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Rifkin, Danny, and Harry Shearer

## People: A Statement by the Grateful Dead

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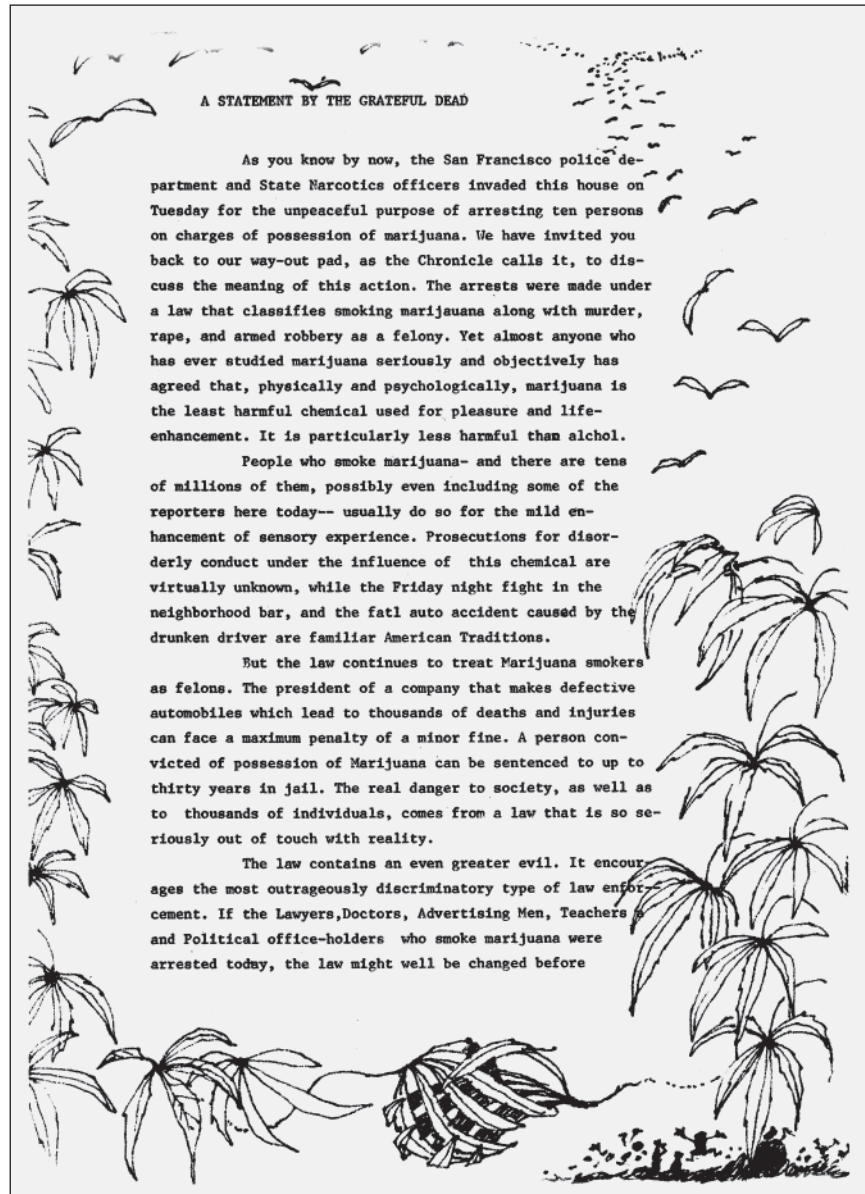


Figure 1. The first page of the flyer of the Grateful Dead's statement on their 1967 marijuana arrest.

## People: A Statement by the Grateful Dead, 1967

DANNY RIFKIN  
HARRY SHEARER

People: As it must, apparently to all long-hairs in San Francisco, bust time came to the Dead early in October. Claiming that 710 Ashbury kept cropping up as a “supply source,” city cops and state narcs swept into the band’s house on October 2, arresting two members of the band (Bob Weir, Pigpen), two managers, five girlfriends, and several visitors.

As if that wasn’t enough, manager Rock Scully was rearrested two days later. The original bust was for possession of marijuana, a charge made without benefit of search warrants. Scully was then charged with maintaining a house where marijuana is possessed, sold, or hanging from the ceiling.

On Thursday, October 5, the local press trooped onto 710 Ashbury to hear comanager Danny Rifkin give the Dead’s side of the arrest. With TV cameras whirring, reporters tripping over each other, and lights blazing, Rifkin read a prepared statement putting down the laws on pot and patterns of police pot arrest.

Then came an easy-going question and answer period, in which Rifkin defined the group’s reaction to the whole hassle as being “annoying.” Scully added that the real bummer about the arrest was that it now limits the group’s freedom, at least until the case is disposed of. A reporter from an Oakland radio station got a quick putdown from Rifkin, and jeers from the other reporters, for asking the dumbest question of the press

conference: “Danny, how long did it take you to let your hair grow that long?” The arrestees will appear before a Grand Jury early in November.

\* \* \*

#### A Statement by the Grateful Dead

As you know by now, the San Francisco police department and State Narcotics officers invaded this house on Tuesday for the un-peaceful purpose of arresting ten persons on charges of possession of marijuana. We have invited you back to our way-out pad, as the *Chronicle* calls it, to discuss the meaning of this action. The arrests were made under a law that classifies smoking marijuana along with murder, rape, and armed robbery as a felony. Yet almost anyone who has ever studied marijuana seriously and objectively has agreed that, physically and psychologically, marijuana is the least harmful chemical used for pleasure and life enhancement. It is particularly less harmful than alcohol.

People who smoke marijuana—and there are tens of millions of them, possibly even including some of the reporters here today—usually do so for the mild enhancement of sensory experience. Prosecutions for disorderly conduct under the influence of this chemical are virtually unknown, while the Friday night fight in the neighborhood bar, and the fatal auto accident caused by the drunken driver, are familiar American traditions.

But the law continues to treat marijuana smokers as felons. The president of a company that makes defective automobiles which lead to thousands of deaths and injuries can face a maximum penalty of a minor fine. A person convicted of possession of marijuana can be sentenced to up to thirty years in jail. The real danger to society, as well as to thousands of individuals, comes from a law that is so seriously out of touch with reality.

The law contains an even greater evil. It encourages the most outrageously discriminatory type of law enforcement. If the lawyers, doctors, advertising men, teachers, and political office-holders who smoke marijuana were arrested today, the law might well be changed before Thanksgiving. But the police, in making arrests, prefer to concentrate on individuals who have been manufactured, by the mass media, into a group

that typifies the now popular image of the drug-oriented hippie. The mass media looked at a city full of individuals trying to develop styles of life as free men and women and created the so-called hippie scene. Now the police find it easier to arrest as marijuana smokers only those persons who fit this artificial category. This way the American people are protected by the police and the media from the fact that the law is a lie.

But the “Hippie,” as created by the media, is a lie as well. Afraid of people who are exploring new ways of living freely, the larger society has classified and categorized them into the myth of the “Hippie,” the long-haired dropout who performs his exotic rites for the benefit of visiting cameramen.

The law creates a mythical danger and calls it a felony. The people who enforce the law use it almost exclusively against the individuals who threaten their ideas of the way people should look and act. The result is a series of lies and myths that prop each other up.

Yet all we wish to be is free Americans—endowed with certain inalienable rights—among which, somebody once said, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Is that so frightening?

Behind all the myths is the reality. The Grateful Dead are people engaged in a constructive, creative effort in the musical field, and this house is where we work, as well as our residence. Because the police fear and misinterpret us, our effort is now interrupted as we deal with the consequences of a harassing arrest.

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### Note

This reproduces the text of the two-page stapled flyer distributed in the Haight-Ashbury shortly after the press conference held by the Dead at 710 Ashbury on October 5, 1967 (Rifkin and Shearer 1967). Since this was intended to be a public document, minor typographical and grammatical errors have been silently corrected. A survey of the textual history of the statement follows this article.

### Source

[Rifkin, Danny, and Harry Shearer.] 1967. “People / A Statement by the Grateful Dead.” [San Francisco: publisher unknown, 1967]. Handbill. Two letter-sized pages, stapled. Red cardstock with black type and decorations.

**DANNY RIFKIN** served as Grateful Dead comanager beginning in 1966 and went on to serve several functions in the organization, including tour manager and director of the Rex Foundation.

**HARRY SHEARER** is an actor, comedian, writer, musician, radio host, director, and producer. A child actor, he went on to a wide-ranging career as a comedy writer and performer, including several years with *Saturday Night Live* and an even longer tenure with *The Simpsons*. He cowrote *This Is Spinal Tap*, earning a Primetime Emmy Award, and has been nominated for several other Emmy and Grammy Awards. He was named artist-in-residence at Loyola University in New Orleans in 2013.