

## Book Reviews

***Too high to fail: Cannabis and the new green economic revolution.* By Doug Fine. 2012.**  
New York: Gotham Books. 319 pp. Hardcover \$28.00 list. ISBN: 978-1-592-40709-5

**By Maia Ryan**

*Too High to Fail* is a book written by Doug Fine offering first-hand narration of his experiences living and researching the role cannabis plays in Mendocino County, California. Fine follows one particular cannabis plant named “Lucille” through the entire growth, harvest and distribution process; starting from the genetic lab and ending with a patient (legally recommended medicinal marijuana in the state of California). Throughout his journey, Fine comes in contact with various “players” involved in the cultivation and preservation of the county’s cannabis economy including farmers, county law enforcement, dispensary owners, cannabis co-op business owners, and patients who find the drug useful for their medical needs. The author specifically focuses on a working model of cannabis legalization and regulation—Mendocino County’s 9.31 permit program, which allows farmers to grow up to 99 medicinal cannabis plants through a zip-tie regulation system. This medical marijuana-based program allows cannabis distribution to patients with clinical referrals.

The book makes a few major claims. To begin, Fine explores how the U.S. economy would largely benefit from the taxation of cannabis. Our national debt could decrease significantly if all of the businesses and buyers involved in the cannabis trade were required to pay taxes for a variety of products made from the plant. The author aims to show the futility of the federal classification of cannabis as a Schedule I drug, when research has shown it to have legitimate healing properties. Even considering the potential benefits of hemp as a nutritional supplement, hardy building material as well as an alternative fuel resource emphasizes the absurdity of denying that cannabis has any characteristics that yield productive utility, as the Controlled Substances Act implies.

Secondly, Fine posits that legalizing the drug on a federal level is the best way to regulate it because cannabis is not going to disappear. The plant has been widely used in human societies for centuries, at the least. In fact, it is getting more widely used, so much so that more than half of Americans favor legalization (p. XXII). He addresses the massive amount of federal funds that are being wasted in the “Drug War” and how this strategy is failing to decrease the cultivation and/or distribution of the drug, not to mention the violence surrounding the black market culture. Fine claims that lives are being ruined for confusing State vs. Federal policies that sentence some people to jail, often by a matter of chance (or profiling), for the possession, cultivation, and use of a seemingly harmless plant.

These major claims are then reiterated incessantly throughout the rest of the text and then loosely corroborated with opinions and quotes derived either from the scattered thoughts of the author or other pro-cannabis supporters. Sometimes the author references perceivably hard facts, however, the sources are scant and must be further researched since the book does

not offer a formal bibliography. There are also footnotes in the text, but they do not represent scholarly citations. The book is meant to be a comedic, yet serious account of the interactions the author has within the “redneck hippie” world of the marijuana industry in Mendocino County. He defines the cannabis-focused capitalistic endeavor as a “ganjapreneur mindset,” or in other words, combining advocacy with ambition and having a good time all the while (p. 58). It seems that the author himself took this approach in writing the book because the tone largely reads as an opinion piece embellished with instances of rhetorical partisan repartee. The major issues he raises concerning the positive aspects of cannabis are poignant, however the execution of a deeper analysis is needed for more established credibility concerning marijuana research.

The author briefly mentions in the section of the book entitled, “Introductory Position Paper,” that there are also negative consequences concerning cannabis, yet a comprehensive critique of those disadvantages is relatively limited (p. XXXI). Adding substantial content addressing the drawbacks of cannabis would strengthen the book by providing a full examination of the drug and pointing to potentially important research needs. Academically speaking, a chapter or two from the book might be useful for college students in an introductory progressive debate class, provided that they are trendy enough to understand the author’s eclectic lingo. However, this book makes a valuable effort in illustrating a county model for cannabis legalization and regulation that could inform nation-wide policy and practice.