

# Great Moments in Weed History

## S2 E1 - Obama

ABDULLAH: This podcast is for adults 21 years of age or older. We talk about cannabis history and advertise cannabis products. If you're not 21 come back when you are

*[Spoke Media Intro]*

ABDULLAH: Hey, how's it going folks? It's Abdullah.

Bean: And Bean

ABDULLAH: And welcome back to another episode of Great Moments in Weed History. On this podcast Bean and I who are both cannabis journalists and media makers go over one of the more fascinating points in the long, long history of human beings and cannabis isn't that right, Bean?

Bean: That is exactly what we do.

ABDULLAH: So I have no prior knowledge of the story that Bean's about to tell me. I'm just going to chime in with my general knowledge about cannabis. We're going to smoke some weed and we're going to hear an amazing story. So Bean, what do you got for us today?

Bean: I got a story for you about one of the most legendary weed crews of all time and I think it's going in a direction that you're not going to expect.

ABDULLAH: Wow. So we've had a story about a weed crew before. Of course, the Waldos who invented 420, but this is a different weed crew, H?

BEAN: Similar time period.

ABDULLAH: Interesting.

BEAN: Different Weed crew and it spawned one of the most well known people on the planet.

ABDULLAH: Interesting. Wow. My mind is running wild with anticipation. If only there was something that would call me down and stimulate me at the same time.

BEAN: Yeah. Well that's why we got the weed smoking studio writer.

ABDULLAH: That's right. Oh my God. It is so good to be in a professional studio that lets us smoke weed in it. Shout out to Gold Diggers.

BEAN: Yeah, and as I remind you in every episode of great moments and weed history of you're listening along at home, you might as well be smoking along at home. If you're not rolled up or packed up or ready to go, hit pause now. Do what you do and we'll be here when you get back. We are about to hotbox this MF'er, and then I think it might be time for another...

*[Great Moment in Weed History Intro]*

ABDULLAH: So, Bean, I've got this J in progress in front of me. Why don't you give us the quick rundown on what our story today is going to cover.

BEAN: The subject of today's great moment in weed history was born in Hawaii in 1961 if you believe the official story.

ABDULLAH: Oh, born in Hawaii in 1961 part of a famous weed crew. Man, who was born in Hawaii in 1961 that was part of a famous weed crew.

BEAN: If you believe the official story.

ABDULLAH: Hmm.

BEAN: You want me to go on?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, yeah, please go on. I don't have any solid guesses yet.

BEAN: All right. His mother was a white lady from Wichita, Kansas, studying to be an anthropologist. His father -

ABDULLAH: (gasps)

BEAN: Hmm. Ready?

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: Guess.

ABDULLAH: Ah, it's Barack Obama.

BEAN: Fuck yes!

ABDULLAH: Dude. Okay. I am so, so stoked. So as many people know, Barack Obama has written in his own autobiography that he did use cannabis back in the day. And of course, Hawaii is one of the cannabis places in America, but I don't know the deep details of this story. I've read *Dreams from My*

*Father*, but besides that I don't know very much about it. I don't know much about Obama's cannabis history.

BEAN: Yeah, it is interesting. And, so in his autobiography, you know, he talks about smoking weed and -

ABDULLAH: Choom, I think he calls it.

BEAN: Yeah, but he doesn't get into the details. It's not how you or I would write about our weed smoking past. It's somebody who clearly has in mind, they're gonna run for president at some point. And, you know, he doesn't diss weed too hard, but he doesn't -

ABDULLAH: Endorse it, I guess, right?

BEAN: Endorse it, But,

ABDULLAH: But you've pierced through the veil, haven't you, Bean?

BEAN: You know, I'm not a birther, I don't even think he was born.

ABDULLAH: I don't think anyone was born. You know what I mean?

BEAN: Yeah.

ABDULLAH: I think we were all just kind of like, you know, descended from star dust. You know?

BEAN: Everybody's opinion is equally valid and facts don't matter. So, I don't -

ABDULLAH: Yeah, that's right. It's a post-fact world that we're living in. Great Moments in Weed History is the final, the last bastion of true history. And you've never heard it anywhere before. You're never get to hear it anywhere else.

BEAN: And I assume you're listening to this show and some kind of a bunker, and a quick shout out to our sponsor, Bunker Delivery, the only place that will deliver essentials food, we'd water to your bunker

ABDULLAH: Post bunks.

BEAN: Post Bunks.

ABDULLAH: Bunkmates.

BEAN: Bunkmates is a whole different app in a post-apocalyptic future, yeah.

BEAN: That's the dating app.

ABDULLAH: Bunkmates. Find your bunkmate today

*[chimes]*

BEAN: Okay. Should we get back in the story?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, man, I can't wait to hear.

BEAN: Okay. So his mother was a white lady from Wichita, Kansas, studying to be an anthropologist. His father was a foreign exchange student from Kenya studying economics. The couple met in a Russian language class at the University of Hawaii and married six months before Obama was born, and then they divorced before his fourth birthday. A year after Obama's parents divorced his mother remarries this time to a foreign exchange student studying geography.

ABDULLAH: Right. This - So this is the Indonesian guy, right? If I'm not mistaken. And that's why Barack Obama ends up spending some of his life in Southeast Asia, which is, you know, it feels very close to my heart because I also am an American kid who grew up in Southeast Asia. So when I read that part of his book, I was like, "Oh, that's so cool! Another person with that sort of like cultural perspective or whatever."

BEAN: Yeah. Were there, were there aspects of that that really connected with you like that, you know, you recognized his story in your own?

ABDULLAH: Yeah. You know, what, like definitely the book added a lot of depth to my understanding of it. But you know, the moment that comes to mind in terms of, you know, relating to Barack Obama, right, is really when he gave that speech at the DNC

*[speech fades in]*

*OBAMA: ...who dares to defy the odds, the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him too.*

ABDULLAH: And I seriously, I still get choked up every time I think about it because I'm a skinny kid with a funny name, and I thought the same thing about America, and I always think about that speech and you know, it just, it really is one of those things that makes me feel all this hope. I don't know. It just makes me feel good. You know?

BEAN: It was that same speech where he famously said, you know, there's no red America, there's no blue.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, he did.

BEAN: And...

ABDULLAH: And he was clearly wrong. He could not see into the future. So this J is rolled up. May I light this thing?

BEAN: I think you must. All right, while you, while you settle in, I'm going to settle us into this story a little bit cause we're getting to the good shit.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, let's keep going.

BEAN: Okay. So his mother remarries a foreign exchange student studying geography when her new husband's visa ran out. She followed him to his home country of Indonesia because he's got visa problems.

ABDULLAH: And this is where Barack Obama grows up as a kid for a little bit.

BEAN: Yeah, so they live there from when he was 6 to 10. So 1971 he returns, he's only 10. He returns to Honolulu and he's living with his maternal grandparents, and they enroll him at an upscale private college prep academy, which he attended on a scholarship from fifth grade until he graduated from high school in 1979.

ABDULLAH: Okay, Gotcha. So he finished his high school in Hawaii.

BEAN: He finished his high school in Hawaii and he is at this like really prepped out very expensive school on scholarship. And that's, you know, he is this figure who bridges worlds and that's another kind of eastern west, his parental background but also he's somebody who really is not of much means and his family is , you know, you wouldn't say they were in poverty, but you would certainly say that they were probably not quite middle class. , but he is very bright and he gets this scholarship. So that's another formative part of him. And this is also where he joined a gang.

ABDULLAH: Right. Okay. So definitely heard some stories about this. You know, one of my favorite depictions of this is a Key and Peele sketch.

*PEELE: Trust me, I think that this party can be the most inspirational party this campus has ever seen. Is that coming to me? Let me just grab that. Some righteous bud.*

BEAN: And quick shout out to Jordan Peele friend of the podcast.

ABDULLAH: Seriously, anytime, bro. Anytime you want to come on the show, tell us about the first time you smoked weed. We are down.

BEAN: So while at school at this upper class school, Obama joined a gang. It was called...

ABDULLAH: The Choom Gang.

BEAN: It was called the Choom Gang, and according to close friend and fellow member, and I'm going to say a friend of the podcast, Tom Topolinsky.

*TOM: We had these sleepovers where we'd party with the Choom gang, um, choom meaning, um, indulge and um, pakalolo.*

BEAN: A local slang for cannabis.

*TOM: So that kind of became our symbol of our, our friendship. But clearly we were in a gang. We were a family.*

BEAN: We were a gang. We were a family.

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, no, that's, that's really sweet. And I think it really speaks to the bonding power of cannabis, man. I mean, we've talked about this on the show before. We both experienced this, like our best friendships, maybe all our friendships throughout our lives are cannabis centered somehow. You know what I mean? That it's like it's this lubricant and when cannabis is something that's illegal or you know, you do in the shadows a little bit, it fosters that little group vibe even more, you know? And yeah, you might call it a gang. Not exactly a gang, but choom is definitely involved.

BEAN: Eh, much more choom than gang. They're all about the Choom and they're not really a gang. , but it's this group that's full of in jokes and full of adventure and full of like this zest for life and openness and they're really into pickup basketball. Like that's one of their things.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, Obama loves basketball. That's right.

BEAN: Yeah. Anytime man, you got nine guys and you need one more. I'm better than I look, Obama. I got a decent little jump shot. So we were hearing from esteemed Choom Gang member, Tom Topolinsky. He's saying, you know, telling us what pakalolo is. And in the course of, so I said, I was googling just this morning to try to hear somebody say it, and I found a Don Ho song and perhaps our cool new crew at spoke can splay some of this in for us.

*[Who Is the Lolo Who Stole My Pakalolo begins]*

*Don: Who is the lolo who stole my pakalolo?*

BEAN: And it's a funny song and it's about actually getting your plants rubbed off.

*Don: A few days later I look out to find instead of 50 bushes there were 29*

BEAN: And it reminded me of your, of your piece, *I Just Want My Big Bag of Weed Back*.

ABDULLAH: Ah, the one that started at all. The piece that started my weed career was a cover of a Don Ho song.

BEAN: You owe him royalties.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, shhh.

BEAN: A friend of the podcast in memoriam.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, Don Ho's spirit, you're welcome on our show anytime and are perhaps here right now. Who knows?

BEAN: But yeah, it's a funny song. Getting back to our main main character, the true story of the Choom Gang first came to light in journalist David Maraniss, friend of the podcast. His 2012 book was called, *Barack Obama: The Story*, and it's also in his own memoirs, but in *Dreams from My Father*, Obama makes it out like he's like hanging out with a group of misbegotten ne'er do wells, what he called, quote, the club of disaffection. But in fact, according to this other book, which was very well researched and I relied a lot on it for this episode. So this is David Maraniss writing, "Most members of the Choom Gang were decent students and athletes who went on to be successful and productive lawyers, writers and businessmen" and president. Oh Shit. Spoiler. "One notable exception was Ray, the group's pot dealer who would years later be killed by a scorned gay lover armed with a ball pin hammer.

ABDULLAH: Oh, geez.

BEAN: Yeah.

ABDULLAH: That is fucking rough, but you know, the fact that the rest of them actually grew up to be gainful members of society. I mean, I think that's so true. It's a total stereotype that attributes cannabis used to just the burnout kids because more kids than you think have used cannabis. You know, like the ones who end up doing things with their lives, you know, may have used it. You know, like it's like, it's not so exclusive that like burnouts smoke cannabis and cannabis is loved by burnouts. Everybody smokes weed and as you get older you start to realize that.

BEAN: And I also think, you know, the other way to look at it is people with a lot of trauma in their life are going to look to self medicate, that weed's actually a really good thing for treating some of that trauma, but people with trauma in their lives also have more difficult lives -

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: And make mistakes, and, you know, have harder outcomes because of that trauma. So when you lay those two data points over each other, it's easy to think like, Oh man, particularly if you're not a part of

the culture, and particularly with all the propaganda and all the bullshit science, it's easy to kind of make that association one way,

ABDULLAH: Right.

BEAN: Oh, you smoke weed and you're going to get into all these bad outcomes.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, wow. That is a really interesting point actually, Bean, to think about. That it's like, there's a lot of things with cannabis that it's like kind of a chicken or egg situation. , you know, and the sort of forces that are more anti-cannabis in the world are always, you know, going to draw that line and be like, "Oh, cannabis caused this." But you don't realize. It's like, you know, like that makes me think of the correlation between cannabis use and schizophrenia. You know, it's like someone with that mental illness might be more likely to self-medicate using cannabis, but they draw a correlation the other way and they say, "Oh, well, you know, people who have schizophrenia smoked cannabis, cannabis must be causing the schizophrenia." Or like, you know what I mean? Making it more likely or something. Oh, it's bullshit.

BEAN: Yeah, one little adventure I had between season one and season two was I went on the Tucker Carlson program.

*[Tucker Carlson Tonight theme]*

*TUCKER: David Bienenstock is the author of How to Smoke Pot Properly. David, thank you very much for coming on.*

ABDULLAH: Bean went on Tucker Carlson and he held it down.

*TUCKER: Why should we legalize something that we know causes schizophrenia?*

*BEAN: Tucker, you know, you're the one on here repeating old lies, old distortions, debunked claims. The author of the book that you had on last week, many of the people in the studies that he cited have gone on Twitter to say you grossly misrepresented our findings.*

*TUCKER: Okay. Well, let me just ask you, look, I'm not an expert in this.*

*BEAN: The National Academy of Medicine report. The author said you misrepresented - you're not an expert, but you're supposed to do your job.*

ABDULLAH: Bean held it down. I'm so proud of you, Bean.

BEAN: Oh, thanks man. But that was what it was. It was this debate about schizophrenia.



ABDULLAH: And what made it so worth it, it was all worth it, but what made it even more worth it is that Tucker Carlson said -

*TUCKER: Great Moments in Weed History.*

ABDULLAH: He said the name of our show. You can look it up. We got to put that in a promo or something.

BEAN: All right. Why don't we, why don't we leave Tucker Carlson in the ashtray of history where he belongs.

ABDULLAH: So anyhow, Barack Obama.

BEAN: Yes. So Obama and his friends, they used to get their weed from this guy, Ray. They hung out with him. They considered him an honorary Choom Gang member. He was a white hippie mainlander who worked at a place called Mama Mia's pizza parlor, which sounds like it has disgusting pizza. Like Hawaii, all pizza has pineapple.

ABDULLAH: Pineapple pizza. Oh my God. Is that actually, it's like in Hawaii, if you just order a regular slice, did they give you a Hawaiian slice? You know?

BEAN: And it's served in a hollowed out pineapple and they just called pizza.

ABDULLAH: I like the thing in Hawaii that all drinks are served in pineapple. Like literally just like you go into like your kitchen cabinet and open and it's just a bunch of hollowed out pineapples instead of cups.

BEAN: What, what do you drink out of?

ABDULLAH: Cup, like a sucker? They call it like there's like a New York Cup, you know?

BEAN: So, you know, when he's not working at Mama Mia Pizza Parlor, this Guy Ray, , he lived not far from their school and a broken down bus parked in an abandoned warehouse. So it's like, that is the thing that frightens parents.

ABDULLAH: See, this is what happens when you push weed into the shadows. Ray's like, I'd get a storefront on main street, but you know, cause the laws, I gotta work out of this warehouse.

BEAN: And in a broken down bus. But you know, in memoriam, Ray, friend of the podcast, shout out. He did though, keep them very well supplied with classic Hawaiian landrace strains of the era like Maui Wowie, Kohai Electric, Poona Bud, Kona gold.

ABDULLAH: So I have a couple of questions here. So like what does this weed look like, back then? I'm always curious about like when we talk about these great moments of weed history, you know, it's like what did weed, you know, look like in Nigeria, in the sixties or seventies, right? It's like, so, so when you're talking about Hawaiian weed from this era, like what does it look like? Smell like? Taste like?

BEAN: Yeah, you're referring to the Fela Kuti episode and that's an interesting aspect of bouncing around in history and locations. You know, you are always talking about these different strains. So in the 70s, in Hawaii, when I say landrace, that means the weed that's like indigenous to Hawaii. It hasn't been crossed with other kinds of weed. A single strain that's usually associated with a specific place. It's been bred so that you have like the best example of it, but it's not a cross. Whereas your Sour D's of the world are two strains or three strains or a long complicated lineage. This is like one thing, they're pure sativa strains. They would grow really tall.

ABDULLAH: Like spindly looking buds, right?

BEAN: Spindly looking buds. Sativas are known for being uplifting. Indica is sometimes called Inda-couch. And we're in big time sativa world in Hawaii. These are like if you talk and if like me and I think most people you worked at High Times for like 15 years, you talk to a lot of old heads who were smugglers in the 70s or growers or just deep into this culture. The OG's are still alive, you know, and they talk about Maui Wowie and some of these strains with a real reverence.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, and I'm sure a lot of people might remember Maui Wowie from that moment in Half Baked, of course, legendary cannabis movie where Dave Chappelle breaks into the medical marijuana thing.

*Dave Chappelle: Maui Wowie!*

ABDULLAH: It is a fantastic strain, Maui Wowie. If you have the opportunity to smoke some Maui Wowie, you should try this strain cause it's still around and it's, you know, it's really good.

BEAN: We're at a little point now where in our story we're getting to the, to the real meat of the story. But what I'm about to tell you is one of Obama's earliest weed policies actually dates back to his days in the Choom Gang, but I thought we would skip ahead a little bit cause we're going to have a little break and talk about his weed policies when he was president before we go back and see how the Choom gang might have influenced his thinking and with some quotes of his I can kind of take us through this.

ABDULLAH: Oh, I love it. Okay. Yeah, let's, let's do this.

BEAN: Okay. So as a politician, Obama's evolution on weed played out in public and never quite put him out in front of the issue, but the results are obvious. You know, we're sitting here smoking weed in a legal state and a fucking recording studio.

ABDULLAH: And he was, you know, he was the first president to be that supportive of weed. All right, let's hear these quotes.

BEAN: Okay. So in 2004 when he was running for the Senate, and I think this was the same year he gave the speech that you were referring to, he told students at Northwestern University,

*OBAMA: The war on drugs has been a utter failure.*

BEAN: Dot dot dot.

*OBAMA: But I'm not somebody who believes in legalization of marijuana.*

ABDULLAH: Right. He's like, he really had that college crowd on the edge of their seats and let them down pretty fucking hard. His, his evolution on it was like pretty slow. There was raids going on in northern California under the Obama led DEA or the, the, the DEA that was under Obama. But also when I look back on it and think about it, it was such a different world, right? Like we've seen such change in the last few years. There was a time just in, I mean 2010 where the prospect of legal cannabis in the United States was, we did not think we would see that in our lifetimes. You know, it's like sure, you had medical cannabis in different places and that was growing and at its own pace, but it really did not seem like we would be where we are now. But at the times when he would release tidbits like that, like if he said something like, the drug wars a failure, I would be like, I'm going to ignore everything else he said in that speech and just focus on that because the president just admitted that the drug war is a failure. So at the time it was so exciting, but he was kind of, you know, there was definitely things that he allowed to go on that are atrocious.

BEAN: Yeah, absolutely. And it can't and shouldn't be ignored, and being a part of this weed community gives you a good perspective to look at, like all these political divides and say, well wait, you are both fucking wrong about this thing that's so important to me and is so obviously wrong, Weed Prohibition, that I can be skeptical about politics and politicians and movements that I am also aligned with. When you start to get this tribalism. It's dangerous territory.

ABDULLAH: It's very true. And I think that the good thing about Obama is that he showed change in himself. You know, he might not have started out in exactly where we wanted him to as weed people, but he ended up a lot closer to it than I think anyone would have guessed. You know?

BEAN: Yeah, and I think he's playing a long game, you know? So let's -

ABDULLAH: Yeah, let's keep going.

BEAN: So by 2006, this is when he says quite famously, "I inhaled frequently. That was the point."

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Dude. So I mean, that's crazy. That's like when a 2000's rap song references like an early 90's rap song and it kinda like flips it on its head a little bit.

*[music in]*

*CLINTON: I experimented with marijuana, a time or two, and -*

*OBAMA: I inhaled frequently.*

*[music out]*

*OBAMA: That was the point.*

BEAN: By 2012 and now he's president. 2006, you know, he's still a senator. Colorado and Washington passed the first adult use legalization laws. We were both there.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, dude. Wow. What a day. January 1st, 2013.

*Segment 1: Have your ID's ready? It's a wild west weed rush.*

*Segment 2: Colorado's Amendment 64 was passed on November 6th, 2012*

*Segment 3: President Obama clarifying his recent comments that pot is no more dangerous than alcohol, comments coming right in the middle of a national debate sparked by the recent legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington.*

ABDULLAH: I remember it was flurrying in Denver, Colorado. Bean and I met up at 3D Discreet at seven in the morning. Right.? Good day.

BEAN: It was beautiful. It was a special day. And so, Obama of course needs to react to this.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: They played it pretty tight lipped before the election in terms of how they were going to react if it passed. Same thing, didn't come out against it, didn't come out for it and didn't give any indication of whether they were going to let this stand, man, you know? So, after the election, Barbara Walters, sure, friend of the podcast, why not?

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: Asks him about it and, and Obama says

*OBAMA: It does not make sense from a prioritization point of view for us to focus on recreational drug users in a state that has already said that under state law that's legal.*

ABDULLAH: So this was the beginning of the seriously let the states decide kind of thing. Cause obviously that was a sticking point with California for the previous 15 years because it was a wild west sort of rule. It was like, yeah, we can have medical weed but anyone can get a prescription or whatever. Colorado on the other hand had had like a really well-regulated, like locked down super tight medical program. Right? Or at least the tightest one that had existed in the US so far. So when they built this rec system on top of it and everyone voted it in, it's a purple state, you know, like, and cannabis is starting to become a nonpartisan issue, you know, at this time it's like, I mean, what other move is there for the sitting president? You know what I mean? Like you can't really say otherwise. You can't be like, no, this is totally a back door to, you know, a black market or whatever. It's not.

BEAN: It's the opposite?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, exactly.

BEAN: And the thing is in that election in 2012 Obama was up for reelection. Spoiler alert. He Won.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. WHAT?! Wow, I'm learning so much?

BEAN: Holy Cow! But he also won the state of Colorado, but weed legalization got way more votes than him in Colorado.

ABDULLAH: Right. And, that ballot was like, it was voted on...

BEAN: Same day.

ABDULLAH: ...when Obama was the same day. Right, right, right. Same election. Wow. Dude, that's crazy.

BEAN: This is Obama to the New Yorker, "As has been well documented, I smoked pot as a kid and I view it as a bad habit and a vice, but I don't think it is more dangerous than alcohol."

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: And then here's where he really comes into it. "Middle-Class kids don't get locked up for smoking pot and poor kids do. And African American kids and Latino kids are more likely to be poor and less likely to have the resources and the support to avoid unduly harsh penalties. We should not be locking up kids or individual users for long stretches of jail time when some of the folks who are writing those laws have probably done the same thing."

ABDULLAH: Man, I remember when he said this. I have, I read this quote and I got choked up because I couldn't believe that it was being said. Even with the caveat he's saying, you know, that we shouldn't lock up people for just using or possessing small amounts, but you, he'd probably still be okay

with people arresting people with higher quantities or dealing or selling or whatever it is, be arrested. Right? But man, for him to just cleanly and plainly state these very true facts, right, was such a crazy moment. Do you remember where you were when Obama said, admitted that there's a disproportionate amount of black and brown men in jail for weed.

BEAN: You don't forget a thing like that.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: Moving on.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: And, actually that's kind of perfect timing cause we're going to take a little break. We're going to get paid to smoke weed.

ABDULLAH: Beautiful.

BEAN: And when we come back, I'm going to tell you about Obama's very first weed policy, which was actually a policy for the Choom Gang.

ABDULLAH: Hmmm, Oh I think I know what you're talking about.

*[music in]*

BEAN: Alright, spark that shit up.

*OBAMA: I inhaled frequently. That was the point.*

*[music out]*

*TUCKER: Great Moments in Weed History.*

*[Smoke Weedia]*

ABDULLAH: And we're back in. We're talking about Barack Obama. We're smoking weed and we're having a good ol' fucking time. Bean, where were we?

BEAN: A little technical correction. We're smoking Pakalolo.

ABDULLAH: Pakalolo.

BEAN: On this episode.

ABDULLAH: The best name for weed. Let's do it.

BEAN: Alright.

ABDULLAH: I'm stoked.

BEAN: So, you know we talked about Obama's presidential and weed policies, but I promised you I was going to tell you about his very first weed policy.

ABDULLAH: Ah, that's right. So this brings us back to the days of the Choom Gang.

BEAN: We are re-choom-inating. One concept that Barry, as he was known to them, Obama introduced to the Choom gang was quote total absorption.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, known today as the hotbox.

BEAN: Known today as the hotbox, but he had his own, you know, he's, he's a forward thinker.

ABDULLAH: Innovator.

BEAN: He's like, yeah, you can hot box. But what's what's beyond that? He's aspirational in his hotboxery. And what that means is total absorption meant that for the Choom gang penalties would be created and enforced for anyone who didn't hold in a hit of fine pakalolo sufficiently long. First offense resulted in getting skipped over the next time in rotation.

ABDULLAH: Oh, interesting. So this is basically a very, very high stakes game of Chicago.

BEAN: Wow. I haven't heard that term in a long time

ABDULLAH: I know, right? This is one of those like very old school things. It's a way to conserve weed essentially. Right? I mean this is a funny thing. I don't think you and I, when we smoke weed that we hold it in now, you know, we have enough weed, thankfully, we're very lucky and we have enough weed that, you know, you just gotta smoke it and you know, hit it and you're not standing there being like, I'm going to all this and you know, like suck every last bit of THC out of it. But back in the day, you had to do it. But it's so funny to me that he organized and politicized this, this old school game.

BEAN: Yeah. This is like the public option for weed. There's an individual mandate that you have to hold it in. He's trying to do it in, in their own interests. He just wants his homies to go as efficiently high.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: Based on the resources that they share collectively, you know, so this is basically socialized medicine.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. It's for the greater good, you know, quite literally. And he's innovated and figured out a way. He's like, why are we like, you know, like dragging our knuckles around and like, you know, like clubbing each other to death when we should be utilizing our supply of cannabis to its absolute fullest. And he did it.

BEAN: He did it, but so this is not his only weed policy, and he was sort of like the mayor of the Choom gang, you know?

ABDULLAH: Okay, gotcha. So a natural leader, he just sort of rose to the top.

BEAN: A natural leader who built consensus, you know, reading his book and this other book, that's the really, you know, there's people who are the natural leader because they're charismatic assholes and bullies. I mean, I'm not thinking of anybody specific.

ABDULLAH: Right?

BEAN: I'm just saying there's a type of person who, you know, appeals to sort of the worst in people to get them to do what he wants. He's not that, you know, but he does have some other pretty specific weed policies.

ABDULLAH: Let's hear them.

BEAN: And this is according to the book, the story that we talked about before. "Along with total absorption, Barry popularize the concept of quote, 'Roof hits'.

ABDULLAH: Roof hits. So this does not perhaps mean hits on the rooftop.

BEAN: It does not. It does not. Any guesses what a roof hit might be

ABDULLAH: A roof hit. Hmm. What could that possibly be?

BEAN: It's a tough one.

ABDULLAH: Does it have something to do with a hot box and the smoke collecting in the room?

BEAN: Mmhm.

ABDULLAH: Oh, interesting. So maybe it's like where you sit in hot box a room and then stand on a chair to stick your head in like the cloud.



BEAN: If the room's a car. Well here we go. So when the Choom gang were chooming in a car, all the windows had to be rolled up so no smoke blew out and went to waste. That's a conventional hot box. When the pot was gone, they tilted their heads back and sucked in the last bit of smoke from the ceiling.

ABDULLAH: Ah, okay. Yeah. So essentially that the roof hit.

BEAN: Yeah.

ABDULLAH: A ceiling hit it probably should be called technically, but nevertheless a good idea. And once again, you know, he's all about the utilization, the conservation of the weed. He's got them just being more efficient potheads right here.

BEAN: Yeah. And then he's got one more policy here. Barry also had a knack for interception.

ABDULLAH: Ah, now this one I've heard before, again, credit to the Jordan Peele depiction of this.

*PEELE: Intercepted. Don't sleep on Barry O. Don't ever sleep on Barry O.*

ABDULLAH: Now this is interesting. Okay. In every other situation, he is all about the democratization of cannabis among his friends, but this is a little bit different here. Go ahead and describe it.

BEAN: Yeah. So, when a joint was making the rounds, Obama often elbowed his way in out of turn, shouted, intercepted and took an extra hit. No one seemed to mind.

ABDULLAH: See, this is, that is very interesting in terms of if, you know, if you want to read into this a lot, right?

BEAN: Which I think is the purpose of our show.

ABDULLAH: But, yeah. Like, you know, in every other case he's doing something for the greater good. In this situation using his position of power to benefit himself, doing something that is essentially, would be categorized as a dick move done by almost anybody. But you know, he knows that his charm and his leadership skills are going to make it okay for him to intercept. I would never do this. I would be mortified to like jump in and be like, "Intercepted." I mean, there's some situations where, ahh, you're with the homies screwing around or something. And nowadays of course we have, thankfully, again, so much weed that doesn't even matter. But you know, man, like that's a, that's an interesting thing, you know?

BEAN: Yeah. I mean, you gotta be a pretty charming person to, you know, to do. I think anybody could do that once.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Right?

BEAN: But to have it be a,

ABDULLAH: A thing to do.

BEAN: Your thing. The other thing is that, you know, they're like, they're athletes, so you know, he's playing with that idea and he's a charming guy and they've got a lot of weed, sometimes, probably. I don't think you intercept when you, it's like eight people sharing the last joint you have.

ABDULLAH: Or is that exactly when you intercept, you know what I mean?

BEAN: So let's get a little more into like that Choom Gang and what they're about. So, aside from attending the same high school and getting blazed together, the main glue binding the Choom gang together was pickup basketball, like I said. So they're, they're getting high and playing ball. Jokingly they called themselves the Hack League because despite everybody being lit while they're playing, there were a lot of hard fouls that began nonstop trash-talking. And so, yeah, Obama is basically like the mayor of the game. Anytime there's this dispute over a foul or out of bounds, everybody's sort of like looks to him as the arbiter.

ABDULLAH: See again, more signs of these kind of a natural leader. But I mean, some of those calls might have leaned a little bit in Barry's favor. You know what I'm saying?

BEAN: So anyway, and now I'll just say, I grew up in New Jersey in the 1980s. So, this is what it was like for Obama in Hawaii in the 1970s and prepare to be like a little jealous. "After a long day of shooting hoops, the Choom gang would climb into a VW bus. They called the Choom Wagon, crank some Aerosmith or Stevie Wonder and head to a waterfall with a deep basin of cool mountain runoff they could dive into."

ABDULLAH: Wow Man, what an amazing day. The only thing I would change is the Aerosmith, but no, no, no, that sounds like such a good time, man. Incredible. What a upbringing.

BEAN: Those are those magic days and you know, just like how bounded this crew of people were, or you know, if they didn't go to the waterfall, oh they just had to the beach and body surf.

ABDULLAH: Right, ah man. Life in Hawaii. That sounds wonderful.

BEAN: And you remember when Obama would go on vacation to Hawaii and you'd see those pictures of embody surfing?

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Yeah, totally.

BEAN: He's, you know, getting back to that Choom vibe and, and God, remember he took a fucking vacation.

*Segment 1: There's been a lot of criticism of the president taking this four day holiday.*

*Segment 2: What will it take to get the president actually go back to his office and work?*

*Segment 3: The world's going to hell and the president is out there playing golf.*

ABDULLAH: Hey, you know, a golf is really a lot more like a business meeting when you think about it.

BEAN: It's just not a thing that a president should be doing playing golf. So, Barry, as he was known at the time, he was already known for his unflappable nature and as a fierce competitive debater in high school, but he didn't really stand out in a school where it was like very strict academic standards. It's this upper crust school preparing people to be, you know, the 1% of the future. He's a good student, but he's not the best student. He's on the debate team, but he's not all about it. You know, he isn't really about this crew, you know, and playing ball and smoking weed and he's having a pretty normal upbringing in terms of like not being somebody that you would say that guy is going to be president.

ABDULLAH: Right, right, right. He's sort of, he's low key right now. I mean, he's a, he's the duckling of the gorgeous duck and he is to become.

BEAN: Absolutely. And so, you know, aside from, riding the bench for the varsity basketball team, he didn't go in for any extracurricular activities, including student government, but what he did do was he went to the library at the school and he read a shitload, and this is a, he talks about that a lot more in his memoir, reading at the library then smoking weed, but that's very formative for him as well. And he's starting to become the person that we know him as. You know, he's not a frivolous young person. He has lots of fun. He has lots of friends, but there's a serious side to him, and a questioning side. And somebody who is, you know, obviously trying to figure out all of these complicated forces that have shaped him.

ABDULLAH: It's interesting to me. I always, you know, I, because I grew up in another country, you look at America in this different way, right? And you see it for all its flaws and everything, right? And all its, you know, benefits and, you know, realizing that as an American you have such a better life. You know what I mean? In this world. And when you've seen another country as a kid, you really, that you know, that hits home and it makes you so curious and you know, so hopeful and you go to the library and dig up every book about it and you read it. And then for others of us, you end up quitting the track team because you were smoking too much weed and you ended up playing drums and just riding a skateboard for the rest of the summer. That's where it took me. You know what I'm saying. That's where I went with that perspective. But you know, it's really interesting to hear how this big nerd, you know, became, became the guy that we know him to be, you know?

BEAN Yeah. So are we're gonna I think we're getting into our second J and that'll is going to take us a right out, cause I'm going to, I'm going to give the last word here to our friend Tom Topolinsky of the

Choom gang. And this is how he kind of like summed it all up. What the experience meant, and what remains of being a Choom Gang member, not the most famous one.

ABDULLAH: Right.

BEAN: And this is what Tom said.

*TOM: The Choom Gang was, was all about adventure.*

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, totally. That's the name of the game. You know what I mean? Because it's, it's less about the weed and it's more about the Brotherhood and you know, that sense of adventure that you have when you're a young person and you feel like the possibilities are endless, you know?

BEAN: Yeah. And so he says

*TOM: We could turn anything into an event. Um, whether it was small things like playing nerf basketball, everything was animated, everything was funny. It was all about laughter.*

BEAN: I mean, does that resonate with you as a lead crew?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, totally. It's just like maybe you know, that feeling you get at the end of the day when you've been with your friends all day and you're all like giggly, slap happy and just every little thing that someone says becomes a joke in your head and you know, it's like you almost, you just feel like drunk just on the laughter of that. You know what I mean, of that experience of being in that, in that company, man, that's, that's such an awesome nostalgic feeling.

BEAN: Yeah, and just that feeling of like inside jokes and references starting to pile up on themselves. That's a weedy environment.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: And, then he says...

*TOM: There was no restrictions on what you could say or do. You're amongst family, you can cry if you want. You can laugh if you want. We can call each other's names. And um, Barry was very much a part of that, that feeling and that support group and, and that kind of a, anything goes mentality.*

ABDULLAH: Yeah, man, that's, that's really great. That's like, you know, there's movies may like Stand By Me or whatever. You know what I mean? It's like, it's about that, you know, it's, it's all about the vibe that's created there. You're so pure in that state, you know what I mean? The world hasn't gotten you down yet. You know what I mean? And it's like, it's so interesting to hear like about Obama's period like that, you know what I mean?

BEAN: Yeah. Or even when he says you could cry, it's like not always a thing in a male young peer group

ABDULLAH: Yeah, seriously.

BEAN: to show that vulnerability. And they were open to that and they were there for each other. And I'll just, I'll bring it home with Tom's words.

*TOM: It was a beautiful thing. It was a lot of fun. And till this date, I am still very close with Choom gang, many, many years later. Barry's been a little harder to get ahold of.*

*[ABDULLAH and Bean laugh]*

*TOM: But, um, we were, I think a very, very close bunch and that allowed him to be himself. Um, and that was our main thing is you just, you just had to be yourself. There was no other rules.*

ABDULLAH: Man. That's a beautiful sentiment and it definitely reinforces my fandom of Barack Obama despite, you know what I mean, like some of the things we've discussed, he really did show a, an altruist them, you know, that really resonates with me. There's definitely a couple questions I have at the end of this, right? That perhaps are unanswerable. One is that in his college years now, I know that in his college years he hung out with a couple of Pakistani dudes. Pakistani people love telling this story because you know, at some point being like, you do know Barack Obama, like hung out with Pakistani guys. Like he was part of a crew in New York who in the movie Barry, which was directed by my friend, Vikram Gandhi, they show Barack Obama in this period when he's at Columbia University. Right? And he's living with this guy and I don't think he's shown smoking weed, but he lives with these party animals. And I can only guess that a guy who was most weed in high school is also gonna smoke weed in college. And you know, he was in New York City. So I wonder if he smoked weed at this time. Do you have any idea?

BEAN: He definitely didn't stop by then, but it's not quite clear when he stopped, if he stopped.

ABDULLAH: If he stopped. Which brings me to my second question here, which is that, do you think based on everything, you know, if you had to guess that since Barack Obama stopped being president that he has perhaps resumed smoking weed or maybe that he never stopped smoking weed the whole time?

BEAN: Well, I gotta be honest. I wasn't gonna say anything cause I felt like you'd feel a little left out. But, I seshed with Obama. Should I, should I have done that earlier in the episode? Do you think that would have been like a, like a get.

ABDULLAH: [inaudible] buried the lead on that one.

BEAN: You know what, he was gonna, he was down to come on the show and I was like, you know, we just got kind of a vibe between the two of us.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Nah, you know what, he would have messed up this vibe or whatever.

BEAN: Barry, Barack, he said, call him either, you know, when we were session together. Why don't you come on the show and we'll do the college years, but if you're gonna come into our studio, it's like our home.

ABDULLAH: Bring your own pakalolo.

BEAN: Bring your own pakalolo and no interceptions.

ABDULLAH: No interceptions in here, man. We'll roll you a personal. That was an incredible story. Thank you so much, Bean.

*[Who is the Lolo that Stole My Pakalolo in]*

ABDULLAH: I definitely got the learn so much more about an icon, nay a cannabis icon. And it's so cool to hear that Barack Obama is just a regular dude that loves kicking it with his boys, playing some ball, and smoking that sweet, sweet pakalolo. Amazing. Well, that's it for this episode of Great Moments in Weed History. We'll see you next time. Great Moments in Weed History is a Spoke Media production. It's hosted by me Abdullah Saeed and David Bienenstock, Aka Bean. We're produced by Brigham Mosley and Cody Hofmockel with help from Rayez Mendoza and Kendall Lake. Special thanks to Gold Digger studio. This episode was mixed by Jonathan Villa-Lobos.

BEAN: Our executive producers are Aaliyah Tavakolian, and Keith Reynolds. Check out our show notes for more info on all the things we discussed on today's episode.

ABDULLAH: You can find us on Twitter and Instagram at GMIWH podcast, or shoot us an email at [gmiwhpodcast@spokemedia.io](mailto:gmiwhpodcast@spokemedia.io).

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*[Who is the Lolo Who Stole My Pakalolo out]*

ABDULLAH So that's like Hawaiian Guitar stuff, right?

BEAN: Yeah, what's that little guitar called?

*Singer: It's a ukulele.*