*, *Dope Addict*, *Doped Youth*, and *Love Madness*. The plot of the film follows clean cut high school students who get lured into trying Marijuana. They immediately become addicted and their lives devolve into trouble. They end up involved in a hit and run, commit murder, suffer hallucinations, and descend into madness.

The film was first called *Tell Your Children*, and was financed by a church group.

Dwain Esper, a known exploitation film producer, purchased and re-edited the film so it could be released on the exploitation film circuit. Despite being vulgar for its time, the film was able to use "moral guidance" as a reason to escape censorship.

Impact of the Movie

Only a year after the release of the film, The 1937 Marijuana Tax Act was passed. This act essentially criminalized marijuana through heavy taxation, strict regulations that were difficult to comply with, and reduced legal availability of cannabis. This led to a





massive decline in its growth and use for industry and medicine. While *Reefer Madness* was not alone responsible for this act, it is one of the anti-marijuana propaganda films that spread misinformation and contributed to the fear and negative views held by Americans of that time.

Reefer Madness has a 39% on Rotten Tomatoes, and a score of 70 out of 100 on Metacritic. The film now has a cult following, after becoming a popular but unintentional satire amongst people who are pro-cannabis. In particular, the film was a hit in the 1970s. The film had a budget of around \$100,000, which translates to 2.175 million dollars in the year 2024. Including its 1970 reissue, *Reefer Madness* has grossed about \$1,400,000.



About the Creators of the Musical

Kevin Murphy

Kevin was a producer of the original LA and NY productions of *Heathers* (Drama Desk nom for music). He also provided lyrics and co-wrote the book for the stage musical *Reefer Madness* and was a producer on both the original Los Angeles and Off-Broadway productions. *Reefer* swept the three major Los Angeles theatre awards which included triple wins for Best Musical and Best Score. In New York, Kevin's lyrics were nominated for a Drama Desk Award. Kevin co-adapted *Reefer* into a Showtime Original movie which premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival and screened in competition at the 2005 Deauville Film Festival, winning the Premiere Audience Award. The movie received three Emmy noms, winning for Outstanding Music & Lyrics. Kevin is currently showrunner for the AMC historical drama series *The Son* starring Pierce Brosnan. Other TV credits include *Desperate Housewives* (Golden Globe winner, two-time WGA Award nom, Emmy nom), *Defiance*, *Ed*, *Reaper*, *Caprica* and *Hellcats*. Kevin has co-written many songs for these shows, most recently "Across the Storm Divide" (recorded by Trace Adkins) and "Teach This Boy to Fly" (co-written with Laurence O'Keefe), both of which were featured on *Defiance*.



Dan Studney

As composer, Dan Studney won an Emmy Award for the movie version of *Reefer Madness*. For the original stage show, he received multiple Ovation, Garland and L.A. Drama Critics Circle awards as writer, producer and composer.

He works primarily in film and television, where his writing credits include *Jack the Giant Slayer*, *Weird Science* (TV), *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (TV), *Sabrina: The Animated Series*, Disney Channel movies *Genius* and *'Twas the Night*, and comic books for *The Simpsons*.



A Timeline of Marijuana in the United States

17th Century:

- The U.S. government encourages hemp production for rope, sails, and clothing.

Post-Civil War:

- Domestic hemp production declines as imports replace it.

Late 19th Century:

- Marijuana is used in many medicinal products and sold in pharmacies.

1906:

- The Pure Food and Drug Act now required labeling of any cannabis in over-the-counter medicines and products.

1910s:

- After the Mexican Revolution, immigrants brought the recreational use of marijuana to the U.S.
- Anti-drug campaigns warn of the “Marijuana Menace.”
- Anti-drug campaigners claim horrible crimes are linked to Marijuana and immigrants who use it.

Early 1930s:

- Public fear increased during the Great Depression, associating marijuana with Mexican immigrants.
- Harry J. Anslinger became the first Commissioner of the FBN (and continued in this position until 1962).
- By 1931, 29 states outlawed marijuana.

1936:

- Produced by French director, Louis Gasnier, the propaganda film, *Reefer Madness*, is released.

- The MPA (Motion Pictures Association of America), bans the showing of any narcotics in movies.

1937:

- Congress passes the Marijuana Tax Act, criminalizing marijuana.

1940s:

- 1944: The New York Academy of Medicine reports research that marijuana does not cause violence, sex crimes, other drug use, or addiction.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture launches “Hemp for Victory” to produce military gear, and incentivizes farmers to grow hemp. Offering seeds and draft deferments, the program resulted in 375,000 acres of hemp grown and harvested.

1950s:

- Mandatory sentences for drug-related offenses are enacted.
- First offense possession of Marijuana now resulted in a minimum sentence of 2-10 years with a fine of up to \$20,000.

1960s:

- Cultural shifts lead to more lenient attitudes toward marijuana.
- Reports under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson confirm marijuana does not lead to violence or heavier drug use.

1970s:

- 1970: Congress repeals most mandatory drug penalties.
- 1972: The Shafer Commission recommends decriminalization, but President Nixon rejects it.
- 11 states decriminalize marijuana.
- A parent-led anti-marijuana movement supports harsher laws.

1980s:

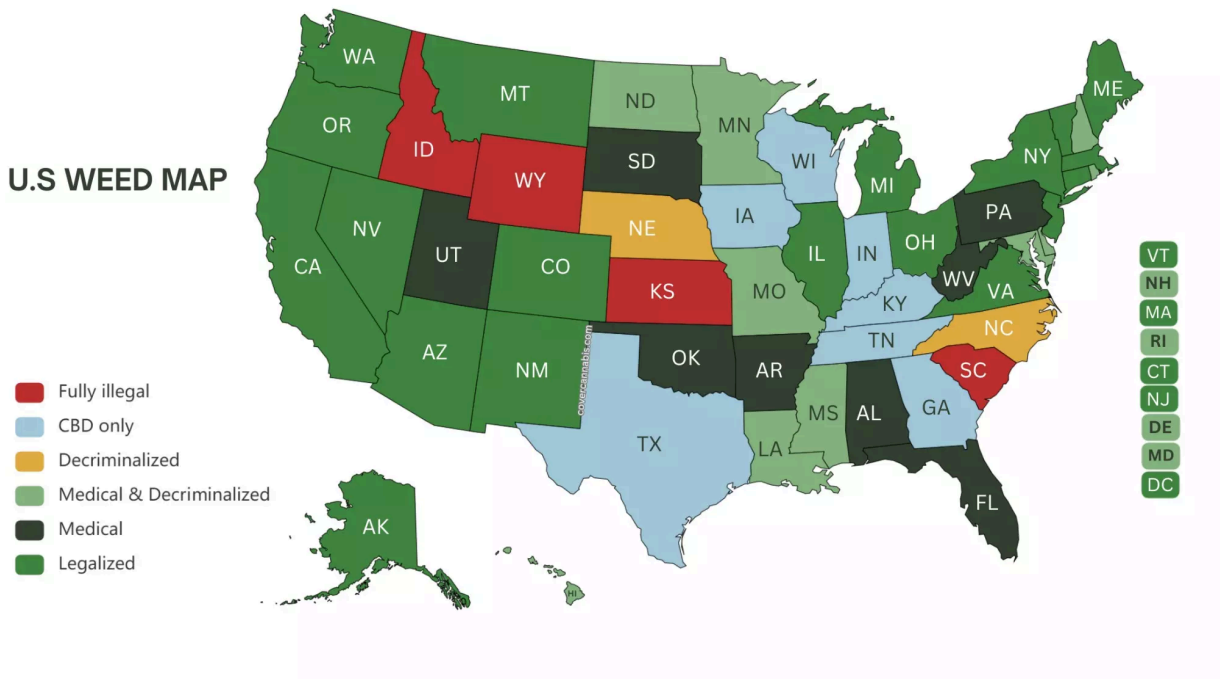
- President Reagan enacts mandatory sentences and the “three strikes” policy.
- The War on Drugs continues under President George Bush.

1996:

- California passed Proposition 215, legalizing medical marijuana, starting a conflict between federal and state laws.

2012:

- Colorado and Washington legalize recreational use of Marijuana for adults aged 21+.



Terminology for Marijuana

Cannabis

Time Period: Early 20th century to present

Origin: The scientific name for the plant, used in medical and legal contexts.



Marijuana

Time Period: Early 20th century to present

Origin: Derives from the Spanish word "mariguana"; popularized in the U.S. in the 1930s during anti-drug campaigns.

Mary Jane

Time Period: 1930s to present

Origin: Deriving from the Spanish "marihuana", the translation of "Maria" and "Juana" is Mary Jane.

Pot

Time Period: 1930s to present

Origin: Likely derived from "potaguaya," a Mexican term referring to marijuana. Became popular during the 1960s counterculture.

Weed

Time Period: 1970s to present

Origin: A slang term referring to any unwanted plant; adopted for marijuana due to its illegal status.

Ganja

Time Period: 1970s to present

Origin: A term from Hindi and Sanskrit, popularized in the U.S. through reggae culture and Rastafarianism.

Grass

Time Period: 1960s to 1980s

Origin: Referring to the plant's appearance, popularized during the counterculture movement.



Bud

Time Period: 1990s to present

Origin: Refers specifically to the flowering part of the marijuana plant; became popular with the rise of cannabis culture.

Herb

Time Period: 1980s to present

Origin: Used to describe marijuana in a more natural, holistic context, emphasizing its plant-based nature.

Dope

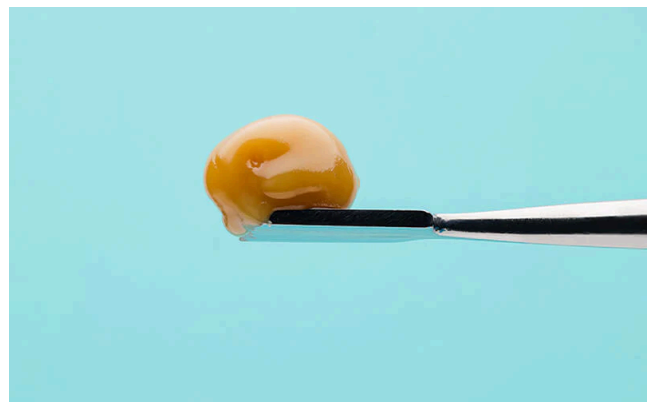
Time Period: 1920s to present

Origin: Originally referred to any drug; by the 1960s, it became more closely associated with marijuana.

Dab

Time Period: 2010s to present

Origin: Refers to a concentrated form of cannabis (hash oil); that became popular with the rise of concentrate consumption.



Chronic

Time Period: 1990s to present

Origin: Initially referred to as high-quality marijuana; it gained popularity in hip-hop culture.

420

Time Period: 1970s to present

Origin: A code term used by a group of high school students in California for smoking marijuana; has since become a cultural symbol.

Skunk

Time Period: 1980s to present

Origin: Originally referred to a specific, potent strain of cannabis; now used more generally for strong marijuana.



Discussion Questions

Before the Show

- ★ How many terms for Marijuana can you think of? Do you know their origins?
- ★ When you were growing up, what was the perception of marijuana in your community? How was that attitude different from past generations?
- ★ What do you know about Marijuana? What things have you heard about it that you know are false?
- ★ What do you know about propaganda?
- ★ What are your views on Marijuana? What, if anything, would change your views?

After the Show

- ★ Which song in the show was your favorite? Why did you like that one?
- ★ Which character did you find the most likable? Which character was the most interesting or surprising?
- ★ What plot point was the most surprising to you? Which scene was the funniest?
- ★ Have you seen the original film that this musical was referencing? How did it compare to this story? Which characters were the same? Which plot points changed?
- ★ What do you think was the point or message of this musical?

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