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INHALING:

THE CHANGING SIGNIFICATIONS OF MARIJUANA IN HEGEMONIC AND SUBCULTURAL DISCOURSES, FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH ITS PROHIBITION

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the various ways in which marijuana, its use, and its users have historically been signified, within both hegemonic and subcultural discourses, from marijuana's origins in antiquity through its North American prohibition in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Attention is given to how this history, and prohibition in particular, has informed contemporary North American significations of the drug, its use and its users.

Cette thèse examine les façons dont la marijuana, l'utilisation de marijuana, et ceux qui l'utilisent ont été representer dans les discours hégémonique et sous-culturel dès les origines de marijuana en antiquité jusqu'à la prohibition de marijuana pendant la commençement de la vingtième siecle. Attention est payé au comment cet histoire, particulairment la prohibition, a construit les representations nord-américain de la drogue, l'utilisation, et ceux qu'ils l'utilisent.

"Sho', they got *to have it against the law. Shoot, ever'body git high, wouldn't be nobody git up an' feed the chickens! Hee-hee ... ever'body jest* lay in bed*! Jest lay in bed till they* ready *to git up! Sho', you take a man high on good gage, he got no use for they ole bull-crap, 'cause he done see right through there. Shoot, he lookin' right down into his ver'* soul*!"*

"I ain't never heard nobody talk so dang crazy, C.K."

"Well, you young, boy - you goin' hear plenty crazy talk 'fore you is a grown man."

"Shoot."

"Now we got to think of us a good place to put *this gage," he said, "a* secret *place. Where you think, Hal'?"*[1]

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[1] Terry Southern, "Red-Dirt Marihuana", *The Evergreen Review* (1960). Rpt. in *The Marihuana Papers*, ed. David Solomon (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 181.

Table of Contents

Inhale -
Hold it in.
Exhale ...
Let's begin.

Prologue

Inhaling

"How much to be revealed about marijuana especially in this time and nation for the general public! for the actual experience of the smoked herb has been completely clouded by a fog of dirty language by the diminishing crowd of fakers who have not had the experience and yet insist on being centers of propaganda about the experience."[2]

It was late March, 1992, and the U.S. election primary campaigns were in full swing. The Democrats were campaigning through New York state, and Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas was having a bit of a rough go of it. During five days of campaigning through New York City, the candidate had been receiving relatively little exposure on the evening news. The last weekend in March would rattle the president-in-waiting, however, provoking some unwelcome attention from the news media.

On the Thursday prior to the last weekend of March, Clinton had lost his temper when heckled by an AIDS demonstrator. On Saturday the 28th, he was visibly irritated in a confrontation with the presidential candidate for the New Alliance Party. Both incidents resulted in increased media interest in Clinton's performance, but were mere ripples through the media pool compared to the revelation which was to surface on the final Sunday in March.

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[2] Allen Ginsberg, "First Manifesto to End the Bringdown", *The Marihuana Papers*, David Solomon, ed. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966) 184.

That day, at a televised candidates forum on New York station WCBS-TV, reporter Marcia Kramer called into question Clinton's responses to previous inquiries about drug use. She pointed out that Mr. Clinton's repeated insistence that he had never broken any U.S. law was a rather leading assertion, implicitly allowing for the possibility of illicit drug use in something other than a U.S. federal jurisdiction. To the surprise of many, Clinton somewhat sheepishly admitted that he had, in fact, while as a student at Oxford University in the late 1960s, tried marijuana.

Despite this confession, Clinton's response seemed oddly enigmatic to many observers. While admitting that he had "experimented with marijuana a time or two"[3] he denied that he had actually smoked it: "I didn't like it, and didn't inhale, and never tried it again."[4] Following the program, Clinton was forced to walk a fine line in response to reporters anxious to perhaps uncover a scandal. Brushing aside suggestions that he had been less than truthful in the past regarding drug use, he insisted that "Nobody's ever asked me that question point-blank."[5] Then, fashioning himself like a Young George Washington, Clinton boasted, "And I just told the truth."[6]

Admission of past marijuana use had cost U.S. Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg a seat on the bench in 1987 (though it did not similarly damage Clarence Thomas's

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[3] Elizabeth Kolbert, "As Entertainment, This Campaign Is Not So Bad", *New York Times*, 31 March 1992, national ed.: A17.

[4] Kolbert A17.

[5] Gwen Ifill, "Clinton Admits Experiment With Marijuana In 1960's", *New York Times*, 30 March 92, national ed.: A15.

[6] Ifill A15.

chances four years later), a fact undoubtedly not lost on fast-rising political star Bill Clinton. He suggestively pointed out to the reporters at the forum that similar admissions during the 1988 campaign by Bruce Babbit and (eventual running-mate and vice-president) Al Gore did no harm to their political careers.

Perhaps hoping to instill or reinforce the notion that his claim to have tried marijuana yet not inhaled revealed only a past youthful innocence or naivete on his part, Clinton also let the attending reporters know that he had "never even had a drink of whisky until I was 22."[7] (To a cynic, this statement must appear to beg the very sort of question posed by reporter Marcia Kramer in the first place; one wonders whether, upon further query, Clinton might reveal that he had, however, held a quart of gin to his lips in his grade-school days.) What Clinton wished to stress, it seemed, was that his brief foray into drug experimentation was borne only of innocence, and was nothing more than the typical youthful indiscretion of a naive, somewhat innocent young man a long, long way from his Arkansas home.

Though Clinton's self-characterizations throughout this affair were, as might be expected of a politician seeking office, entirely self-serving, their implications are worth noting. As presidential hopeful, Clinton was certainly in a more precarious political position than most. He could not appear to condone such illicit behaviour as the smoking of marijuana; a presidential candidate requires the appearance of statesmanship, especially one running against an established, incumbent elder statesman such as President Bush. Yet Clinton's carefully groomed image depended largely on the appearance of youthful hipness; he was poised to become the first American president born in the post-World War II baby

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[7] Ifill A15.

boom, and his fellow 'baby boomers', his generational peers, constituted an enormous political constituency.

And the baby boomers were now faced, in the 1990s, with having to re-assess certain proclivities of its generation, particularly those of the 1960s. The resurgent interest in marijuana in the 1990s made it the ideal subject for just such moral re-evaluation. And as is pointed out in the Addiction Research Foundation's *Cannabis, Health and Public Policy*,

> One feature of the renewed interest in cannabis is the frequency with which questions on the subject have been put to political candidates. Their responses - often including admissions of cannabis use - are typically lighthearted, but the humor is perhaps lost on the hundreds of thousands of Canadians with criminal records for cannabis possession.[8]

By 1992, several prominent politicians had admitted to having used marijuana in the past. In Canada, for example, Kim Campbell and Jean Charest both did so; in the 1990 election in Massachusetts, a staggering ten politicians - including Representative Joe Kennedy, one senator, the Lieutenant-Governor, and the Attorney-General - all confessed to pot smoking. None suffered significant negative repercussions as a result of their admissions.

As reporter Gwen Ifill suggested in the New York Times' initial reporting of the WCBS forum and Clinton's statement, "Mr. Clinton's disclosure of marijuana use underscores a generational transition in this year's election. To many of his contemporaries such an admission is hardly a shock."[9] Not shocking, certainly, but for some, facing up to past 'indiscretions' (not to mention those of the present) such as experimentation with illicit

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[8] *Cannabis, Health and Public Policy* (Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, Dec. 1996) 1.

[9] Ifill A15.

substances would prove to be somewhat discomforting. Bill Clinton had learned this first-hand. And as the case of Douglas Ginsburg demonstrated, admission of past marijuana use by a public figure could indeed be politically costly. If smoking marijuana could be perceived as something which might undermine the integrity of the Supreme Court, certainly the worthiness of one seeking the Office of the President of the United States of America might be similarly questioned.

One must also keep in mind that Bill Clinton had been the object of considerable derision for having avoided military duty during the Vietnam War, waived because of his attendance at Oxford. And despite marijuana's enduring popularity among many typical (largely middle-class) American college students, its association with 1960s counterculture[10] had made an indelible impression on the way in which many Americans perceived both the drug and its use: "Marihuana became a symbol - an embodiment - of the Counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s for policymakers and the media as well as for rebellious youth"[11]; and,

> Because of its historical coincidence with the passage of the baby boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1962) through adolescence and the emergence of the marijuana epidemic in the

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[10] Here and elsewhere in this paper, the term 'counterculture' is used in the sense described by Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall, et al.: "... that amalgam of 'alternative' middle-class youth cultures - the hippies, the flower children, the yippies - which grew out of the 60s, and came to prominence during the period 1967-70." (Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979) 148.)

[11] Jerome L. Himmelstein, *The Strange Career of Marihuana: Politics and Ideology of Drug Control in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983) 144.

> general population of the United States, many people associate marijuana use with adolescent 'acting out' ...[12]

Thus, Clinton must have been keenly interested in countering any suggestion that his experimentation with marijuana reflected any counterculture sensibility on his part - it would undoubtedly be better for him to project the naïveté of a young American co-ed who was simply 'acting out' (and quite unsuccessfully at that), than to be thought to have engaged in any way with the perceived radical anti-establishmentarianism of the counterculture. But Clinton need not have worried about unflattering and potentially damaging associations with countercultural elements. Rather, the naïveté which he apparently wished to project with respect to his experimentation with marijuana came off instead as disingenuous and lacking credibility. Clinton's claim to have tried but not actually inhaled marijuana drew scorn and ridicule upon him; he was portrayed not as an innocent, nor even a latent radical, but as a fool and an idiot, and quite possibly (probably?) a liar.

If neither the baby-boomer generation's generally innocuous experience with marijuana or marijuana's renewed popularity in the 1990s had been enough to make Clinton come clean, so to speak, certainly the fact that the public appeared more put off by his apparent evasiveness than his past experimentation with marijuana provided the necessary motivation to change his political tack. At any rate, Clinton embarked on a mission of political spin-doctoring, making an appearance on Arsenio Hall's youth-oriented, late-night Hollywood talk show.

After joining the house band on stage for a little rock 'n roll on the alto sax, decked

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[12] Richard R. Clayton, *Marijuana in the 'Third World': Appalachia, U.S.A.* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995) 2.

out in a dark-suit-and-shades outfit reminiscent of the Blues Brothers, Clinton granted a brief interview. Endeavouring to clarify the remarks which had caused such a media uproar, Clinton asserted that his failure to inhale was not the result of any priggish moral concerns. He explained to Arsenio that he was fully aware that pot's psychoactive effects required ingestion by inhalation, and insisted that he had not intentionally avoided inhaling the smoke; rather, as a non-smoker, he simply found himself unable to get the smoke into his lungs. Bill Clinton seemed determined to have it both ways.

And, it turns out, he did. Clinton's revelation about having tried marijuana did not stand between him and the presidency, though it did provide his opponents with some political fodder, albeit of a relatively harmless and humourous variety. Campaign opponent Jerry Brown, former California governor, even rushed to his defence, imploring reporters to "lay off this stuff".[13] (Of course, the going joke about Brown was that while Clinton hadn't inhaled, Brown had never exhaled.) Clinton's dalliance with marijuana even appears to have since bestowed a certain hip cachet upon him - he who had suffered the indignity, despite the Oxford education, no less, of being branded by some as a Bubba or 'good ole boy' at heart.

Most observers appear to have accepted Clinton's story with a wink and a nod; apart from poor Mr. Ginsburg, few if any of the politicians and public figures who have made similar admissions have suffered any significant negative consequences. And yet in the jurisdictions over which these people preside, marijuana remains illegal, its use or cultivation in some places severely punished. In the state of Oklahoma, for example, a conviction for cultivation of any amount of marijuana can result in life imprisonment. On the other hand,

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[13] Kolbert A17.

voters in California and Arizona recently voted to legalize marijuana for medical use.[14]

As Wayne Howell of the Addiction Research Foundation has wryly noted, "The politics of pot are passing strange."[15] Clinton's experimentation-without-inhalation is a strange yet apt reflection of the sometimes startling contradictions which characterize marijuana's peculiar status within North American society. Why did Clinton make the claims that he did? Why reveal a past experimentation with an illicit substance, only to insist that the substance was not actually ingested? The phrase 'hip to be square' comes to mind - perhaps Clinton simply wished to portray himself as being the consummate moderate, situated conveniently between the supposed liberal progressiveness of the baby boomers and the conservative traditional values of previous generations. Whatever the case may be, one can only speculate on Clinton's political motives for his admission, and at any rate, this is not a primary concern of this thesis.

What is of greater interest within the context of this project is how Clinton's assertion about trying marijuana but not inhaling - and the public response to such a claim (in this case, it was generally one of apathy) - might reflect on the relationship between contemporary American (and by extension, North American) society and this illicit drug. Why did the public respond in the manner in which it did - not with outrage, but with a sort of collective shrug? Rather than take issue with the candidate's experimentation with an illicit substance,

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[14] In California, the approval of Proposition 215 in the 1996 elections legalized the medicinal use of marijuana, while in Arizona, voters' approval of Proposition 200 gave doctors there the authority to prescribe whatever drug they consider appropriate for treatment, and mandated medical treatment rather than incarceration for those arrested for possession of illicit drugs.

[15] Wayne Howell, "Presidential Smoke", *The Journal* (ARF), Oct.-Nov. 1992: 9.

most American voters appeared to be put off by the way in which he qualified his admission.

Just what was it about an almost off-hand comment about inhaling (or not) that caused such a media sensation, one that still reverberates to this day?[16] And if millions of people - including even the head of state of the most powerful nation on earth - have tried marijuana, why does so much contemporary discussion and debate on the matter remain fixated on abstract slogans and dispute over the interpretations of scientific and medical research, neglecting consideration of the cultural significance of marijuana use? To what extent is the debate on possible reform of existing marijuana laws arrogated by misconceptions and cultural biases regarding marijuana's traditional cultural associations? Why too does marijuana remain classified, in legal terms, with much 'harder', more dangerous drugs such as cocaine or heroin, in disregard of its demonstrated therapeutic properties? More to the point, why has marijuana - widely accepted and utilized within various cultures worldwide for thousands of years - been, in twentieth-century North America, signified within a hegemonic discourse as something which poses a threat to public order and well-being? This thesis will investigate the different ways in which marijuana has been signified; the statements that emerge to frame its discourses; what is said and *not* said throughout its cultural history.

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[16] As recently as August 10, 1998, with the prospect of Clinton's appearance before a grand jury inquiring into his affair with Monica Lewinsky looming large, *Time Magazine* speculated on his options for his then upcoming testimony: "Yes, I'm very sorry", and "Yes, but I didn't inhale". ("Clinton's Options", Canadian ed.: 20.)

Introduction

Hamlet, De Quincey, Emma Bovary, Balzac, Baudelaire, William Burroughs, Artaud (and scores of others) urged upon us a thinking of human nourishment. If they were not quite vegetarians, they tried to nourish themselves without properly eating. Whether injecting themselves or smoking cigarettes or merely kissing someone, they rerouted the hunting grounds of the cannibalistic libido. In a certain manner of conscious monitoring, they refused to eat - and yet they were always only devouring, or drinking up the toxic spill of the Other. Drugs make us ask what it means to consume anything, anything at all.[17]

I have used the strange case of Bill Clinton's claim of marijuana experimentation-without-inhalation to illustrate a central theme of this thesis paper's primary argument - that the act of inhaling the illicit substances of marijuana smoke is, more than just an illegal act in North American jurisdictions, a sort of cultural violation, a transgression which is signified within popular discourse as a threat to the perceived order of hegemony. Bill Clinton's enigmatic qualification of his admission suggested an implicit assumption that while a line had admittedly been crossed - a clearly illegal activity had been engaged in, for which Clinton would express appropriate contrition - another boundary existed, beyond which mere contrition might not suffice for it having been breached. For while the smoking of marijuana, at least in principle, might be seen today by many as a rather benign act of rebellion - a victimless crime, as it were - it nonetheless continues to signify a transgression beyond illegality or deliquency that might even be characterized as a sort of desecration, a defilement, which inheres itself in the act of ingesting marijuana's illicit substances.

To smoke marijuana - to inhale - is to, in effect, ingest the Other, and here, I believe, lies the key to understanding how and why marijuana prohibition in the U.S. and Canada

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[17] Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature/Addiction/Mania* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 63.

originated and has persevered, despite its violation by millions of North Americans and several decades of considerable opposition to its continuance. A crucial element in the prohibition of marijuana in the United States and Canada - perhaps *the* crucial element - is the fact that historically, marijuana has been most closely associated with cultural and ethnic groups that have traditionally been marginalized, in both social and economic terms. An examination of marijuana's broader history, beginning much earlier and further abroad than twentieth century North America (cultivation of the marijuana plant having originated somewhere in Neolithic central Asia), reveals that it has been widely accepted and utilized by many distinctly non-White, non-European cultures, especially by peasants, labourers, artists and artisans, and members of the lower classes. These traditional cultural associations have figured prominently in both its legal prohibition as well as in the popular images and perceptions of the substance itself (its drug form in particular) and of marijuana use and users in general. Many different meanings have historically been attached to marijuana use, but perhaps most predominant among those in circulation through twentieth-century North American popular discourse is the way in which it has signified an engagement with the Other, the alien and the outsider, the disenfranchised.

It is my contention that marijuana prohibition exists, at its core - and has persistently endured - as a manifestation of cultural hegemony. That is, rather than merely serving its ostensible functions as a safeguard on public health or a means of forestalling or regulating potential criminal activity, the criminalization of marijuana and its users instead essentially reflects a certain 'establishment', or hegemonic, disdain for lifestyles and (sub)cultural activities deemed to be offensive or harmful in some way to mainstream or establishment

interests. Marijuana prohibition is, fundamentally, a means of policing or exercising authority over 'deviant' or otherwise 'socially undesirable' (sub)cultural activity, irrespective of marijuana's effects on public health or safety. The nature of these effects, however - in fact, the very 'nature' of almost every aspect of the cannabis plant itself (of which marijuana denotes the drug form) - are themselves subject to much dispute and the matter of considerable debate.

Thus, as will be demonstrated, the cultural hegemony which marijuana prohibition represents is by no means entirely secure or even stable, and despite its influence over popular discourse, oppositional and contradictory discourses - much of them emanating from subcultural formations closely associated with marijuana - do circulate through popular culture, and even thrive. As will be seen later, millions of North Americans have inhaled marijuana smoke despite (and perhaps to some degree because of) its illicit status, and in the 1990s marijuana, in several manifestations, has attained a level of visibility in popular culture comparable to - perhaps even exceeding - that of the 1960s. Thus, the particular popular myths upon which marijuana prohibition has depended, and through which it has largely been sustained, might well be crumbling somewhat. And yet, a definite stigma remains attached to the act of inhaling such an illicit substance (as Clinton himself, of course, could attest). Ostracization, through stereotypification and demonization of the user and, more seriously, penal incarceration and criminalization, is often the end result of such violation of the ascribed norms of cultural hegemony. In the face of mounting evidence indicating not only marijuana's relative lack of harm but potential health benefits, and establishing the serious questionability of linking it causally to criminal or violent behaviour, one *must*, I feel,

recognize and re-evaluate the cultural aspects of both marijuana use and prohibition in order to fairly consider what legal and social status should reasonably be applied to its cultivation and use. What part, for example, has racism played in the prohibition of marijuana? How might certain class or ethnic associations figure in the particular legal classification of marijuana as an illicit substance? These and other questions circumscribed within a cultural context will be a primary concern to be addressed by this paper.

The project of this thesis, then, is to focus on the many ways in which marijuana has been signified and put into discourse in North America, through an examination of various cultural-historical aspects of marijuana use, and the origins of its use and prohibition in North America in particular. Any consideration of marijuana's place within North American society, any debate concerning its relative harms and benefits, and thus its proper legal status, must take into account the cultural aspects of its use throughout its history, both in North America and worldwide. And yet, despite an increasingly visible debate which has emerged with respect to marijuana, the context of that discourse has for the most part remained exceedingly narrow and exclusive in its focus on legal and medical/scientific issues, neglecting the integral cultural dimensions of marijuana use. I will attempt to demonstrate that the popular discourses and the processes of mythification through which marijuana use in twentieth-century North America has been largely defined have been primarily influenced by its legal prohibition, but have also been significantly shaped by many opposing, often contradictory discourses. The historical specifics of the origins of its prohibition in the United States, the particular hegemonic and subcultural 'players' of that era, are thus especially germane, and have been the primary influence on Canadian prohibition as well.

This history, and that which predated it, will thus be examined later in some detail.

What the ingestion of marijuana, through smoking in particular, thus signifies, and how it signifies, for both users and detractors, will be of special interest for this project. With this in mind, the work of several cultural theorists will be referred to in order to provide some theoretical perspective on marijuana's cultural significance - specifically, Dick Hebdige, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Avital Ronell. Hebdige shall be useful in the examination of the ideologies and machinations of hegemony and the ways in which subcultures (for our purposes, those which are culturally associated with marijuana in particular) form and develop in resistance to the 'cultural status quo'; Barthes, for an examination of how marijuana and marijuana users have been represented through the mythifications of popular discourse; Foucault, with respect to the ways in which relations of power are expressed through discourse and affirmed in modes of discipline; and Avital Ronell shall provide a useful perspective on the political significations of 'being-on-drugs', of 'being high'.

To begin, however, it is the perspective of a poet to which I defer in order to establish a starting point for discussion, for Allen Ginsberg once provocatively characterized marijuana prohibition as a cultural *taboo*, and argued that this was a crucial point in fully understanding what is at issue in the debates over marijuana use. Chapter One will introduce and elucidate the concept of marijuana-prohibition-as-cultural-taboo as it was first argued by Allen Ginsberg. Having thus assessed its relevance to the issues at hand, I will endeavour to expand upon Ginsberg's provocative assertion in order to establish a contextual framework for examining the histories of marijuana, its use and its prohibition, and the significance of

the interplay between (sub)cultures and hegemonic institutions within those histories.

In Chapter Two, I will take a closer look at the plant itself - the centre of the storm, so to speak - and its cultural status as popular icon, so as to better inform the reader of the literal substance of the issue. In Chapter Three, I will contextualize the cultural issues surrounding marijuana use in broad historical terms, beyond the restrictive parameters circumscribed by the usual, virtually ahistorical accounts of marijuana, which often only vaguely allude to a past supposedly rooted in the counterculture of the 1960s.

In contrast to the broad contextualization of Chapter Three, Chapter Four serves as a sort of case study (albeit still somewhat broad in scope), an examination of the political interplay between a cultural hegemony and an artistic subculture. It will focus on aspects of the association with marijuana amongst the artistic communities of early jazz music, and the responses by hegemonic intstitutions (government and the media in particular) to this and other cultural associations, primarily through anti-marijuana publicity campaigns and the establishment of legal prohibitions.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will touch upon the contemporary social and legal status of marijuana and its users, its aficionados and its foes, and attempt to reveal something of the contemporary *zeitgeist* with respect to illicit drugs in general, and marijuana in particular. I will also reflect on how the work of those aformentioned cultural theorists might be of some value in providing a useful perspective on what marijuana use 'means', and how cultural considerations might affect and inform our popular perceptions of marijuana use and its users.

Chapter One

'Several Breaths Necessary to Feel the Effect'[18]: Marijuana, Prohibition and Their 'Meanings' Through Myth, Signification and Discourse

"Just Say No"[19] / *"Just Say Know"*[20]

Just about around the time that Oxford student Bill Clinton may or may not have been inhaling the sweet, pungent smoke of a marijuana joint, Allen Ginsberg, who had just recently risen to prominence in the political and social turbulence of the 1960s, was struggling philosophically with the subject of marijuana prohibition, and by extension the control and prohibition of various other activities and lifestyles deemed to be illicit or counter to public interests. The celebrated Beat poet and social activist addressed this state of affairs vis-a-vis marijuana in an essay entitled "First Manifesto to End the Bringdown" (part of which was written while under the 'influence' of marijuana), first published in David Solomon's seminal text, *The Marihuana Papers*, and printed in part in *Atlantic Monthly Magazine*. Arguing against marijuana prohibition and decrying the ignorance of those individuals (most of whom, he suggests, have likely never inhaled) who establish, defend and enforce such punitive restrictions, Ginsberg makes a rather provocative assertion: that the American prohibition of marijuana may be seen, "in some respects ... as an arbitrary cultural taboo".[21]

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[18] Ginsberg 185.

[19] Slogan of the Reagan Administration's National Drug Control Strategy.

[20] 'Pro-pot movement' slogan.

[21] Ginsberg 191.

On this point, Ginsberg has hit a nerve. His characterization of the nature of marijuana's status within contemporary North American society is particularly intriguing, for it serves to illuminate a central aspect of marijuana's peculiar cultural status in our society: both relatively (and enduringly) popular, and at the same time, strangely unfamiliar, mysterious, and even threatening. Such a dichotomy is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's description of the concept of taboo in *Totem and Taboo*: "For us the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us, sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean."[22] Ginsberg points out that,

> All India is familiar with ganja, and so is all Africa, and so is all the Arab world; and so were Paris and London in smaller measure in high-minded but respectable 19th-century circles; and so on a larger scale is America even now. Young and old millions perhaps smoke marijuana and see no harm.[23]

But as Bill Clinton's experience with marijuana - or, more specifically, the experience of publicly admitting past marijuana use - demonstrates, a definite stigma remains attached - in North America, at least - both to the act of smoking marijuana as well as the mere discussion of such experience. Whether it is proper or accurate to describe marijuana prohibition as a taboo or not, it is certain that beneath the relatively lighthearted scorn and derision with which Bill Clinton's admission is often treated, there lurks, as in much humour, a darker side. As is remarked in the Addiction Research Foundation's *Cannabis, Health and*

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[22] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, transl. Dr. A.A. Brill (New York: Vintage Books, 1918) 26.

[23] Ginsberg 191.

Public Policy, this humour "is perhaps lost on the hundreds of thousands of Canadians with criminal records for cannabis possession".[24] Marijuana's enduring worldwide popularity, its widespread historical use in ritual, agricultural, industrial, therapeutic, and 'recreational' applications, and its relative lack of harm, do not appear to have significantly mitigated or influenced the punitive measures adopted by many North American constituencies in attempts to restrict and control its use.[25] Freud provides us with an insight into an aspect of taboo which is thus key: "something like the concept of reserve inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions". For those criminally convicted of marijuana possession, the repercussions of such expression are of course explicitly manifest; "The violation of a taboo makes the offender himself taboo".[26]

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[24] ARF 1.

[25] According to the Addiction Research Foundation, in *Cannabis, Health and Public Policy* (Dec. 1996), for example, "By any accounting, the impact of health problems linked to cannabis is much less than that resulting from alcohol or tobacco use."(4) Further,

> We know from an extensive body of research that cannabis use carries with it health and safety risks; however, these risks increase disproportionately with the amount, pattern and frequency of use. ... The current legal framework imposes high costs on society and on individuals without clear evidence that it contributes to reducing either the harm resulting from cannabis or its use. (7-8)

[26] Freud 29.

These repercussions are indeed real and significant, and should not be underestimated: Today, according to Eric Schlosser, who cites statistics provided by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and the United States Sentencing Commission,

> ... one of every six inmates in the [U.S.] federal prison system - roughly 15,000 people - has been incarcerated primarily for a marijuana offense. The number currently being held in state prisons and local jails is more difficult to estimate; a conservative guess would be an additional 20,000 to 30,000.

("Reefer Madness", *Atlantic Monthly*, Aug. 1994: 46.)

While the rate of prosecution of marijuana offenses in Canada is less, the statutory

Nonetheless, as Ginsberg himself points out, millions of Americans (and Canadians as well) have tried marijuana - and, presumably, inhaled.[27] Given the relatively large number of people who have smoked marijuana, coupled with an increasingly visible debate today surrounding marijuana and various other illicit drugs, Ginsberg's assertion that marijuana prohibition exists as a form of taboo is thus problematic. That the use of marijuana might at once be relatively widespread and visible, the subject of considerable discourse, and yet tabooed, is nothing less than a paradox. It would appear, in fact, especially in our

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criminalization of marijuana in this country is likewise based on a prohibitionist foundation, and marijuana figures disproportionately in drug-related crime statistics. According to the Addiction Research Foundation, in *Cannabis, Health and Public Policy*,

> Since 1965, there have been about 700,000 criminal convictions for cannabis possession [in Canada]. ... Despite concerns about 'harder' drugs such as heroin and cocaine, 64 per cent of 37,678 charges for drug-related crimes in 1995 involved cannabis, and the number of these charges was rising in some areas after a period of decline. ... Canada continues to spend the bulk of its drug enforcement dollars on cannabis possession. (5)

[27] In Canada, "In 1994, seven per cent of Canadians 15 years and older reported using cannabis during the previous year while roughly one in four had used it at some point in their lives." (Addiction Research Foundation, *Cannabis, Health and Public Policy*, Dec. 1996, 1.) In the United States,

> In 1997, an estimated 11.1 million Americans were current (past month) marijuana/hashish users. This represents 5.1% of the population age 12 and older. ... Marijuana is by far the most commonly used illicit drug. In 1997, approximately 80% of current illicit drug users were marijuana/hashish users. ... In 1997 there were an estimated 6.4 million frequent marijuana users, defined as use on at least 51 days during the past year. This represents a rate of 3.0% of the population age 12 and over.

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Adminstration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Preliminary Results from the 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*, 16.)

contemporary era, in which marijuana prohibition appears more controversial than in even the 1960s, and the possibility of legal reform seems much more likely, that such a contradiction is irreconcilable. Of what value, then, is Ginsberg's argument? Ginsberg, as noted, draws our attention to the contradictions and inconsistensies which characterize much of the discourse which circulates through contemporary North American popular culture regarding marijuana use. And the notion of taboo resonates with the larger issues at the core of this thesis project - the struggles, through discourse and representation, between forces of hegemony and subculture. The concept of taboo may point up certain aspects of marijuana prohibition; certainly, it shall be seen that there is indeed some element of taboo embedded in fundamental aspects of its North American incarnation.

Michel Foucault's work on sexuality offers a useful perspective on such a dilemma. Foucault's characterization of his own agenda in describing issues surrounding "the notion of repressed sex" resonates with some of the apparent contradictions of discussing a drug which is at once of relatively high profile in contemporary popular discourse and subject to widespread use, despite being the object of various forms of regulation and restrictions - not the least of which, of course, are the legal prohibitions applied to the possession of marijuana. In an examination of what he terms the "repressive hypothesis" regarding discourses on sexuality, Foucault declares that,

> ... my aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the

> powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.[28]

Much like Foucault in discussing sex and its ostensible repression, we must reconcile the notion of marijuana regulation and restrictions with the fact that there is, nonetheless, widespread use of the drug, reflected in and by a surfeit of discourse on drugs and drug use in our society. And today, it seems, marijuana is perhaps one of the most widely discussed of illicit drugs. As Avital Ronell points out,

> The contagious spread of the entity described as drugs is discursively manifest. Drugs cannot be placed within the frontiers of traditional disciplines: anthropology, biology, chemistry, politics, medicine, or law, could not, solely on the strength of their repective epistemologies, claim to contain or counteract them. While everywhere dealt with, drugs act as a radically nomadic parasite let loose from the will of language.[29]

The central question is thus not merely whether marijuana is a subject 'open to discussion'; rather, it is a matter of what marijuana use signifies within our culture, and how it signifies. Likewise, the question of whether marijuana prohibition may appropriately be described as a taboo does not hinge so much on the degree to which it has been violated (though this may indeed bring into question the efficacy of such a taboo), but rather on the social effects and consequences of inhaling (or otherwising consuming) to the marijuana user - who is, through the regulation of prohibition, also effectively placed in the position of self-regulator - and the justifications proffered for such effects. We must therefore endeavour,

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[28] Michel Foucault, "We 'Other Victorians'", from *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, Rpt. in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 297.

[29] Ronell 52.

like Foucault with respect to sexuality, not only

> ... to account for the fact that it is spoken about, [but] to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the overall 'discursive fact,' the way in which [in our case, marijuana] ... is 'put into discourse.'[30]

And what is most crucial to our consideration of the ways in which marijuana is 'put into discourse' are the ways in which its prohibition (and thus the criminalization of the marijuana user) has put limits on or defined the parameters of that discourse, and influenced the ways in which marijuana and its users have been perceived within North American popular culture.

Alien Weed

Allen Ginsberg's allusion, noted earlier, to the cross-cultural, global nature of marijuana use, its acceptance in many varied cultures, points up one of the central elements in its prohibition in North American society. Many observers have noted that marijuana's traditional cultural associations, rather than serving as validation of its usefulness and popular appeal, has historically been a factor in the very prohibitions through which its use, and indeed much of its popular significations, have been primarily regulated in North America. As Bonnie and Whitebread argue in *The Marihuana Conviction*,

> It seems clear that the introduction of marihuana-smoking into the United States came not from Europe, which transmitted the fiber, oil, and medicinal uses of hemp, but from Asia and Africa by way of South and Central America, particularly Mexico and the West Indies. This fact has had a substantial impact on the

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[30] Foucault, "We 'Other Victorians'", 299.

> perspective with which the policy-making establishment - legislators, press, governmental agencies, and private opinion makers - have viewed the drug and its effects.[31]

As mentioned in the introduction, a crucial element in the prohibition of marijuana - perhaps *the* crucial element - is the fact that early in this century, and continuing for decades, marijuana was popularly associated with marginalized groups: especially Mexicans, as well as "Negroes, prostitutes, pimps and a criminal class of whites"[32] - not to mention jazz musicians, who, as will be explored later in this paper, were at one time singled out by anti-marijuana legislators and crusaders as criminals for their use of marijuana. Such racial and class distinctions would in turn contribute to the confusion which then, as now, surrounded the drug itself.

Legal classification of marijuana in the United States has always been subject to much dispute, for the drug has long been legally classified as a 'narcotic', though this is not scientifically accurate:

> This classification emerged primarily from the drug's alien character. Although use of some drugs - alcohol and tobacco - was indigenous to American life, the use of 'narcotics' for pleasure was not. Evidently, drugs associated with ethnic minorities and with otherwise 'immoral' populations were automatically viewed as 'narcotics'.[33]

Here we can see a clear manifestation of what Roland Barthes, in his examination of myth as semiological system, described as "the very principle of myth: it transforms history into

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[31] Richard J. Bonnie and Charles H. Whitebread II, *The Marihuana Conviction: A History of Marihuana Prohibition in the United States* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974) 5.

[32] Bonnie and Whitebread 34.

[33] Bonnie & Whitebread 51.

nature".[34] The somewhat arbitrary historical association of the alien object of the narcotic with the alien subject - the immigrant, the non-White, the criminal, the generally disenfranchised (in other words, the Outsider, the Other) - would, through discourse, be made to seem entirely rational and reasoned: "what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as motive, but as a reason".[35] This is not to suggest that the association of ethnic minorities and "otherwise 'immoral' populations" with narcotics was simply the result of some ideological agenda, an outright distortion of the 'truth'. Rather, I refer here to what Barthes described as "the naturalization of the concept, ... the essential function of myth"; "causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature. This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden - if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious - but because they are naturalized".[36]

Thus, the entire process of stigmatization, in this instance, would become essentially self-justifying, apparently seamless, and virtually invisible to the American public. The myth at issue here was one in which the human subject is 'naturally' rational, and this rationality is somehow threatened by 'altered' states of consciousness. The association of the ethnic or 'immoral' alien with narcotics presented a conception which could only be viewed as threatening and dangerous: "for the myth-reader, ... everything happens as if the picture [here, the image of the 'immoral' ethnic] *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier

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[34] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1973) 140.

[35] Barthes 140.

[36] Barthes 142.

gave a foundation to the signified".[37] Marijuana, associated as it was with ethnic and 'immoral populations', who in turn were associated with narcotics, would indeed be automatically viewed as a narcotic, which in turn was associated with immorality, thus effectively creating a sort of hermetic reality unto itself.

Ginsberg's assertion that the prohibition of marijuana, given its acceptance and popularity throughout various cultures worldwide, may thus be seen as a possibly *arbitrary* cultural taboo is underscored by Freud's observation that "taboo prohibitions lack all justification and are of unknown origin. Though incomprehensible to us they are taken as a matter of course by those who are under their dominance."[38] Here, those who espouse a 'Just Say No' approach regarding illicit drug use immediately spring to mind. Yet marijuana prohibition does not precisely follow Freud's definition of taboo: justifications for prohibition have indeed been proffered by governments, news media, the judiciary, and other concerns; and the origins of prohibition, though clouded by myth, legend and misinformation, can in fact - with some effort - be tentatively traced out (thus, Ginsberg's qualification, "in some respects ..."). And of course, as mentioned previously, a not insignificant portion of the North American population have not been deterred from inhaling by the supposed existence of a mere taboo.

As such, marijuana prohibition might well be considered to be what Freud described as a "moral prohibition" - to be distinguished from taboo restriction - being included as it is "in a system which declares abstinences in general to be necessary and gives reasons for this

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[37] Barthes 140-141.

[38] Freud 27.

necessity".[39] However, justification for the criminalization of marijuana and those who use it, and for the punitive measures thereby imposed, has been, it shall be seen, tenuous at best. Likewise, the origins of marijuana prohibition, though not unknown *per se*, are largely unclear and, for all intents and purposes, forgotten or neglected. And certainly, the restrictions imposed under marijuana prohibition have been "taken as a matter of course by those who are under their dominance."[40] That marijuana prohibition, considering the available evidence, *cannot* be taken as a matter of course is a central argument of this thesis. It will be demonstrated in the chapters to follow that marijuana has not always been subject to such regulation; in fact, it has been embraced, to varying degrees, by many cultures, over thousands of years, in a wide variety of manifestations and applications.

Intoxication through the inhalation of marijuana smoke is but one such use, albeit the most notorious in our contemporary context. This notoriety, reflected in and by marijuana's illicit status, however, has proved to be an effective impediment to serious and open discussion among citizens, lawmakers, and researchers regarding its true nature. As John Strausbaugh puts it, "A lot of history often winds up being overlooked or intentionally dropped in drug hysterical discourse."[41] Neglect of marijuana's cultural history has undoubtedly contributed to the propagation of misconceptions regarding the plant and its products, particularly its manifestation as a drug. Fear of the unknown and the alien has always been a crucial element in the demonization of marijuana and its users. From the first

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[39] Freud 27.

[40] Freud 27.

[41] John Strasbaugh, introduction, *The Drug User: Documents 1840-1960*, John Strausbaugh and Donald Blaise, eds., (New York: Blast Books, 1991) xvii.

introduction of marijuana-as-intoxicant to the United States by itinerant Mexican farm workers, marijuana's cultural associations have been disparaged and exploited in various attempts to regulate and restrict the use of marijuana and other drugs.

The demonization of Mexican immigrants and their use of marijuana in turn-of-the-century America is but one example of how drugs such as marijuana have often functioned as a locus of cultural anxiety over a variety of social and political issues. Such cultural anxiety has been manifest in a myriad of ways with respect to marijuana, from the persecution of ethnic and racial minorities, and, in turn, jazz musicians, in the 'reefer madness' of zealous anti-marijuana campaigns of the earlier part of this century, to the contemporary 'war(s) on drugs' waged by each successive American president since Richard Nixon in the early 1970s. Historically speaking, marijuana is probably most commonly associated, in North America at least, with the 1960s counterculture. Much has been written on this period with respect to drug use and its social implications - so much so that for the parameters of this project, our focus shall be on the history of marijuana use prior to the 1960s. I defer here to John Strausbaugh, co-editor of *The Drug User: Documents 1840-1960,* for justification of a pre-1960s historical focus:

> ... Before, that is, the modern era of drug use and drug hysteria. ... You can read all that elsewhere. It's practically all you can read about drug use. America has a short memory. Media and politicians focus our attention on today's top stories. It's not hard to forget that popular drug use was *not* invented by hippies. That in fact drug use has been a constant in American history for many decades, in western civilization for centuries, and stretches back to the earliest traces of human consciousness.[42]

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[42] Strausbaugh xvi.

The history of marijuana is, for all intents and purposes - in North America, at least - a largely forgotten one. And this must be attributed, to a large degree, to the dominant significations of marijuana, its use and users, which have come to largely define its meanings within popular discourase. Perhaps, then, as the debates surrounding the marijuana plant and its products - particularly its drug form - begin to heat up at the end of the twentieth century, a certain re-contextualization is in order. Perhaps, as significant change to the status quo with respect to marijuana seems increasingly inevitable, it is time to look back, far beyond the 1960s, to the beginnings of the twentieth century, and even further still to ancient China and India, in order to understand more fully just what is - or should be - at issue. This will be the primary aim of Chapter Three, but in order to put this history itself into proper perspective, certain fundamental issues must first be addressed. In fact, any serious discussion about marijuana - inhaled by millions, misunderstood by many more - must really begin with a simple question: Just what is marijuana?

Chapter Two

Cannabis Sativa/Cannabis Indica: Plant and Icon

"The leaves are arranged in rows around the stalk, at equal distances apart, with five or seven in a row; for Nature so cherishes the Pantagruelion that she has endowed its leaves with those two odd numbers, which are so divine and mysterious."[43]

'Marijuana' is the most widely used name of the weedlike plant more formally known as cannabis, and historically more commonly referred to as hemp or Indian hemp. (Hereafter, the term cannabis will be used to refer to the plant itself, while marijuana denotes the drug form, and hemp indicates cannabis grown for industrial purposes; many of the sources cited, however, use these and various other terms interchangeably.) It is the cannabis leaf which is undoubtedly the most widely recognized aspect of the plant, an icon as familiar, perhaps, as the peace sign (and often associated with it). In the quotation above, Francois Rabelais describes the leaves of a fictional version of the cannabis plant, which he endows with the name of the work's giant hero, Pantagruel, "out of resemblance".[44] The odd number of leaves, "so divine and mysterious", seems to hold little symbolic significance today, but there is no doubt that the leaf's form -"lanceolate, serrated, unequal leaves (which) fan out radially from the stalk ... and somewhat resemble those of a poinsettia"[45] - has acquired the iconic status evoked by Rabelais' mythical description.

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[43] Francois Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, Book III, transl. Samuel Putnam (Paris: Covici-Friede,1929), rpt. in Solomon, 107.

[44] Rabelais, rpt. in Solomon, 114.

[45] Lester Grinspoon, M.D., *Marihuana Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) 33.

Today, the cannabis leaf has become a common sight, emblazoned upon hats and t-shirts and the like, defiantly announcing the wearer's affinity for a substance whose use is forbidden. One is reminded of Dick Hebdige's observations on the construction and manifestations of subcultural identity in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*:

> ... the most mundane objects ... take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile. ... On the one hand, they warn the 'straight' world in advance of a sinister presence - the presence of difference - and draw down upon themselves vague suspicions, uneasy laughter, 'white and dumb rages'. On the other hand, for those who erect them into icons, who use them as words or as curses, these objects become signs of forbidden identity, sources of value.[46]

In contrast with the mundane objects to which Hebdige refers as examples to illustrate his point - "a safety pin, a pointed shoe, a motor cycle ..."[47], the cannabis leaf might appear in some respects as something more otherworldly than mundane, but it is important to remember that cannabis, particularly in its hemp manifestation, has been, for centuries, ubiquitous throughout much of the world, including the West. This fact may well be lost on the typical (if such a thing exists) wearer of a pot-leaf cap, but given the leaf's high recognition factor as well as the illicit status of the drug which it represents, cannabis fashion serves to imbue the wearer with a certain subcultural cachet such as described by Hebdige. And at any rate, as Hebdige argues, "the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the

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[46] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979) 2-3.

[47] Hebdige 2.

contradictions displayed ... at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs"[48].

Some might question to what extent Bill Clinton's experimentation might have effected the subcultural 'value', the strength of the expressed "challenge to hegemony", of displaying the cannabis leaf on one's person. In an article in *Newsweek*, for example, the new fashionability of marijuana is dismissively described as being representative of "style abuse more than actual substance abuse. The leaf icon, once a rebel image, now seems almost benign: even the new president and vice-president have indulged."[49] The authors of the *Newsweek* article, in their dismissive tone, appear unwilling or unable to recognize the inherent mutability of the relationship that exists between the superficial and the substantial, particularly as it is manifest in subcultural style. The relative mutability of the signifier does not necessarily imply the loss of symbolic power. As Hebdige points out, the apparent contradictions of and breakdowns in subcultural expression should not be equated with loss or absence of meaning, for,

> forms cannot be permanently normalized ... commodities can be symbolically 'repossessed' in everyday life, and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings, by the very groups who originally produced them. ... [T]here are ... always 'objections and contradicitions which hinder the closing of the circuit' between sign and object, production and reproduction.[50]

That the signification of the leaf icon, "once a rebel image" (here, the *Newsweek*

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[48] Hebdige 17.

[49] Ned Zeman and Donna Foote, "Turning Over a New, Old Leaf: An Unfashionable Icon Comes Back In Fashion", *Newsweek* Feb. 8 1993: 60.

[50] Hebdige 16, 17.

authors most likely have the image of the counterculture hippie in mind), has changed - most certainly due in part to the relatively newfound association with contrite politicians - goes without saying, but whether this robs the cannabis leaf of any significant symbolic power is highly disputable. The fact that Clinton and Gore have 'indulged', quite contrary to draining the icon of its symbolic power, merely serves to exacerbate the fracturing and mutation of the meaning of signs which circulate around the object, for, to again refer to Hebdige: "The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is ... always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life".[51] The fact that Clinton's indulgence, by his own account, only went so far, stopping short of inhaling and thus fully engaging with its subcultural signification, might itself be seen as a point of pride in demonstrating one's affinity for the substance. To display the cannabis leaf is to in effect declare that one *does* inhale.

Jive

While the cannabis leaf may be instantly recognizable to many observers, most probably know little about the plant itself. Given cannabis' many manifestations, and the many uses in many forms to which cannabis has been applied, it is little wonder that there might be some confusion regarding its nature, and that information on its diverse characteristics might be often lacking. Confusion regarding its manifestation as a drug in

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[51] Hebdige 17.

particular might well have stemmed initially from the very proliferation of names attached to it:

> The names borne by various hemp intoxicants read like a gazetteer. In India the hemp drug is called *bhang*, *ganja*, and *charas* (*churrus*); in Algeria and Morocco, *kif*; in South Africa, *dagga*; in Brazil, *machona* or *liamba;* in Turkey, *kabak*; in Tunisia, *takrouri*; in Central Africa, *djoma*; in Syria and Lebanon, *Hashish el Keif*.[52]

In the English language alone there is a staggering array of colloquialisms that have been used to describe marijuana. In fact, the *Marijuana Dictionary* lists one hundred forty-five synonyms for the term (not including words used to describe variations on the drug form - foreign, domestic, high and low potency, etc. - as well as the plant itself).[53] Some of the most familiar terms include pot, reefer, grass, tea, and weed; some of the more colourful names applied to marijuana include gage, mootah, muggles, mezz, boo, bud, the kind, Mary Jane and Mary Warner. The proliferation of names attached to the cannabis plant, its drug form in particular, is a clear indication of its considerable cultural impact, as ethnobotanist Terence McKenna argues:

> The thousands of names by which cannabis is known in hundreds of languages are testament not only to its cultural history and ubiquity but also its power to move the language-making faculty of the poetic soul. ... [These names] were the mantras of an experientially oriented underclass religion that worshipped a jolly green goddess.[54]

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[52] Grinspoon 32.

[53] Ernest L. Abel, *A Marihuana Dictionary: Words, Terms, Events, and Persons Relating to Cannabis* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982) 132-133.

[54] Terence K. McKenna, *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge: A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bantam

McKenna's reference to religion is not mere hyperbole. As will be demonstrated in the chapter to follow on marijuana's place within various cultures throughout history, beginning in antiquity, cannabis played a part in the folk ritual and religious ceremonies of several cultures.

Etymology of the term 'marijuana' has not been precisely determined, though according to the *Dictionary of Marijuana*, the word is "most likely derived from the Mexican-Spanish mariguana, meaning 'intoxicant'".[55] The name was first widely popularized in North America by William Randolph Hearst's newspapers. Ironically, the Mexican term was used by the notoriously racist Hearst in an attempt to demonize the drug and its users through association with immigrant Mexicans, who, as noted earlier, were at the time often singled out as scapegoats for a variety of America's social problems.[56] In exploring the motivations for attempts to establish such a determinedly negative association with respect to marijuana and Mexicans, we might benefit from reflecting upon Foucault's observations on the regulation of discourses of sexuality in the seventeenth century: "As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present."[57]

Books, 1992) 150-151.

[55] Abel 66.

[56] Clarence Lusane, *Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs* (Boston: South End Press, 1991) 37. See also McKenna, 165: "William Randolph Hearst popularized the term 'marijuana' with a clear intent of linking it to a mistrusted dark-skinned underclass."

[57] Michel Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis", from *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, Rpt. in *The Foucault Reader*, 301.

Hearst's particular motivations with respect to popularizing and demonizing 'marijuana' were in a significant way simply pragmatic, an attempt to "gain mastery over it in reality", for the newspaper baron had a special, vested interest in facilitating the demise of hemp as a large-scale commercial product:

> ... hemp's use as a high-quality paper substitute threatened the lumber and newspaper industries controlled by Hearst, especially after the invention of state-of-the-art, affordable hemp stripping machines in the 1930s. The USDA was predicting that hemp would be the number-one crop in America, and even as late as 1938, one year after marijuana was outlawed, *Popular Mechanics* referred to hemp as the $1 billion crop. Hearst, along with the Dupont chemical companies, which had just invented a wood pulp process of their own, formed an alliance to outlaw hemp.[58]

The use of the term 'marijuana' did undoubtedly play some part in the demise of large-scale hemp production, for "few realized until it was too late that the evil marijuana cigarette being attacked in the Hearst papers and by federal authorities was the same hemp plant that had provided so many useful and essential products for decades".[59] The racist connotations of the word's American 'origins', however, would eventually fade from public consciousness, and 'marijuana' would instead gain a popularity within the English language likely unimagined by Hearst. The word has, in fact, become readily accepted now as standard English terminology for the drug, virtually shedding its alien status.

Cannabis

Generally considered to be one of the oldest cultivated plants known to humanity,

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[58] Lusane 37.

[59] Lusane 37.

cannabis is also one of the planet's most widely dispersed plant species, having been, over several thousands of years, disseminated the world over through human agency. It can be found on every continent but Antarctica, in a wide range of climates and growing conditions. Its broad dissemination is largely owing to the fact that, in botanical terms, cannabis is characterized by "extraordinary plasticity and variability" in cultivation, making it a multi-purpose, commercially important plant.[60] It is very hardy and adaptable, growing rapidly and aggressively, encroaching upon and stifling the growth of neighbouring plants.

Cannabis is closely related to the hop plant, one of beer's main ingredients, and is also akin to the fig tree and the stinging nettle. It was first scientifically classified as *Cannabis sativa* (L.) in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus, in the *Species plantarum*, the internationally accepted basis for modern botanical nomenclature.[61] While cannabis is often categorized as monotypic, a distinct species - *cannabis indica* - has been widely recognized (as early as 1783, by Lamarck). The polytypic concept vis-a-vis cannabis species has not, however, been universally accepted. Interestingly, while much of the academic literature on cannabis/ marijuana treats the plant as a monotypic species, most if not all 'underground' literature on marijuana horticulture assumes the polytypic categorization as the standard. Indeed, a not insignificant amount of this literature devotes a great deal of attention to weighing the various pros and cons of the different characteristics of *cannabis sativa* versus *cannabis indica*.[62]

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[60] Richard Evans Schultes et al., "Cannabis: An Example of Taxonomic Neglect", in Vera Rubin, ed., *Cannabis and Culture* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975) 21.

[61] William T. Stearn, "Typification of *Cannabis sativa* L.", in Rubin, 13.

[62] See, for example, *Marijuana Growers Guide*, Mel Frank and Ed Rosenthal; *Marijuana Botany*, R.C. Clarke; *Indoor Marijuana Horticulture*, Jorge Cervantes; etc.

Polytypic or not, the plant does feature several varieties, the appearances and certain characteristics of which may vary considerably, depending on plant genetics and the conditions in which the plant is grown. Some of these characteristics can be readily manipulated by the grower, though plant genetics are of course fundamental. Cannabis may mature at a height anywhere between one and twenty feet. Hot, dry conditions will generally result in a relatively shorter, bushier plant which (if genetically predisposed; hemp, generally speaking, is not) produces a protective resin containing marijuana's primary intoxicating substances. Milder, more humid conditions will tend to result in a relatively taller, more fibrous plant which produces less resin. The latter form is generally referred to as hemp, whereas the former is preferred by those seeking intoxicating effects. Various strains have been developed by growers in order to produce plants with the desired effect - whether the strong fibre of hemp or the intoxication of highly resinous 'pot'.

Hemp

Cannabis has long been utilized as a source of strong fibre, obtained from the long hollow stem of the plant through a process of soaking, beating and stripping the plant known as retting. Among natural fibres, the strength of hemp is apparently "unsurpassed".[63] As a result, hemp has long been highly valued as a material in the production of many textiles, especially rope. Hemp was so familiar as rope material that the terms became synonymous.[64] So favoured was hemp by executioners that the hangman's noose was often referred to as a

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[63] Abel 50.

[64] Abel 50.

"hempen necktie" (or collar, garter, halter, and so on); lynchings were often described as hemp parties; "to die of hempen fever was to be hanged".[65]

Though hemp is just now, in the 1990s, experiencing a certain renaissance and returning to a small measure of the profile it once had, this newfound prominence is relatively inconsequential in comparison to its onetime ubiquitous status. Its ubiquity, in fact, cannot be overstated; Bill Clinton, after all, was not even the first president to come into contact with cannabis. This distinction belongs, in fact, to the very first American president, George Washington. Washington grew hemp at his plantation in Mount Vernon, Virginia, primarily for fibre.[66] At the time, hemp was especially important to the shipping and sailing industry, since nearly all ships' sails, rigging, ropes and nets were made from hemp. It was also widely used in the manufacture of clothing.

Hemp was, for a time, a vital crop of the American colonies, considered so important to many states' economies that in some places authorities offered considerable incentives for high production and imposed penalties upon those who did not grow it. Thus many plantations such as Washington's produced hemp. Richard Clayton, in *Marijuana in the 'Third World': Appalachia, U.S.A.*, notes, however, that Washington "was interested in separating the male plants from the female before pollination, presumably to increase their potency. This suggests that George Washington may have been growing hemp for other purposes, perhaps its presumed medicinal qualities."[67] Evidence for such usage by

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[65] Abel 50.

[66] Solomon xiv.

[67] Richard R. Clayton, *Marijuana in the 'Third World': Appalachia, U.S.A.* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995) 6.

Washington or any of the settlers is sketchy, though, and so we can only speculate as to whether the first president of the United States ever inhaled.

Herb

Cannabis has long been used in food preparations, particularly in the form of cakes and sweetmeats in which cannabis resin preparations are combined with various spices and condiments. These confections are especially popular in India, Turkey, and North Africa.[68] Cannabis has also been used as food for birds as well as humans; the seeds apparently developed a reputation among bird fanciers for improving plumage, and making songbirds more vocal.[69] The oil which cannabis seeds contain, rich in fatty acids, has also been used for lighting and in the manufacture of linoleum, soap, varnish, lacquer, and paints.

Cannabis has been utilized for therapeutic purposes for almost as long as it has been cultivated. Medical use in India, according to Khwaja Hasan, predates written records[70]; Hui-Lin Li, a contributor to *Cannabis and Culture*, maintains that "the first documented medical uses of cannabis in China, in an herbal text of the second century A.D., chronicles oral traditions passed down from prehistoric times, based on archaeological, botanical and linguistic evidence".[71] Recognized and noted in the nineteenth century in the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia and National Formulary*, the therapeutic properties of the plant were utilized

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[68] Grinspoon 40.

[69] Grinspoon 34.

[70] Khwaja A. Hasan, "Social Aspects of the Use of Cannabis in India", Rubin 243.

[71] Hui-Lin Li, "The Origin and Use of Cannabis in Eastern Asia: Their Linguistic-Cultural Implications", Rubin 51.

in the United States as early as 1839, and cannabis' legitimate use as a medicine was "familiar" in the U.S. until the late 1930s.[72] In Canada, though its medical use was not widespread, medicinal cannabis preparations were in use until "relatively recently"; according to Green and Miller, "Several over-the-counter remedies (primarily cough syrups, sleeping potions and corn removers) were available until 1939, and cannabis-containing medicines were produced for prescription use until 1954".[73] (Non-medical use of cannabis was made illegal in Canada by the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act of 1923.)

Today, the accumulation of evidence on cannabis' therapeutic properties has demonstrated significant potential, according to Dr. Lester Grinspoon of the Harvard Medical School (one of the most prominent proponents of medical marijuana), for use in the treatment of depression, pain, seizures, asthma, and glaucoma, and some promise in the treatment of various other illnesses.[74] Cannabis' appetite-stimulating and nausea-reduction properties have also been shown to be useful in the treatment of cancer patients and people with AIDS.[75] The number of studies in the U.S. and Canada continues to grow, despite some legal obstacles:

> In 1996, voters in two U.S. states passed referenda that would allow physicians to recommend or prescribe marijuana use for severely ill patients, while in 1997, Canada's prohibition on the medical use of cannabis was subjected to challenges in the courts. Marijuana, THC and structurally similar synthetic chemicals are currently under study in the treatment of epilepsy,

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[72] Grinspoon 10.

[73] Melvyn Green and Ralph D. Miller, "Cannabis Use in Canada", Rubin 498-499.

[74] Grinspoon, "Missed Opportunities?: Beneficial Uses of Illicit Drugs", *The Control of Drugs and Drug Users: Reason or Reaction?*, Ross Coomber, ed. (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998) 199-204.

[75] Grinspoon, "Missed Opportunities?..." 201-203.

> wide-angle glaucoma, anorexia nervosa, multiple sclerosis and asthma; for relief of nausea and vomiting produced by cancer chemotherapy; and to combat anorexia among patients with advanced cancer and AIDS.[76]

Marijuana

Of course, what attracts the most attention to cannabis is its intoxicant qualities. It is one of only approximately sixty species of plant known to have been used historically as 'hallucinogens', of which only about twenty plants have been used to any significant extent as an intoxicant.[77] Of these and other intoxicants, marijuana is among the most widely used, "following only tobacco and alcohol in popularity" worldwide.[78] While the leaves and stems of the plant may contain the active substances which produce marijuana's intoxicating effects, it is a sticky resin produced by the plant which is primarily responsible for these effects. This resin is believed to be secreted by the plant in order to protect itself from heat and loss of moisture. It contains many alkaloids, including several unique to the plant which are known as cannabinoids. One of these, delta-9-tetra-hydrocannabinol (THC), is considered to be the substance primarily responsible for cannabis' intoxicating effects.

Both male and female plants (cannabis is dioecious in nature) produce resin, and thus THC, though the male exudes considerably less. Most of the resin is produced at the flowering tops of the plant, of which the female has far more. As such, growers intent on

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[76] Bruna Brands et al., eds., *Drugs and Drug Abuse* (Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1998) 224.

[77] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered* 30-31. Grinspoon here describes a hallucinogen as being a drug "which can produce subjective perceptions of that which does not exist".

[78] Rubin 1.

maximizing the plant's drug potency remove and destroy male plants from their gardens so as to avoid pollination, which inhibits the production of resin. Cannabis resin which is removed from the plant, collected, and rolled or pressed into balls or slabs, is known as hashish (in India, it is referred to as *charas*). Though hashish is usually smoked, the 'classic' method of ingestion requires that the material be eaten. When ingested in this way, the effects of hashish are "comparable to the power of a hallucinogen".[79]

Cannabis is remarkably pliant with respect to its cultivation; the relative ease with which it may be grown, and its form manipulated, has undoubtedly been a significant factor in its popularity as a 'recreational' drug. Because it is so hardy and easy to cultivate, and requires only drying in preparation for smoking, it is a relatively simple matter to produce 'homegrown' marijuana (perhaps the greatest difficulty, or at least concern, being concealment from the authorities). It can also be, as David Solomon points out, "an economical euphoriant: its preparation does not entail fermentation or distillation; hence it is far cheaper to produce than alcoholic beverages."[80] Growing marijuana indoors, however, as is the common practice among North American growers today, can involve considerable expense, at least at the outset, for special lighting, ventilation, hydroponics systems and such. Today's more potent indoor strains are therefore not entirely economical, but growing marijuana outdoors, circumstances permitting, remains a relatively inexpensive endeavour.

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[79] McKenna 150.

[80] Solomon xiv-xv.

Bud

Indoor marijuana cultivation techniques emphasize flowering over vegetative growth; since the flowering tops, or buds, of the plant produce most of the plant's intoxicating resin, such manipulation increases drug potency. Plants are forced to flower early, and prodigiously, through the manipulation of light cycles, nutrients and fertilizers. Male plants are separated from the females and often destroyed, so that the development of the flowering buds of the female plant, and hence, the production of potent resin, will not be inhibited by the process of pollination. The resulting seedless marijuana is known as sinsemilla, from the Spanish for 'without seed'. The result of such growing techniques (and, of course, genetic predisposition) are plants which might be described, as Michael Pollan of the *New York Times Magazine* put it, as "marijuana bonsai - no larger than a patio tomato plant and yet fully mature, their stems bending under the weight of buds thick as fists."[81] Pollan describes such a dried bud, highly prized by marijuana 'fanciers', as looking "like a lump of hairy, dessicated animal scat."[82] Thus, today's more potent strains of marijuana (i.e., those with a higher percentage of THC), grown indoors under strict horticultural regimens, could well be unrecognizable to an 'untrained' eye. Because of the emphasis on flowering rather than vegetative growth, the familiar cannabis leaf may be overwhelmed by the flowering buds of the plant.

Thus, while the cannabis leaf icon remains the most highly visible and most widely

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[81] Michael Pollan, "How Pot Has Grown", *The New York Times Magazine*, Feb. 19 1995, 33.

[82] Pollan 32.

recognized aspect of the plant, a symbol of marijuana subculture in general, the cannabis bud has become the focal point of marijuana subculture's preoccupation with cannabis horticulture. The flowering bud, symbolic of marijuana potency, has become fetishized within the subculture; witness, for example, *High Times Magazine*'s 'Bud of the Month' centerfold, in which plants such as those described above by Michael Pollan are featured, usually in close-up and lit so as to highlight the glistening fluorescent quality of the resin exuded by the plant. And while the leaf figures prominently as icon, a preponderance of leaf on a plant is a sign of lesser quality marijuana, and is thus looked down upon by serious marijuana connoisseurs. High-quality marijuana, with its preponderance of buds, is often trimmed of much of its leaves before sale; these leaf scraps are referred to as 'shake', which may be used as mulch for seedlings, in culinary preparations, sold cheaply (sometimes not so cheaply to naïve buyers), or simply thrown out.

Despite cannabis' illicit status (or perhaps because of it, given the profits generated by an unregulated, high-stakes black market) cannabis horticulture has become an extremely sophisticated enterprise. Perhaps the best evidence of this (certainly the most highly visible) is *High Times Magazine*'s annual Cannabis Cup competition, in which various strains of marijuana developed by Dutch seed companies and distributed by Dutch coffee shops are judged in a number of categories. Hosted each year in and around Amsterdam, the Cannabis Cup was first held in 1988, begun as an attempt "to establish an international standard for marijuana seeds."[83] The inaugural event in 1988 was open only to local seed merchants and was judged by a panel of three. Today, the competition is open to seed companies,

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[83] Steve Bloom, "Smokin' in the Free World", *High Times* April 1993, 44.

independent growers, and coffeeshops, both in Amsterdam and throughout Holland, and is judged by a panel of dozens. The judging panel is now open to any member of the public willing to pay a registration fee.

The Cannabis Cup is held in Amsterdam because of the Netherlands' liberal policies on drug use. While cannabis (marijuana and hashish) is not a legal substance *per se* in Holland, it has been decriminalized since 1976. At that time, marijuana was assigned special status, differentiated from other illegal drugs - so-called 'hard drugs' - which were considered to present unacceptable risks (cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, etc.). Possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use was statutorily decriminalized; the retail sale of marijuana, largely through coffeeshops, remains illegal but this is for the most part not enforced, resulting in *de facto* decriminalization of the Dutch retail market in marijuana. What better place, then, than Amsterdam in which to celebrate the intoxicating effects of marijuana? And the Cannabis Cup is indeed a celebration, perhaps more of the liberating effects of decriminalization than of the drug itself. For the *High Times* contingent, and marijuana users in general, the Netherlands - Amsterdam in particular - is a model for the legalization of marijuana and tolerance of 'soft' drug use.

Participants in the event put out two hundred dollars or more for the opportunity to imbibe and judge as many as two or three dozen samples of marijuana. The competition entries feature names like Skunk #1 (winner of the inaugural event), Early Pearl, Northern Lights, Haze, Afghani, and Kush. As the breeding and cultivation of various strains have become more sophisticated, the competition has been divided into several categories. The varieties are separated by type into three classes: mostly *sativa*, mostly *indica*, and mostly

mixed. There are separate competitions for seed companies and coffeshops, which are further divided into those in Amsterdam and those from elsewhere in Holland. Coffeeshops are also judged in categories such as decor, service, food and ambiance. An overall winner is also announced - a Best in Show, as it were.

Such is the state of the art in marijuana horticulture, and in a way, the state of marijuana subculture (at least its 'upper echelon', if it might be described as such) as well - surprisingly sophisticated, yet falling short of general acceptance and respectability. The Cannabis Cup is an apt reflection of to what degree the North American culture of marijuana has 'evolved' from the popular heyday of the sixties, both literally and figuratively. As Michael Pollan points out, "marijuana growing in America has evolved from a hobby of aging hippies into a burgeoning high-tech industry with earnings that are estimated at $32 billion a year. That makes it easily the nation's biggest cash crop."[84] The evolution of marijuana horticulture only serves to emphasize the relative constancy of its central contemporary signification, the perseverance of the taboo which continues to relegate the most technically sophisticated marijuana grower to the status of criminal Outsider. The genetic sophistication of the modern cultivated plant simply makes its stigmatization all the more pronounced and ironic in a world which so highly values technological wizardry. And the genetic sophistication of those cannabis varieties proudly displayed at the Cannabis Cup must make the marijuana connoisseur's 'self-imposed exile', literally manifest in the competition's Dutch locale, all the more deeply felt.

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[84] Pollan 33.

Chapter Three

Bhang/Hemp/Marijuana: From Ancient Fellowship to Twentieth Century Otherness

"... the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,/ Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus *two hundred and fifty shekels,/ And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil an hin:/ And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil."*[85] (emphasis added)

There was a time - in relative terms not so long ago - when, contrary to the stigmatization and exile of the twentieth-century marijuana user 'mandated' by marijuana prohibition, cannabis was embraced within even North American society-at-large. This was, however, as described earlier, primarily within the context of cannabis' hemp manifestation (recall, for example, that in some jurisdictions of the early American colonies, farmers who did not grow hemp could be subject to considerable penalties), as well as in its medicinal applications. Historically, though, among many other cultures in which cannabis' intoxicant properties were well known, no such regulation or negative signification existed. And yet, by well into the twentieth century, a substance which had once signified a certain fellowship

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[85] *The Holy Bible* (King James version), Exodus 30: 22-25. In "Early Diffusion and Folk Uses of Hemp", Sula Benet maintains that *calamus* (a fragrant marsh plant) is an erroneous translation of the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, in which the term *kaneh bosm* is used:

> The error occurred in the oldest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, in the third century B.C., where the terms *kaneh, kaneh bosm* were incorrectly translated as 'calamus.' And in the many translations that followed, including Martin Luther's, the same error was repeated.

Benet argues further that the Hebrew *kaneh bosm* is more appropriately translated as 'aromatic hemp', and is the term from which the generic term *cannabis* is derived. (in Rubin 40-41)

through its use in both religious and folk ritual would come to signify instead - in North America, at least - an almost entirely oppositional meaning: deviancy, anti-social tendencies, Otherness. A look at the nature of cannabis' acceptance within these various cultures, then, might well shed light on the fundamental character of North American society's prohibition of marijuana and its continuing stigmatization of marijuana users. For while the question of acceptance versus rejection of marijuana might be facilely attributed to a simple disagreement on the essential nature of the substance itself - the signified -, this does not adequately explain the nature of its signification. Manifest in its prohibition, and thus the criminalization of the user, marijuana continues to signify as the 'evil weed' in North American society, a substance which is somehow 'inherently' deviant. As Barthes pointed out, "the mythical signification ... is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy". It shall be seen, in fact, that marijuana's very acceptance in other (more specifically, 'Other') cultures has directly informed its prohibition and its negative signification in North American culture-at-large.

Vera Rubin, whose work on the historical diffusion of cannabis is among the most comprehensive in the literature, proposes that historical use of the plant should be viewed in terms of two major cultural complexes which have encompassed it over time - "a traditional folk stream which reveals remarkable continuity and a contemporary, more circumscribed configuration."[86] According to Rubin,

> The folk stream is multidimensional and multifunctional, involving both sacred and secular use, and is usually based on small-scale cultivation ... the second stream of dispersion, or

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[86] Rubin 3.

> expansion, of cannabis use encompasses two major currents with different functions. The first is based on the use of hemp for commercial manufactures utilizing large-scale cultivation primarily as fiber for mercantile purposes mainly in Russia, Canada and the United States. ... The second current, going back only about a century to the formation of the Club des Hachichins in Paris, is linked mainly to the search for psychedelic experiences.[87]

Rubin describes the first complex, the traditional folk stream, as the '*ganja* complex', and refers to the second, encompassing both the hemp stream and the psychedelic stream, as the 'marihuana complex'. With an understanding of how these complexes and their constituent elements have evolved over time and across cultures, we might gain a keener insight into how and what cannabis use has come to signify in contemporary North American popular culture.

From its origins in ancient central Asia, through its dispersal across continents and over time, cannabis/marijuana has enjoyed a fascinating, colourful history. Its reach across cultures and over time is remarkable. In fact, "No plant has been a continuous part of the human family longer than the hemp plant."[88] And as Terence McKenna argues further, "Because of its pandemic range and environmental adaptability, cannabis has had a major impact on human social forms and cultural self-images."[89] Today, this impact might not be readily apparent; while revelations of politicians' and other public figures' past marijuana use might not come as a shock these days, the scope of humanity's historical involvement with cannabis would likely come as a surprise to most. Contemporary news media reports and government anti-drug campaigns tend to leave the impression that marijuana, as well as many

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[87] Rubin 3-4.

[88] McKenna 150.

[89] McKenna 150.

other illicit drugs, first surfaced in North America in the 1960s. Casual observers might thus be forgiven for thinking that the current situation vis-a-vis marijuana somehow resonates like a collective, drug-induced flashback to the heady times of the sixties, but in order to gain any meaningful perspective on marijuana's place within contemporary cultures, one must look much further back in time and much farther afield than 1960s America.

Cannabis' North American history, though spanning four centuries, is in relative terms actually a very short one, as cultivation of the plant is generally believed to have originated in the Neolithic era somewhere in central Asia (the precise time and place of origin is still undetermined).[90] As it was dispersed worldwide over time, primarily through the passing of traditional folk uses from one region to another, so too were ritual uses of the plant passed from one culture to another. From the ancient Near East, India and China, where "traditional folk use of cannabis has the greatest antiquity as well as the most extensive diffusion"[91], "through trade contacts, migrations and wars, the ritual uses of the plant were carried to Egypt and Africa, westward to Europe, and eastward to central Asia."[92]

Ganja

Traditional folk use of cannabis - the "*ganja* complex" - as noted by Rubin, was

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[90] The specifics of the origins of cannabis use remain the subject of some debate amongst scholars, as much of the evidence appears to be vague and sometimes contradictory. However, a perusal of the literature on cannabis reveals that most scholars agree that the origins of its use by humans can be confidently placed in central Asia or the Near East approximately six- to ten-thousand years ago. See Abel, Benet, Grinspoon, Hui-Lin Li, Rubin, et al.

[91] Vera Rubin, ed., Introduction, *Cannabis and Culture*, 2.

[92] Sula Benet, "Early Diffusion and Folk Uses of Hemp", Rubin 48.

multi-faceted: cannabis was utilized in the manufacture of cloth and rope, in food preparations, folk medicine, religious ritual, and as an intoxicant and euphoriant - usually in a communal context, as a "symbol of fellowship."[93] Significantly, multipurpose use within the 'folk stream' or '*ganja* complex' was for the most part confined to the lower social strata - "peasants, fishermen, rural and urban artisans and manual laborers"; for members of the priestly or upper classes, it was used almost exclusively as part of religious ritual.[94] Despite the lack of a precisely determined origin or route of dissemination of the cannabis plant, the literature reveals a wide consensus regarding the origins of the *ganja* complex. Cannabis' ancient history, within the context of the story of its embrace by societies-at-large, thus effectively begins in China and India.

In ancient China, hemp was a major source of fibre, food (it was considered by the ancients to be one of five major grains) and medicine, so highly regarded that the Chinese described their country as the "land of mulberry and hemp."[95] It was the Chinese who were the first to discover and perfect many industrial applications of the plant, including papermaking and the manufacture of clothing (significantly, while "silk fabrics were used by the wealthy ... hemp cloth was the textile of the masses."[96]). The Chinese were probably the first people to utilize cannabis for its medicinal properties. The plant's medicinal properties are recorded in the earliest pharmacopoeia in existence, the *Pen-ts'ao Ching*, which was

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[93] Rubin 4.

[94] Rubin 4.

[95] Ernest L. Abel, *Marihuana: The First Twelve Thousand Years* (New York: Plenum Press, 1980) 5.

[96] Hui-Lin Li 53.

compiled in the first or second centuries A.D., though widely attributed to an herbal published by the Emperor Shen-nung as early as 2800 B.C., which in turn is considered to be based on oral traditions passed down from pre-historic times.[97]

In addition to its perceived therapeutic qualities, ancient Chinese medical texts indicate that cannabis' psychoactive properties were clearly recognized; herbals referred to visions of 'demons' and temporal distortion which the ingestion of large amounts of cannabis seeds produced. But use of cannabis as a drug, though relatively familiar, apparently did not become widespread, a fact which scholars seem unable to fully explain, but generally attribute to the drug's effects of "mental exhilaration and nervous excitation", which are seen as being, perhaps, "unsuitab[le] to the Chinese temperament and traditions."[98] This is implied, according to Hui-Lin Li, in two connotations of the term *ma*, the Chinese word for hemp:

> One connotation meant numerous or chaotic, derived from the nature of the plants' fibers. The second was one of numbness or senselessness, apparently derived from the stupefying effect of the fruits and leaves. Ma was used in these ways as a radical for many other characters.[99]

It was in India around 1000 B.C. that marijuana first became widely used specifically as an intoxicant. By this time, it had become a part of Hindu culture. As Alfred R. Lindesmith explains, Hindu society demonstrated

> an aversion to alcohol ... supported by reference to the sacred literature. On the other hand, marihuana, in the form of *ganja,*

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[97] Grinspoon, "Missed Opportunities?" 198.

[98] Hui-Lin Li 59.

[99] Hui-Lin Li 51.

> *bhang*, or *charas*, is not religiously or socially tabooed to anywhere near the same extent and is actually frequently prescribed in religious practice and social custom. In short, the status of marihuana in relation to alcohol tends to be the opposite of what it is in Western society.[100]

Members of the lower castes drank a concoction known as *bhang*, which was made from the leaves and stems of the plant, blended with milk and various spices. From ancient times, both religious and social gatherings featured *bhang* as part of the refreshments offered guests, whereas use of alcohol was very limited, confined mainly to those lower castes for whom it was not expressly forbidden. Khwaja Hasan offers some clarification on this point:

> This does not mean that there is no use of alcohol among Hindus. It only indicates a differential in cultural and religious orientation toward these two groups of intoxicants. Alcohol in any form is absolutely prohibited to the Brahman, the highest *varna* in the Hindu caste system. ... It is believed that the god *Shiva* (also known as *Shankar*) was very fond of hemp drugs, [and] it was due to this religious association that Brahmans and *Bhagats* did not abstain from using these drugs while they abhorred alcoholic drinks.[101]

The widespread use of 'hemp drugs' in India - primarily in the form of *bhang*, *ganja* (the dried flowering tops of cultivated female plants, usually smoked) and *charas* (hashish) - would become a concern to the British colonial rulers in the nineteenth century. A commission was thus established to examine the situation, and in 1894, the British Governor of India's *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission 1893-1894* was issued. To this day, it remains one of the most extensive studies of cannabis use as socio-cultural phenomenon. As for its conclusions regarding the social impact of cannabis use, these were almost entirely

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[100] Alfred R. Lindesmith, PhD., introduction, Solomon xxvi.

[101] Hasan 238-239.

positive:

> It has been clearly established that the occasional use of hemp in moderate doses may be beneficial; but this use may be regarded as medicinal in character. ... In regard to the physical effects, the Commisssion have come to the conclusion that the moderate use of hemp drugs is practically attended by no evil results at all. ... In respect to the alleged mental effects of the drugs, ... the moderate use of hemp drugs produces no injurious effects on the mind. ... In regard to the moral effects of the drugs, ... their moderate use produces no moral injury whatsoever. ... for all practical purposes it may be laid down that there is little or no connection between the use of hemp drugs and crime.[102]

From ancient India and China and thereabouts, the spread of cannabis use in various manifestations was extensive, gradual yet persistent. Its use as an intoxicant, much like in the Hindu culture of India, would spread throughout the Islamic cultures of the Middle East largely as a result of religious restrictions on the use of alcohol, and by about 1000 A.D. it was well established in the Islamic world. Many references to cannabis' intoxicant use can be found in Arabian literature. The Arab influence was considerable, and would bring cannabis use to Africa (primarily north of the Sahara) and the Mediterranean, but it was a nomadic Indo-European people, the Scythians, who would be the primary agents of the spread of cannabis use - particularly its use as an intoxicant in ritual - throughout much of the Old World.

Sweet Kaneh Bosm

The first reference in Western literature to the ritual use of cannabis can be found in the work of the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century B.C. Herodotus describes the

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[102] *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 1893-4, Ch. XIII, 263-4, quoted in Ginsberg 192.

funeral rites of the Scythians, which involved purgation by intoxication. Intoxication was achieved by roasting cannabis seeds on heated stones inside a tent, producing a thick veil of smoke, which was inhaled. The effect of such a method of intoxication was a sort of "cannabis sweat lodge"[103]:

> ... they sit round in a circle; and ... by inhaling the fumes of the burning fruit that has been thrown on, they become intoxicated by the odor, just as the Greeks do by wine; and ... the more fruit that is thrown on the more intoxicated they become, until they rise up to dance and betake themselves to singing.[104]

The history of cannabis, in Western terms, thus begins with Herodotus' accounts of the Scythian rituals, but as Benet points out, the Scythians, who are generally credited with introducing cannabis and its ritual use to Europe and much of Asia, "participated in both trade and wars alongside the ancient Semites for at least one millenium before Herodotus encountered them".[105] The Semites' relationship with the Scythians (the ancient Semites knew the Scythians as the Ashkenaz) is a crucial one, for the Old Testament serves as one of the oldest and most important written source materials for "tracing the history of hemp in terms of cultural contacts ... In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament there are references to hemp, both as incense, which was an integral part of religious celebration, and as an intoxicant".[106]

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[103] McKenna 152.

[104] Herodotus, *Works*, H. Cary, trans. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901), Book I, Chapter 202.

[105] Benet 41.

[106] Benet 40. (See, for example, Song of Solomon 4:14, Isaiah 43:24, Jeremiah 6:20, Ezekiel 27:19, in which the original Hebrew *kaneh* or *kaneh bosm* have been variously translated [erroneously, according to Benet] into English as "calamus" or "sweet cane".)

The Old Testament provides a valuable resource in determining something of the route and means of diffusion of cannabis in ancient times. According to Rubin and Benet, the Old Testament reveals that cannabis was among the goods and precious spices transported by caravans through Palestine, along some of the most vital trade routes of the ancient world, linking Europe, Asia and Africa. It also gives an indication as to the degree to which cannabis was generally accepted, in both sacred and secular form, amongst the various cultures of the ancient Near East. Its sacred, ritual use in this context is of particular interest, for while the history of cannabis in its industrial hemp applications is relatively well-documented, less critical attention has been paid to its ancient use as euphoriant and intoxicant. Benet points out that the Scythians, generally regarded as being the primary agents of cannabis' diffusion from its Near Eastern origins through much of Europe and Asia, "apparently did not use hemp for manufactures such as weaving and rope-making ... [rather,] they were the ones to introduce the natives [of Europe and Asia] to the ritual use of the plant and the ... pleasures to be derived from it."[107]

From the paths of the merchant caravans, and along the routes of the mobile and warlike Scythians' raids into the farflung territories of the Caucasus to the north, and westward into Europe, the cultivation of hemp, as well as some of the customs and rituals associated with its use, followed. Reminiscent of the Scythians' ritual use of cannabis in funeral rites such as those described by Herodotus, several cultures of Eastern Europe adopted the use of cannabis - primarily in the form of hemp seed - in funeral purification ceremonies. The harvesting of hemp was also marked by religious and magical rituals,

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[107] Benet 42.

revealing many Eastern European cultures' consideration of the plant as sacred.[108] Though some of these ceremonies, particularly those in which the plant was burned or in some way ingested, might reasonably be assumed to have involved some measure of intoxication, as might its use in European folk medicine, cannabis' intoxicant properties were not widely recognized in Europe, and the extent to which cannabis-as-euphoriant was familiar is the matter of some dispute amongst researchers. It is generally accepted, however, that by the Renaissance, the plant was widely cultivated throughout much of Europe for its fibre. (Competition in the hemp textile industry of the time, for example, was such that "Henry VIII reportedly required its cultivation by English farmers."[109])

Thus, by the Renaissance, the marihuana complex, primarily through its 'hemp stream', had displaced the *ganja* complex as the dominant mode of cannabis use in Europe. And while the *ganja* complex, which had never widely taken hold in mainstream European society, would not be entirely supplanted by the utilization of cannabis for the production of hemp fibre, it would be dwarfed by this mode of utilization. The use of cannabis for intoxication would likewise come to be characterized less through folk ritual than by its use in 'psychedelic' experimentation by a small cultural elite.

Hasheesh Eaters

Despite earlier extensive contacts - both commercial and cultural - between Europeans and Eastern cultures, the introduction of the psychoactive use of cannabis to Europe,

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[108] See Benet and Rubin, et al. for detailed descriptions of the sacred rituals of hemp planting and harvesting in various Eastern European cultures.

[109] Bonnie and Whitebread 2.

according to most of the literature, can only be attributed with any measure of certainty to soldiers of Napoleon's armies returning from Egypt in the nineteenth century. The Napoleonic soldiers imported cannabis, mainly in the form of hashish, to Europe despite the fact that the French colonial forces had themselves tried, unsuccessfully, to end the practice of using cannabis for the purpose of intoxication among its mainly lower-class Egyptian devotees. Somewhat ironically, this turn of events led to an interesting sort of class inversion in experimentation with cannabis intoxication among Europeans newly introduced to the drug: "the curiosity of the occidental elite had thereby been whetted; and the previously passive awareness of cannabis' properties within the medical community was now augmented by the more acute interest of Europe's intellectuals and international traveling set".[110] Here was the genesis of one aspect of what Vera Rubin describes as the 'marihuana complex', the second stream of cannabis use, in which cannabis was utilized, primarily by a small number of members of the middle- and upper-classes, in the pursuit of 'psychedelic' experiences.

As alluded to in the preceding quote, during the first half of the nineteenth century leading physicians in France and England had reported positively on the therapeutic effects of hashish, and cannabis in general. Coupled with certain social and cultural phenomena of the day, experimentation with hashish would become something of a fad, especially in the Parisian artistic community. Interest in opium and the opium tincture, laudanum, was already well established even amongst the upper classes. Neither opium or hashish were yet controlled substances, and at least partly because of their association with the higher social strata, no stigmatization was attached to their use. Rather, this lack of stigmatization,

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[110] Bonnie and Whitebread 2.

combined with the contemporary European society's predilection for "Romanticism, Orientomania, and a fascination with psychology and the paranormal" and further motivated by "the extravagant tales of travelers concerning narcotic raptures and vistas of transcendental ecstasy", served to create a climate in which "daring and unconventional souls" could explore what Baudelaire described as the 'Paradis Artificiel' produced by hashish intoxication.[111] Most notable among the European devotees of hashish was the *Club des Haschischins*, a group of French writers, visual artists, and various bohemians which met weekly at the Hotel Luzan in Paris and wrote enthusiastically of their experiences with the drug. Among its members were such prominent artists as Charles Baudelaire, Alexandre Dumas, Honoré de Balzac, and Victor Hugo. But despite the enthusiasm of the artists of the *Club des Haschischins*, no general interest in or widespread knowledge of the psychoactive properties of cannabis would develop in Europe, at least until well into the twentieth century.

Old Plant, New World

A similar pattern of cannabis dispersion would emerge in North America, in which the cultivation of hemp for commercial purposes initially dominated, followed by the emergence, on a much smaller scale, of the use of cannabis as therapeutic agent and as an intoxicant. Europeans were primarily responsible for introducing the plant into the New World, first by the Spaniards into South and Central America in the sixteenth century, and subsequently by the French and English - on a much larger scale - to North America, through the importation of hemp seed for the purpose of growing cannabis for fibre. Cannabis' North American

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[111] McKenna 158-159.

history began with its experimental cultivation in Nova Francia (now Nova Scotia) in 1606 by one Louis Hebert, apothecary to Samuel de Champlain. It reached American shores as early as 1611 with the Jamestown settlers' importation of cannabis seeds from Europe for the cultivation of hemp fibre. Hemp would become, and continue to be, a major crop in the United States well into the nineteenth century, but as cheaper foreign hemp fibre began to dominate the world market, medicinal applications of cannabis began to outstrip its textile manifestations in prominence in the North American marketplace.

As Dr. Lester Grinspoon attests, more than one hundred articles promoting the therapeutic benefits of cannabis preparations appeared in American scientific and medical journals between 1839 and 1900.[112] In 1870, it was included for the first time in the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia*, and by this time pharmaceutical preparations of cannabis were widely available in local pharmacies. There is no convincing evidence of the use of therapeutic cannabis preparations for intoxication by the general public in the U.S., and yet, much like in Europe, a certain coterie of individuals whose interest was piqued by tales of the reveries of hashish intoxication did emerge in small literary circles, here apparently influenced primarily by "the example of English opium habitués such as Coleridge and DeQuincey".[113]

Works such as Fitz Hugh Ludlow's *The Hashish Eater: Being Passages from the Life of a Pythagorean*, published in 1857, and "The Vision of Hashish" and "The Hashish Eater", attributed to Bayard Taylor and published anonymously in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1854 and 1856, echoed those of the European bohemians whom they sought to emulate. They attracted

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[112] Grinspoon, "Missed Opportunities? ...", 198.

[113] McKenna 160.

less attention than the Europeans, arousing little contemporary interest, but they would begin an American tradition, as Terence McKenna describes it, of "pharmo-picaresque literature that would find later practitioners in William Burroughs and Hunter S. Thompson".[114] Yet apart from the euphoric experiences of hashish intoxication described by a few artists, the practice of eating or smoking cannabis products would not occur on any significant scale in North America until the twentieth century. Bonnie and Whitebread present a persuasive argument for the theory that widespread use of cannabis as intoxicant first emerged in the Americas in the late sixteenth century with the African slave trade in Brazil. Citing marked similarities in practices surrounding cannabis use between Brazilians and West Africans, they contend that, "It seems likely that the conjunction of expansive slave trade, Spanish mobility, intensive commercial activity, and tobacco-smoking gradually introduced the practice of smoking cannabis throughout the West Indies and Central America."[115]

Cucarachas and Marijuaneros

Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the practice of smoking marijuana had reached Mexico by at least 1880, and its use as an intoxicant was widespread there by the end of the nineteenth century. Use of the drug was popular primarily amongst Mexico's lower classes, who were referred to derogatorily by the upper classes as 'marijuaneros' (apparently regardless of whether they used the drug, of course). A popular Mexican folk song of the day, still widely familiar now, alludes to the reputation of Pancho Villa's soldiers' taste for

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[114] McKenna 163.

[115] Bonnie and Whitebread 4-5.

marijuana, describing a cockroach's refusal to march without it: *"La cucaracha, la cucaracha/ Ya no puede caminar/ Porque no tiene, porque no tiene/ Marijuana que fumar"*. Significantly, "Mexican authorities, even more class-conscious than their American counterparts, were particularly apprehensive about its use in the army, fearing it might contaminate the upper classes."[116] This notion of contamination makes the central image of the cockroach in *La Cucaracha* one worth noting: a most durable, persistent and pervasive insect, associated with dirt and unclean environments, even pestilence in general. The cockroach, thus 'loaded with meaning', itself a signifier, of infection, contamination and disease, would in turn, through such association, come to signify the marijuana user as something to be feared and held in contempt.

Such characterizations of the soldiers, most of whom came from Mexico's lower classes, were a key element of the ways by which marijuana use would come to be signified within a hegemonic discourse, as reflected in Bonnie and Whitebread's description of the role of class-consciousness in the establishment of a sort of social foundation for the later prohibition of marijuana: "Class consciousness was a recurrent element in marihuana prohibition even in its infancy. Mexican-American patricians appealed to sentiments of Negro inferiority, and European-American officials appealed to sentiments of Mexican inferiority".[117] The image of the marijuana-intoxicated cockroach resonates with one of the earliest popular significations, on both sides of the Mexican-American border, of marijuana as the "killer weed". This is made evident in Jerome Himmelsteins' elucidation of the process -

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[116] Bonnie and Whitebread 35.

[117] Bonnie and Whitebread 36.

reminiscent of Barthes' conception of the process by which myth transforms history into nature - by which "perceptions of the drug ... were shaped decisively by the social locus of use"[118]:

> The 'killer weed' image originated in New Orleans and the Southwest, where marihuana was associated with Mexican laborers and other lower-class groups. These groups were perceived to be criminal and violent, and thus marihuana gained a reputation for creating crime and violence. Because these using groups were also socially disreputable and distant from the mainstream of society, marihuana was perceived as an 'alien' and inimical force. Its alleged spread to youth, therefore, appeared as an 'infection'.[119]

Such signification of marijuana and its users in Mexico and southwestern states would ultimately, as will be demonstrated in the chapter to follow, have a greater influence upon popular North American beliefs and government policies regarding marijuana and its users than would either the mundane circumstances of its actual use by Mexicans or the effects of the drug itself:

> Marihuana-smoking was probably a casual adjunct to life in the Mexican community - a relaxant, a folk remedy for headaches, a mild euphoriant cheaply obtained for two cigarettes a dollar. But within the Mexican community, marihuana had also achieved a potent folklore status which spread to the Americans more quickly than did the drug.[120]

As has been noted by several authors in drug literature, there is some degree of uncertainty surrounding the circumstances by which marijuana as intoxicant was introduced to any significant portion of the American (and subsequently, Canadian) public. While the first

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[118] Himmelstein 141.

[119] Himmelstein 141.

[120] Bonnie and Whitebread 33.

cultivation of cannabis in the U.S., for industrial purposes, as noted earlier, had been "practically simultaneous with the founding of the early American colonies"[121], it was not until the early twentieth century that the plant's psychoactive properties appear to have been 'discovered' by any significant portion of the American public. As the evidence is somewhat lacking, one can only speculate as to the likelihood of American hemp growers' knowledge or awareness of the psychoactive properties of the plant they cultivated (likewise, for those who used pharmaceutical cannabis preparations).

Thus, popular 'recreational' use of the substance in the United States can only be assumed - with any significant measure of certainty - to roughly parallel the introduction of the plant material rolled in cigarette form. And the general consensus within the literature is that the smoking of 'reefers' (or marijuana 'cigarettes', more commonly referred to today as 'joints') was first popularized in America in the first decade of the twentieth century by itinerant Mexican workers who had emigrated to southern and southwestern states, as well as by dockworkers, most of them Black or Mexican, in New Orleans, where much cannabis found its way into the United States.[122] The spread of marijuana use throughout the United States would be steady and persistent, though not widely dispersed throughout the general population:

> Marihuana use was noted among Mexican populations in Texas in the 1910s and eventually throughout the West and Southwest and as far north as Chicago in the 1920s. The drug spread to poor blacks in the 1920s, first in New Orleans and later throughout the South and North. It was used by both black and

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[121] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 14.

[122] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 14.

> white jazz musicians by the 1930s and had spread to the beat culture of New York and San Francisco and to some intellectual and artistic groups by the 1950s.[123]

Yet while the smoking of marijuana would thus be firmly (and, it would seem, permanently) established in practice in the U.S. by the early 1920s, its use would remain "concentrated among marginal social groups" until as late as the 1960s.[124]

Concentration of use, in social terms, appeared to be largely responsible for the fact that the debut of marijuana smoking in the United States "did not cause a great deal of consternation" at first; as Grinspoon and Bakalar propose, marijuana initially attracted little popular attention "perhaps because it was used almost exclusively by minority groups."[125] Yet for some Americans at the time, particularly those Whites who had been established for some time in the southern states, the itinerant Mexicans who came to America in search of a better life brought with them more conspicuous 'cargo' than just marijuana, and thus:

> When marihuana use seeped across the [American] border early in the twentieth century, the only prerequisite to its prohibition was official notice. The effects of the drug were irrelevant: it was used by a voiceless immigrant group associated with antisocial behavior in general and violent crimes in particular; it was enshrouded in legend - from East and West; and it appeared just after a wave of pharmaceutical and alcohol prohibitions had washed over a haphazard system of distribution. Given the contemporary social context from 1915 to 1930, marihuana prohibition was a foregone conclusion and, indeed, was supported by a latent public consensus.[126]

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[123] Himmelstein 22.

[124] Jerome L. Himmelstein, *The Strange Career of Marihuana: Politics and Ideology of Drug Control in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983) 22.

[125] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 15.

[126] Bonnie and Whitebread 295.

Marijuana would become somewhat emblematic of the 'social baggage' described in the above quotation. Its association with minority groups, as it turns out - despite these groups' relatively low profile, and despite hemp's historical significance as an important American cash crop and recognition of the plant's therapeutic potential - would eventually prove to be a crucial factor in effectively spelling the "dramatic end of America's unsupervised romance with Indian hemp and its products".[127]

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[127] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 11.

Chapter Four

Harry J. and The Mighty Mezz: Marijuana, Jazz, and Reefer Madness

Dreamed about a reefer five foot long
The mighty mezz but not too strong,
You'll be high but not for long
If you're a viper

('If You're a Viper', 1938)

While the use of marijuana as intoxicant in the United States and Canada had begun as early as the turn of the century in some southern states, and medicinal use as early as 1839, it would not be made illegal in the U.S. until 1937 (though local ordinances prohibiting its use did exist in some areas of southern and southwestern states prior to this time). Interestingly, in Canada, "there are no reliable accounts of the non-medical use of cannabis ... which predate the 1930s"; in fact, there was little public awareness of marijuana in Canada, let alone concern, at the time.[128] And yet, just one year after the 1922 publication of a book by Edmonton juvenile court judge and magistrate Emily Murphy, entitled *The Black Candle*, in which the author devotes a rather colourful chapter to "Marijuana - the new menace", legislators in Ottawa, influenced by Murphy's rhetoric, would make marijuana illegal in Canada - "without any scientific evidence or sense of public urgency, and without any explanatory or rationalizing discussion in Parliament".[129] It was included (as "Indian hemp") in the Schedule of the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act of 1923, and its legal status in Canada has remained virtually unchanged ever since.

Given the extent to which the continuing state of prohibition has been called into

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[128] Green and Miller 498.

[129] Green and Miller 498.

question in the 1990s, its justification increasingly challenged within the court systems, the relevance of that historical period in which its use was first prohibited is self-evident. An examination of cannabis/marijuana's considerably broad cultural history also reveals some notable affinities between the situation vis-a-vis marijuana in the 1920s through the 1940s in particular, and today's circumstances. And these parallels are in many ways more resonant with, more relevant to, the *zeitgeist* of the 1990s than are the 1960s. Any such comparisons are of course a highly subjective matter, and open to a very wide range of interpretations, but at any rate, comparisons with the 1960s, as argued earlier, have been made *ad nauseum*, and little in the way of a fresh perspective may be expected from such analogy.

What is of special interest in comparing the status of marijuana today to that of the earlier part of this century is the manner in which, in each era, that status may be characterized as essentially one in flux. Just as the issues of decriminalization/legalization and medicinal use of marijuana now figure prominently in contemporary debate over the drug, the debates surrounding marijuana in and about the 1920s and 30s were becoming increasingly concerned with the implementation of control over and restriction of its use, both medicinal and (especially) as intoxicant. Thus, an examination of what I here describe as marijuana's jazz era, juxtaposed with our contemporary situation in the subsequent, concluding chapter, may offer a revealing perspective on certain fundamental aspects of the struggles between subcultural and hegemonic discourses.

Barthes declared that "everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world".[130]

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[130] Barthes 152.

As argued earlier, the prohibition of marijuana may be seen as not so much an exercise of control over the substance itself - the signifier - as what it is made to represent - the signified. The political struggles over marijuana prohibition, the somewhat conspicuous challenges to the legitimacy of that prohibition, offer striking examples which aptly illustrate Stuart Hall's observations on the relative mutability of hegemony: "Hegemony ... is not universal and 'given' to the continuing rule of a particular class. It has to be won, reproduced, sustained. Hegemony is, as Gramsci said, a 'moving equilibrium' containing relations of forces favourable or unfavourable to this or that tendency".[131]

Within the context of this thesis, with respect to marijuana prohibition as a manifestation of hegemonic power, the means by which hegemony has been 'won, reproduced, and sustained' has been characterized essentially as a struggle over discourse - what Hebdige describes as "a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign".[132] An examination of the origins of marijuana prohibition, and in particular the part which the jazz community played (or rather, were made to play) in its establishment, reveals an exercise in hegemony which clearly reflects Dick Hebdige's definition (quoting, in part, Stuart Hall) of the term hegemony itself:

> ... a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert 'total social authority' over other subordinate groups, not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by 'winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural'. ... subordinate groups are, if not controlled; then at

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[131] Stuart Hall et al., *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), quoted in Hebdige 16.

[132] Hebdige 17.

> least contained within an ideological space which does not seem at all 'ideological': which instead appears to be permanent and 'natural', to lie outside history, to be beyond historical interests.[133]

Jazz artists were 'ideologically contained' within a cultural space in which marijuana was an integral element of subcultural expression; the political implications of this seem as profound, at least in retrospect, as the sense of the inevitability of marijuana prohibition at the turn of the century mentioned in the preceding chapter. A certain cultural hegemony was perceived to be under attack in this jazz era, and no wonder, given the ways in which both jazz and marijuana were, as will be demonstrated, signified within the popular culture of the time. Hebdige's observations on how the nature of subcultural style expresses a certain threat, or at least resistance, to the order of hegemony is especially telling, and shall inform our reading of the significance of marijuana use in the early jazz community at and around the time of the inception of the legal prohibition of marijuana which continues to this day:

> Style in subculture is ... pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus.[134]

Doobie Brothers

In a recent article in *Time*, author Christopher John Farley declares that "Once again, pop music is going to pot."[135] In the 1990s, marijuana has seen a resurgence in its popular

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[133] Hebdige 15-16.

[134] Hebdige 18.

[135] Christopher John Farley, "Hello Again, Mary Jane," *Time* 13 June 1993: 56.

profile in North America, resulting in a great deal of media attention. Much of this attention has been engendered by the increasing number of open references to the drug in much popular music, hip-hop and rap in particular. Artists such as Cypress Hill, Snoop Doggy Dog, and Dr. Dre have received the most attention, having been the most openly vocal supporters of marijuana's many perceived benefits (not the least of which, of course, is simply getting high). Cypress Hill has even been labelled by *Rolling Stone* as "The Disciples of Pot".[136]

Most media accounts appear to view this phenomenon in terms of being simply a new twist on the old refrain of 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll', and as such, most attempts to contextualize the new fashionability of marijuana do so via reference to the heady times of the 1960s' counterculture. Farley, for example, observes that "To baby boomers, today's marijuana music may seem just another reworked '60s social trend that was created by their generation".[137] Such, it would seem, is the typical view of most mainstream media pundits, if one takes their accounts of the marijuana 'phenomenon' at face value. Farley, to his credit, acknowledges that the trend, in fact, has a distinct precedent in early jazz music, as is pointed out to him by Steve Bloom, music editor of *High Times*.[138]

Marijuana has, in fact, been closely associated with popular music for most of the twentieth century. Today, it is most closely associated with hip-hop and rap; in the 1960s and 70s, with rock music. Much earlier, beginning in the 1920s, marijuana was commonly

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[136] Rob Tannenbaum, "The Disciples of Pot," *Rolling Stone* 28 May 1992: 31.

[137] Farley 56.

[138] Farley 56.

associated with jazz music and its practitioners. The use of marijuana as an intoxicant in the United States was at the time, for the most part, restricted to Mexican workers, poor blacks, and jazz musicians - all socially marginalized groups - yet despite the general public's relative lack of familiarity with the drug, many popular images of marijuana and marijuana users were in circulation throughout the popular culture of the day. Perhaps because of the marginal status of the typical marijuana user of the time, most if not all of those images which caught the public's imagination could only be described as being essentially negative.

Then, much like today, there was a widely-felt sense that traditional values, the 'bedrock of civilized society', were under attack. And then, as now, much of this cultural anxiety was focused upon the perceived threat of both drugs and popular music. As such, any and all matters remotely associated with both drugs and music were the subject of much popular attention. Through various means of dissemination, whether the news and entertainment media, governmental policies and initiatives, public education, or the 'popular imagination', around both marijuana and jazz music there developed many popular images, the legacies of which remain to this day. As the histories of both jazz music and marijuana in the United States reveal, each has played a significant role in the ways in which the other has been popularly conceived within North American culture.

The ways in which the histories of jazz and marijuana would become intertwined are reflective of the ways in which popular discourse about marijuana and drugs in general had begun, in North America, around the turn of the century, to refract, scatter and multiply. What had previously developed as a relatively unitary discourse on drugs such as marijuana, concerned primarily with the substance itself and its direct physiological effects on the user,

had begun to become entangled with other much broader social concerns, such as the racial and cultural anxieties alluded to at the end of the preceding chapter. And whereas, until as late as the 1920s, marijuana use "was a local issue - albeit a very minor one - in various parts of the [U.S.]"[139], by the 1930s, the newly created U.S. Federal Bureau of Narcotics saw fit to sieze upon local concerns, and attempted to procure a popular national consensus on the 'evils' of marijuana. The bureau would ultimately play

> ... a dominant role in shaping public beliefs and state policy concerning marihuana. It effectively defined what was true about the drug and how it should be handled. When the bureau argued in the mid-1930s that marihuana had become a menace only recently, its assertion was repeated, often verbatim, in most public discussions.[140]

The bureau's influence was such, in fact, that "most discussions of marihuana bore the mark of the bureau."[141]

While this situation may clearly be viewed as an example of hegemonic authority, it must be kept in mind that "the FBN ... did not wholly create the marihuana issue"; as demonstrated in the previous chapter, a popular discourse in which marijuana was signified as the 'killer weed' was already relatively well established in certain southern regions of the U.S. Thus, the engagement with the marijuana issue by the bureau might well be described by what Foucault (in his characterization of the breakdown and multiplication of sexual discourses since the eighteenth century) refers to as "a regulated and polymorphous incitement

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[139] Himmelstein 138.

[140] Himmelstein 137.

[141] Himmelstein 138.

to discourse"[142]. For while the FBN did indeed wield a sort of hegemonic authority over popular characterizations and perceptions of marijuana users, for example, as the case of the early jazz community's involvement with marijuana will demonstrate, "consensus can be fractured, challenged, overruled, and resistance to the groups in dominance cannot always be lightly dismissed or automatically incorporated."[143] Thus, in the discursive intersecting of hegemony and subculture, of bureaucrats, jazz artists and marijuana,

> we are dealing less with *a* discourse .. than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions. ... So it is not simply in terms of a continual extension that we must speak of this discursive growth; it should be seen, rather, as a dispersion of centers from which discourses emanated, a diversification of their forms, and the complex deployment of the network connecting them.[144]

Jingo

Despite a relative lack of popular attention given to marijuana in the first decades of this century (particularly in comparison to alcohol and to a lesser degree cocaine and opium), certain prominent popular stereotypes had nonetheless emerged with respect to the 'typical' characteristics and behaviour of marijuana users. These sterotypes, connecting marijuana use and Mexican laborers, blacks, and various lower-class groups with violence, "developed in the Southwest and New Orleans in the 1910s and 1920s", according to Jerome Himmelstein, and subsequently "made [their] way into the federal bureaucracy through clear avenues of

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[142] Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis", 315.

[143] Hebdige 16-17.

[144] Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis", 315.

diffusion and from there into the national media."[145] By the late 1930s, a popular image of marijuana as 'killer weed' had become well-established, and with the concurrent development of a certain consensus amongst local anti-drug crusaders throughout the U.S. regarding the nature of the marijuana 'menace', the legal prohibition of marijuana was enacted:

> ... as a result of the increase of marihuana smoking in the southern states during the 1920's, the United States Federal Bureau of Narcotics, under the direction of Commissioner H.J. Anslinger, conducted a campaign against cannabis that resulted in the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 ... Although the Tax Act was styled as a revenue-producing measure, it prohibited use of cannabis as an intoxicant and effectively circumscribed the 'legitimate' industrial uses of the plant.[146]

Yet the end of the United States' 'unsupervised romance' with hemp/marijuana, in 1937, in fact marked only the conclusion of the *initial stages* of what would later be described (officially and unofficially) as a 'war', on both illicit drugs and associated 'drug cultures'. Popular music's place upon the 'battlegrounds' of these wars on drugs and drug cultures was (and always has been - first with jazz, most recently with rap, hip-hop and other popular music forms) central and integral. By the end of the 1930s, perhaps most prominent amongst those subcultures and cultural forms most commonly associated with drugs such as marijuana was jazz.

The association of marijuana with Mexican-American farm labourers, poor blacks, and (primarily black) 'bohemian' jazz musicians was, according to several authors, a central factor in its prohibition. In *Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs*, Clarence

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[145] Himmelstein 54.

[146] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 11.

Lusane makes an extensive and convincing argument for the position that, after World War I, "the war against marijuana ... became a vehicle for attacks on the Black community"; "Hysterical newspaper headlines and radio broadcasts blamed marijuana-intoxicated Blacks and Mexicans for many heinous crimes they claimed were being committed against Whites."[147] He suggests that, "Linking sex, race, and drugs seem[ed] to touch the deepest nerves of the American people"; to that might be added the significance of linking music.[148] Music, drugs, and race, then as now, were often the focus of considerable cultural anxiety, at the centre of what was perceived by some as a rising tide of degeneration characterized by increasing assaults upon so-called traditional values.

Some popular images of jazz which had begun to circulate amidst a rising tempest of mainstream concern regarding the increasing popularity of this relatively new musical form were strikingly evocative of, and often explicitly linked to, stereotypes of drug-crazed Blacks and Hispanics. These characterizations of jazz subculture could be seen to suggest that "the most primitive anxieties concerning the sacred distinction between nature and culture can be summoned up by the emergence of such a group"[149], for

> ... subcultures express forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgressions of sartorial and behavioural codes, law breaking, etc.). They are profane articulations, and they are often and significantly defined as 'unnatural'.[150]

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[147] Clarence Lusane, *Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs* (Boston: South End Press, 1991) 36, 37.

[148] Lusane 37.

[149] Hebdige 92.

[150] Hebdige 91-92.

Neil Leonard, in *Jazz and the White Americans*, quotes a New York physician of the time, who 'explained' that,

> Jazz music causes drunkenness ... [by sending] a continuous whirl of impressionable stimulations to the brain, producing thoughts and imaginations which overpower the will. Reason and reflection are lost and the actions of the persons are directed by the stronger animal passions.[151]

The doctor's description of the 'evils' of jazz music is striking in its use of metaphors which are commonly associated with anti-drug as well as racial hysteria - those of the loss or lack of human will and reason, and the debasement and savagery of the subject. Such tangential connections are of course typical of the manifestation of popular fears and prejudices, and as such typified much of the anti-marijuana and anti-jazz sentiments of the period. As Harry Shapiro concisely describes it in *Waiting for the Man*, "Mexicans were blamed for introducing the drug into America, but musicians were cited as the plague carriers, those who spread the disease and infected clean-cut white kids."[152]

Muggles

Thus, jazz musicians, not surprisingly, were among the most prominent targets of the largely racial anti-marijuana campaigns beginning in the 1920s. In 1931, Louis Armstrong was arrested in Los Angeles, a victim of such a campaign; charged with possession of marijuana, he served nine days in jail, was tried, and was released with a six-month

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[151] Dr. E. Elliot Rawlings, *Jazz* (New York:Whieman and McBride, 19?) 137-38; see also *New York Times*, 12 Feb. 1922, 1.; qtd. in Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) 33.

[152] Harry Shapiro, *Waiting for the Man: The Story of Drugs and Popular Music* (New York: Quartet Books, 1988) 46.

suspended sentence. As Lusane notes, Armstrong had just one year earlier recorded "Muggles", a song about marijuana.[153] According to Shapiro, Armstrong's arrest, which attracted a great deal of media attention, was something of a watershed moment in terms of the American government's response to marijuana, for it was around that time that it began to re-assess its official position (it didn't really have one) with respect to the status of the drug, and thus to shift its strategy:

> Up until then, appeals from state legislators and moral crusaders had been ignored. The appointment of a new Commisioner of Narcotic Drugs and the reorganization of narcotics law enforcement heralded the start of a new era in Federal drug policy.[154]

This new era in drug policy, largely shaped as it was by the drug hysteria which had preceded it, also signalled the crystallisation of certain mythologies which surrounded jazz music, for as Shapiro argues, "The drug connection was central to the creation of the jazz (and later, rock) musicians as outlaw figures. From the earliest expressions of concern about marijuana, musicians [had been] implicated."[155] This implication, and indeed even the creation of outlaws, were not simply abstract notions, but rather were explicitly manifest in the response to jazz music and its practitioners and devotees by the American federal drug authorities.

The post of Commisioner of Narcotic Drugs with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Narcotics had just been created in 1930 - the year before Armstrong's arrest. Appointed to

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[153] Lusane 36.

[154] Shapiro 48.

[155] Shapiro 47.

the position was Harry Jacob Anslinger, previously Assistant Commissioner with the Federal Prohibition Bureau, and a career diplomat. Anslinger would hold the post for the next thirty-two years, and by virtually all accounts would wield enormous influence over the course of popular conceptions of illicit drugs and drug use, even to this day. Anslinger's motives and tactics are the subject of some debate, but few dispute the significance of his role in the orchestration of various anti-marijuana campaigns nationwide over several decades. He was, argues Howard Becker, little more, really, than "an entrepreneur whose initiative and enterprise overcame public apathy and indifference."[156] Yet his reputation, if one is to accept most accounts of him at face value, is one of a rather ruthless political man who pursued his initiatives with zealous fervor. Shapiro maintains that Anslinger engaged in rather heavy-handed political manipulation, motivated by "a single-minded devotion to the greater glory of his department and to the moral crusade against drugs".[157]

Though Anslinger employed various tactics over time in the crusade against marijuana, at some times even suddenly changing strategies entirely, certain of his prejudices regarding the nature of the perceived drug 'menace' appear rather clear. Clarence Lusane reveals that "Anslinger's hatred of people of color was legendary. In official memos to his staff, he would refer to a black person as a 'ginger-colored nigger.'"[158] And among those upon whom Anslinger chose to focus blame for the drug menace were of course jazz musicians:

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[156] Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963) 135.

[157] Shapiro 49.

[158] Lusane 38.

> Anslinger hated the way jazz artists boldly defied social and cultural values he held dear. Inter-racial sex, drug use, and bohemian lifestyles were taboos that directly contradicted the conservative social and political views of Anslinger ... He testified before a southern-controlled Congress that 'coloreds with big lips lured White women with jazz and marijuana.'[159]

Besides their bohemian lifestyles, jazz musicians' public visibility offered the publicity-hungry Anslinger an opportunity to "extract the maximum exposure for the minimum effort. This became known as the 'star-bust syndrome'."[160] According to Shapiro, Anslinger had, since the early 1930s, maintained a special file on musicians, detailing, among other things, arrests of artists for possession and/or trafficking of marijuana - all carefully noted "[i]n order to establish musicians as 'public enemies'".[161] This file, according to Lusane, eventually "included jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Thelonius Monk, Dizzie Gillespie, Cab Calloway, and Count Basie. Even White performers who were close to Blacks, such as Jackie Gleason, Milton Berle, and Kate Smith, came under his scrutiny."[162]

With the aid of the media, often given as it was to sensationalist scare-mongering regarding the evils of illicit drugs and the drug scene (parroting - often verbatim, according to Becker - the Federal Bureau of Narcotics' "questionable statistics and atrocity stories"[163]), Anslinger's federal bureaucracy effectively created something of a "musicians' 'pogrom'".[164]

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[159] Lusane 38.

[160] Shapiro 54.

[161] Shapiro 54.

[162] Lusane 38.

[163] Becker 138.

[164] Shapiro 55.

This 'pogrom', alas, was essentially a failure. Despite the influence it appears to have had in fuelling certain popular antipathy towards jazz music and its practitioners, and bohemian jazz lifestyles in particular, only one 'star-bust', in fact, was ever achieved. The 'capture' of drummer Gene Krupa in San Francisco, for possession of marijuana and involvement of a minor in the unlawful transportation of narcotics (he had a bellhop receive his illicit package in the lobby of the hotel at which he was staying and deliver it to his room), occurred in 1943, six years after its use was made illegal nationwide by the Marijuana Tax Act, and a decade after Anslinger had begun to closely monitor the jazz 'heathens'. But while the jazz pogrom was a failure at the level of political policy, it must be seen as contributing successfully to the dominant mythologies surrounding drug use - specifically, that the use of drugs such as marijuana was inexplicably linked to delinquency and criminal activity, and a life of vice in general.

Vipers

The implication of musicians - jazz musicians in particular - in the concern over marijuana is hardly surprising, or for that matter even unwarranted, for the connections were obvious and real. As both Shapiro and Lusane point out, from the twenties through the thirties ("the first heyday of songs about drugs"[165]) and well into the forties, many songs containing varyingly explicit references to illicit drugs and the 'drug scene' were recorded, directed primarily at the black or 'race' radio-listening audience:

> From well-known artists such as Cab Calloway, Bessie Smith, Fletcher Henderson, and Leadbelly to hundreds of unknowns,

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[165] Shapiro 39.

> they joyfully and woefully sang about getting high on 'reefer' (marijuana), 'dope' (heroin), and 'caine' (cocaine).[166]

According to Shapiro, the drug most often referred to in drug-reference songs of the time, usually by its many slang names (gage, mezz, moota, muggles, reefer, tea, etc.), was marijuana. Its effects were celebrated and its users mythologized:

> The early 'viper' [marijuana user] songs paid homage to the new 'social hero', the man who brought the stuff that people relied on to make their rent parties go with a swing. This was no evil mobster or sinister pusher, but a man like Mezz Mezzrow, regarded with affection and respect. He provided a public service in a city like New York where marijuana had an enormous impact, for not only was it the jazz capital of the thirties, but there were no local ordinances against marijuana smoking.[167]

The notion of the new social hero reflects a central aspect of the subcultural aesthetic and philosophy of much of the jazz music of the twenties and thirties, and in turn much of the public concern about the significance and influence of jazz culture within a rapidly changing, even volatile, American society. The new social hero, such as those who provided the vipers with their 'stash', or the jazz artists who defied conventional style, sought to stand out *against* what were considered traditional values. Thus, the pattern of jazz music's acceptance by those who would embrace it in the 1920s was largely characterized by rebellion, for, as Neil Leonard puts it, "those who embraced its undiluted forms had broken wholeheartedly with a large number of traditional values"; in its relative infancy (and beyond), "Jazz had a strong appeal for those with ... rebellious inclinations."[168] Marijuana,

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[166] Lusane 36.

[167] Shapiro 39-40.

[168] Leonard 52, 54.

in turn, was emblematic of that rebellion.

Given marijuana's already well-established association by the 1920s with blacks - and bohemian jazz artists in particular - this sense of rebellion, and its inherent threats, would be especially potent for many whites - for some, perhaps too potent, as Dick Hebdige points out:

> There is a well-documented tradition of miscegenation in jazz. ... As the music fed into mainstream popular culture during the 20s and 30s, it tended to become bowdlerized, drained of surplus eroticism, and any hint of anger or recrimination blown along the 'hot' lines was delicately refined into inoffensive night club sound. White swing represents the climax of this process: innocuous, generally unobtrusive, possessing a broad appeal, it was a laundered product which contained none of the subversive connotations of its original sources.[169]

To this characterization of white swing it might be added that the use of marijuana and other illicit drugs was, if not entirely nonexistent, removed from view. The white laundered product, at least at the level of appearances, contained none of its original sources' subversive 'inspirations' and manifestations either.

The hysteria which characterized certain popular and institutional responses to marijuana essentially served as a lightning rod for those, like the young new jazz artists, who wished to defy convention and flaunt their contempt for established social mores.[170] Leonard

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[169] Hebdige 47.

[170] Dr. Lester Grinspoon describes the typical effects of the American Federal Bureau of Narcotics' alarmist marijuana education programs, for example, thusly:

> ... the result may be that the concerned uninformed now become the alarmed misinformed. Students who hear about such educational programs scoff and are derisive. Rather than facilitating dialogue between young people and their parents on the subject of marihuana, this kind of 'education' merely serves to widen the affective and substantive gaps.

(Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 327.)

suggests that "Among those young whites of the twenties who either ignored or were in open revolt against traditional values, the new jazz musicians were the most rebellious."[171] And amongst these rebels, he contends, the most rebellious was one Milton 'Mezz' Mezzrow: "For him jazz was sacred, and his rejection of traditional standards was so vehement that he self-consciously gave up his ties with the white world and moved into a Negro community."[172] Mezzrow, it should be added, was (and perhaps still is) the quintessential personification of the intimate and complex relationship between marijuana and popular music.

Mezz

"He was white, he was Jewish, and he became the archetypal hip musician of the Jazz Age, the first White Negro."[173] He was 'Mezz' Mezzrow, a clarinetist and saxophonist from Chicago and chief among those jazz musicians implicated in the concern over marijuana - best remembered not for his musicianship but rather for his particular social status within the jazz world. Mezzrow's status, his 'archetypal hipness', was certainly less the result of his musical talents, which many critics considered somewhat limited, than his involvement with marijuana, for which he was famous. Mezzrow always had access to the best quality marijuana, and quickly developed such a reputation for providing the best that his name became synonymous with quality reefer.

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[171] Leonard 55.

[172] Leonard 55.

[173] Shapiro 26.

In 1933, Mezzrow was even approached by a radio booking agent who was interested in forming a company to sell "Mezzrow's special type of marijuana cigarette", but it was not to be, for, as Lester Grinspoon relates, "Perhaps anticipating the impending prohibition of the drug, Mezzrow declined, thus foreclosing what might have been an interesting and possibly quite significant chapter in the history of marihuana in the United States."[174] Mezzrow describes the extent to which he was implicated in the 'scene':

> New words came into being ... : *the mezz* and *the mighty mezz*, referring, I blush to say, to me and to the tea both; *mezzroll*, to describe the kind of fat, well-packed and clean cigarette I used to roll ... ; *the hard-cuttin' mezz* and *the righteous bush*. Some of those phrases really found a permanent place in Harlemese, and even crept out to color American slang in general. I was knocked out the other day when I picked up a copy of Cab Calloway's *Hipster's Dictionary* and found *mezz* defined there as 'anything supreme, genuine'; and in Dan Burley's *Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* the same word is defined as meaning 'tops, sincere'![175]

As noted earlier, and made clearly evident by the preceding quote, Mezzrow was regarded with a great deal of respect and affection within the jazz world. By his own account, in his autobiography *Really the Blues*, he was "the most popular man in Harlem".[176] This was of great importance to Mezzrow, who, despite his open rebelliousness, obviously highly valued a sense of community. The community to which Mezzrow aspired and in which he felt most 'at home' was essentially defined by two fundamental aspects; it was

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[174] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 15.

[175] Milton Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1946) rpt. in John Strausbaugh and Donald Blaise, eds., *The Drug User - Documents: 1840-1960* (New York: Blast Books, 1990) 132.

[176] Mezzrow and Wolfe, rpt. in Strausbaugh and Blaise 132.

'Negro' and it was jazz. And his place within that community was, in turn, largely established and defined by marijuana:

> 'Just think how many cats you can make happy,' they kept saying. Before I knew it, I was standing on The Corner pushing gauge. Only I did no pushing. I just stood under the Tree of Hope, my pokes full up, and the cats came and went, and so did all my golden-leaf.[177]

Marijuana was Mezzrow's passport to a world, a community, in which and to which, he was constantly reminded, he did not belong. Mezzrow's quality marijuana effectively became his means of establishing a sense of kinship with the black jazz musicians whose lifestyles he strove to emulate, and to whose culture he yearned to belong. His reputation for providing the best of a highly valued commodity - with its inherent pleasures - made him, a Jewish jazz artist from the Northwest Side of Chicago living and working in Harlem, the quintessential Outsider; he was an Insider - "supreme, genuine", "tops, sincere" - in a world of Outsiders.

Gauge

If marijuana was somehow something of a passport, a means of engagement for Mezzrow in the 'alien' Promised Land of Harlem, the language of the particular cultural landscape into which he had boldly ventured was jazz. Mezzrow's own hip 'jive' reveals the degree to which this was fully manifest in the lived experiences of a jazz community which struggled for full, free expression, and to define its own meanings against cultural tides of fear and repression: "Their jazz was ... collectively improvised nose-thumbing at all pillars of all communities, one big syncopated Bronx cheer for the righteous squares everywhere. Jazz

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[177] Mezzrow and Wolfe rpt. in Strausbaugh and Blaise 132.

was the only language they could find to preach their fire-eating message."[178]

Jazz was the dialect of rebellion, and this rebellion pervaded almost every aspect of the jazz community's experience and expression. Jazz artists such as Mezz Mezzrow seemed to be searching for means of assertion, of both engaging with and responding to the society which largely rejected them; as Hoagy Carmichael put it, "[Jazz] said what we wanted to say though what that was we might not know."[179] And for many like Mezzrow, marijuana had become a *means* of 'saying' what they meant, of accessing an emotion and spirit within them that compelled them to "preach their fire-eating message" when they played:

> ... my head buzzed like a loudspeaker. I found I was slurring much better and putting just the right feeling into my phrases - I was really coming on. ... There wasn't any struggle; it was all made-to-order and suddenly there wasn't a sour note or a discord in the world that could bother me. I began to feel very happy and sure of myself. With my loaded horn I could take all the fist-swinging, evil things in the world and bring them together in perfect harmony, spreading peace and joy and relaxation to all the keyed-up and punchy people everywhere. I began to preach my milleniums on my horn, leading all the sinners on to glory.[180]

Marijuana was thus an integral element of the process, much like that described by Hebdige, wherein style such as that expressed through Mezzrow's music and his lifestyle, is loaded with meaning:

> this process begins with a crime against the natural order, though ... the deviation may seem slight indeed. ... But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal. ... [T]hese

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[178] Mezzrow and Wolfe quoted in Leonard 56.

[179] Hoagy Carmichael, New York Times, 14 April 1926, 15, rpt. in Leonard 56.

[180] Mezzrow and Wolfe rpt. in Strausbaugh and Blaise 127.

> gestures have a meaning, ... have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are ... just so much graffiti on a prison wall.[181]

The characterization of such forms of expression as graffiti is not meant to suggest that they are not worthy of our attention - quite the contrary, for indeed, "graffiti can make fascinating reading. They draw attention to themselves. They are an expression both of impotence and a kind of power - the power to disfigure".[182] Indeed, this apparent paradox, the rather uneasy coexistence of both impotence and power represented in subcultural expression, is at the heart of the subcultural defiance of marijuana prohibition. For it is through the struggles between the discourses of both the culturally marginalized and hegemonic institutions over accepted meanings - the "possession of the sign"[183] - which determine the ways in which such an act as the smoking of marijuana is perceived or understood in society. And it is thus through its significations that the status of marijuana and its users - legal and social - shall ultimately (or rather, perpetually, for there is no permanence, of course, in such things) be determined.

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[181] Hebdige 3.

[182] Hebdige 3.

[183] Hebdige 17.

Conclusion

Blunt/Chronic/Sea of Green: Marijuana Signification and the Legacy of Prohibition

"What if we made wheat illegal like marijuana? ... Just think: wheat growing between the corn rows, a greenhouse behind every farmhouse, wheat patches stashed back in the hills, wheat berries in 1 lb. ziplocks, wheat at 10,000% profit; the small farmer on his feet; the bureaucrats off his back. ... But finally, a use for all these four wheelers on the back roads at night. Secret air strips. Wheat dealers."[184]

The phrase 'I didn't inhale' has now long since taken on a life of its own. Bill Clinton's utterance has become a familiar catchphrase among the soundbites of the popular American political culture, right up there with Reagan's political tough-guy/Dirty Harry invocation, "Go ahead - Make my day"; Mondale's "Where's the Beef?" fast-food/political integrity reference; and Bush's snarling come-on, "Read my lips; no new taxes!". The degree to which it is lampooned and derided, however, suggests that it should perhaps more appropriately be compared to Nixon's defiant declaration, "I am not a crook!" Indeed, Clinton's admission of experimentation with marijuana but insistence that he "did not inhale" has become, in North American popular culture, somewhat emblematic of the Clinton presidency, and a recurring staple of late night talk show monologues and lightweight political commentary. But it has also become, for some, emblematic of a hegemonic discourse on illicit drugs in North America which has increasingly, especially in the 1990s, been called into question by a number of disparate interests pursuing as many varied agendas. Though Clinton's claim that he didn't inhale is widely ridiculed and lampooned, it is perhaps

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[184] Joey Tranchina, "A Modest Proposal on the Plight of the American Farmer", *High Times*, April 1993, no. 212, 30.

a more apt reflection of the popular mythologies of drug use upon which we tend to depend, and on which much of our relevant popular discourse is based, than we might care to admit. For haven't we all, to varying degrees, at some time or another, felt compelled to deny our own use of - or even reliance upon - drugs in one form or another?

I allude here, of course, to the very slippery signification of the term 'drugs' itself and the many varied ways in which various drugs are signified within discourse. For we, of course, all use drugs; the drugs which we choose to use tend to depend largely on how we interpret, as individuals, the ways in which they are variously signified, and thus the effects or benefits which we presume to obtain from them. So, as Avital Ronell argues, "Clearly it is as preposterous to be 'for' drugs as it is to take up a position 'against' drugs. Provisionally they may be comprehended as master objects of considerable libidinal investment, whose essence still remains to be determined".[185] And she further hints at the enormous intellectual and philosophical challenge which 'drugs' thus present:

> Drugs resist conceptual arrest. No one has thought to define them in their essence, which is not to say 'they' do not exist. On the contrary. Everywhere dispensed, in one form or another, their strength lies in their virtual and fugitive patterns. They do not close forces with an external enemy (the easy way out) but have a secret communications network with the internalized demon. Something is beaming out signals, calling drugs home.[186]

Perhaps it was 'the internalized demon' which Bill Clinton was seeking to disavow in denying that he had ever inhaled; more likely it *was* some sort of "external enemy (the easy way out)" with which he would admit no consort. One must remember that here was a man who was

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[185] Ronell 50.

[186] Ronell 51.

seeking the highest political office in the nation, and America was (and still is) a nation *at war*, engaged both literally (through various interdiction strategies) and figuratively (through myth and discourse) in the 'war on drugs'.

The symbolism of America's declared strategy for dealing with 'the drug problem' is striking and clear; drugs are signified as the enemy, a clear threat to the nation. Though the term 'war on drugs' may beg the question of *which* drugs are subject to the war effort, no such clarification is deemed necessary, given the American history of drug use, the development of licit and illicit classifications for various drugs, and anti-drug campaigns which have already established and mythically defined the enemy. For, as Barthes explains, "Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth ... presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance".[187] Thus, for example, while few Americans may be aware of the anti-marijuana jazz musician 'pogroms' of the 1930s, the legacy of the mythical significations which characterized such campaigns perseveres within the sign systems which support such hegemonic exercises as the 'war on drugs'. And, in the 'war on drugs', as in any war, to consort with the enemy is of course the worst possible offence. Whether marijuana might reasonably be expected today to conjure up the notion of a dreaded enemy is disputable, regardless of even its most extreme historical significations within a hysterical hegemonic discourse. But it is a drug nonetheless - an illicit drug -, and one, it might be added, whose contemporary American legal

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[187] Barthes 119.

classification is more restrictive than even cocaine and morphine.[188]

Boo

The "dramatic end of America's unsupervised romance with Indian hemp and its products"[189] at the turn of the twentieth century would be punctuated far more dramatically within just a few decades than surely could have been envisioned at the time, marijuana being ultimately targetted and enveloped as it was in the declaration and mobilization of war - the war, that is, on drugs. And yet, just as the prohibition of marijuana was earlier characterized as being inevitable, considering the significations which were carried with it across the Mexican border and into Gulf of Mexico ports of the southern states, marijuana's significations - regardless of the drug's properties or effects - have made it a 'natural' enemy of a cultural hegemony. For,

> Under the impacted signifier of drugs, America is fighting a war against a number of felt intrusions. They have to do mostly with the drift and contagion of a foreign substance, or of what is revealed as foreign (even if it should be *homegrown*). Like any good parasite, drugs travel both inside and outside of the boundaries of a narcissistically defended politics.[190]

At the very least, Bill Clinton's apparently humble - but ultimately self-serving - 'confession' and the public's apparently surprised reaction, followed by a general sentiment of scorn regarding Clinton's handling of the matter, reveal American society's anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion around the subject of illicit drug use. Marijuana in particular has appeared to

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[188] "Cocaine and morphine (Schedule II drugs) are legally available as medicines; marihuana is not." (Grinspoon, "Missed Opportunities?...", 204.)

[189] Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, 11.

[190] Ronell 50-51.

engender widely conflicting and contradictory views regarding its proper place in North American society. Though perhaps seen by many as a rather benign act of rebellion, the smoking of marijuana nonetheless continues to signify a sort of administration of foreign contagion such as that addressed by Ronell. Much of the debate surrounding marijuana, as argued earlier, reflects such a dichotomy, focussing on differences of opinion regarding issues of personal liberty and effects on health, but as Bonnie and Whitebread point out,

> neither philosophy nor science have been shapers of drug policy; instead, the central influence on government action has been the social context - political, economic, and cultural. Amorphous social forces, peculiar to time and place, have shaped both the drug-using behavior of individuals and groups and the wider social response to that behavior.[191]

Yet while these social forces may indeed be specific to a particular time and place, they continue to resonate beyond their particular contexts. It is a central contention of this thesis that marijuana's prohibition within a contemporary context depends largely on a hegemonic mythology which is firmly rooted in the origins of marijuana prohibition earlier this century. And this hegemonic discourse has (arguably) been, if not impervious to the myriad of 'amorphous social forces' which have subsequently come into play in the intervening decades, not substantially transformed by them. Prohibition discourse, centred on what has been referred to in some circles as "the punitive paradigm", had, by the 1990s, come to effectively dominate the terms of debate over marijuana and illicit drugs in general:

> Although battles over how to define and confront America's drug problem have continued throughout the century, the past illuminates an important characteristic of these struggles: the arena of political struggle was progressively narrowed,

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[191] Bonnie and Whitebread 294.

> particularly early in the century, as successive rounds of conflict consolidated elements of the punitive paradigm. ... By the late 1930s the previously open question of how to deal with marijuana ... was closed .... The central drug-policy question by the 1950s was how tough to make punitive sanctions in order to eliminate supply and use. The challenges of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated that the dominant punitive paradigm was by no means monolithic. Powerful forces could still be mobilized to challenge some of its basic assumptions. But substantial reform was exceedingly difficult. ... The marijuana challenge was a more frontal assault on the assumptions of the paradigm ... (but) by the 1970s the principle of prohibition was deeply rooted, and the legalizers were deflected.[192]

The suggestion that the state of prohibition has been a dominant aspect through which discourses surrounding marijuana and its use and users have historically been defined or circumscribed might lend some credence to Allen Ginsberg's contention that marijuana prohibition may be viewed as a cultural taboo. Within the context of Ginsberg's characterization of marijuana prohibition as a cultural taboo, the act of inhaling marijuana smoke takes on a metaphorical significance beyond that of the mere physical ingestion of a substance. The experience of inhaling marijuana smoke has been largely stripped of its historical and cultural contexts - few observers or marijuana smokers themselves, for example, are likely to hear the echoes of the funeral rites of the ancient Scythians or the wailing of Mezz Mezzrow's hemp-fueled clarinet as they take 'hits from the bong'. Yet traces of this history linger today in much of the official and popular responses to marijuana use, and might even be said to be an essential component in maintaining marijuana's illicit status. Legitimate concerns regarding the negative health effects of cannabis use fail to

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[192] Eva Bertram et al., *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1996) 100-101.

adequately justify or explain the criminalization of the cannabis user; some of the punitive measures meted out to users, by certain American jurisdictions in particular, may only be reasonably explained by reference to the manifestations of cultural anxiety represented by - and rooted in - the racially and class-biased anti-marijuana campaigns of the past.

What Allen Ginsberg was essentially arguing was that the criminalization of marijuana is to a large degree - if not entirely - based on specious and disingenuous political reasoning. Marijuana prohibition is, in its essence, the product not of judicial concerns about law and order, or concerns for public health and safety, but rather is a manifestation of the cultural anxiety of a North American 'culture-at-large' concerned about perceived violations of established morality or values. It is in this respect that Ginsberg characterizes what he views as the marijuana prohibition taboo as being arbitrary and of a cultural nature. As Bonnie and Whitebread argue,

> Decades of classification as a narcotic, the presumptive immorality attaching to felonious conduct, and the implication of addiction, crime, and insanity [have] instilled in the public consciousness a fear of marihuana unjustified by the demonstrable effects of its use. But that fear, and its codification by law, is an integral part of the present social context, and it cannot be ignored in either shaping or predicting policy.[193]

Inhaling, in effect, signifies a certain moral, philosophical and cultural engagement with subcultural or counterculture elements (or at least certain subcultural/countercultural sensibilities), and, conversely, a certain rejection, or at least re-evaluation, of establishment mores and values. That many politicians thus might well have been motivated by fear and

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[193] Bonnie and Whitebread 294-295.

anxiety should come as no surprise, if Ginsberg's description of the effects of the marijuana 'high' has any merit:

> And the key, the paradoxical key to this bizarre impasse of awareness is precisely that the marijuana consciousness is one that, ever so gently, shifts the center of attention *from* habitual shallow purely verbal guidelines and repetitive secondhand ideological interpretations of experience to *more direct, slower, absorbing, occasionally microscopically minute, engagement with sensing phenomena during the high* moments or hours after one has smoked.[194]

Righteous Bush

To inhale marijuana smoke, in effect, is to engage with the Other, to identify with the disenfranchised, the marginalized, and thus to question the authority, to subvert the hierarchy, of the establishment, of the hegemonic culture-at-large. To inhale marijuana smoke, then, according to Ginsberg, is to violate taboo - to violate the sanctity of the mind and body, and establishment values -, sullied by the dirt, the stigma, of the inhaled substance, the ingested Other. The key to Ginsberg's argument regarding the somewhat mystifying perseverance of marijuana prohibition may be found reflected in Freud's observation that "these prohibitions ... have appeared at some time or other and must now be retained on account of an unconquerable anxiety. An external threat of punishment is superfluous, because an inner certainty (a conscience) exists that violation will be followed by unbearable disaster."[195] Yet as Ginsberg himself argues, no such certainty necessarily exists, nor does such a sense of dreadful foreboding haunt the 'typical' marijuana user:

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[194]Ginsberg 184-185.

[195] Freud 37.

> the vast majority all over the world, who have smoked the several breaths necessary to feel the effect, adjust to the strangely familiar sensation of Time slow-down, and explore this new space thru natural curiosity ... in short, for those who have made the only objective test, a vast majority of satisfied smokers.[196]

Thus, while an element of taboo may well inhere in the prohibition of marijuana, it is but one aspect of the many significations which have historically been attached to marijuana, its use and its users.

Ginsberg's provocative characterization of marijuana prohibition, though it points up an essential aspect of one way in which marijuana has come to be signified, nonetheless misses the mark somewhat. For while, as has been demonstrated, marijuana prohibition indeed bears some resemblance to a taboo, Ginsberg's characterization fails to adequately account for the varied ways in which it has always, and continues to be, signified outside of culturally hegemonic discourses. Ginsberg is perhaps conflating marijuana's legal status with its status as the object of myth, effectively suggesting that its mythification is circumscribed or even defined by its legal prohibition. But as Roland Barthes makes clear,

> Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones. ... Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things.[197]

The prohibition of marijuana has historically, to some degree, effectively limited the parameters of debate on various issues concerning its use, and has dominated much of the

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[196] Ginsberg 185.

[197] Barthes 117-118.

discourse which has surrounded marijuana, yet it has in no way simply defined the signification of marijuana, nor precluded oppositional 'readings' of those significations or even oppositional significations themselves.

While marijuana prohibition, particularly in its origins earlier this century, might well be characterized as being part of an attempt to mythically construct marijuana as being signified by taboo, thus 'branding' its users as taboo, it must be kept in mind that such a process, regardless of the relative power of hegemony to produce meaning, is not resistant to breakdown, to what Hebdige described as "the objections and contradictions which hinder the closing of the circuit between sign and object, product and reproduction".[198] Neither is the process in any way permanent, for "Hegemony is, as Gramsci said, a 'moving equilibrium' containing relations of forces favourable or unfavourable to this or that tendency".[199] Thus, the ways in which hegemony responds to subculture may change considerably over time, depending on various factors and circumstances, as is reflected in Hebdige's characterization of subculture: "those subordinate groups ... who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons".[200] So while marijuana prohibition has endured now for some time, reflecting the relative power of a cultural hegemony to affect the legal status, and in turn the social status, of the substance and its users, this is not entirely reflected in a particular signification, as suggested by Ginsberg.

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[198] Hebdige 17.

[199] Barthes 16.

[200] Hebdige 2.

Marijuana smokers, whether they identify themselves as part of the mainstream or counterculture or otherwise, effectively engage in a process of subcultural refusal or defiance. As defined by Dick Hebdige, and cited in the previous chapter,

> ... this process begins with a crime against the natural order, though ... the deviation may seem slight indeed - ... But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal.[201]

Inhaling marijuana smoke has indeed been portrayed, in North American society in particular, as 'a crime against the natural order', and no wonder, perhaps, for as Ginsberg's editor puts it, "the consciousness-expanding effects of the herb constitute a reality kick."[202] The notion of Reality - whatever that might imply - taking it where it counts, being subject to the knocks of 'altered states' of consciousness, is perhaps what originally moved American and Canadian legislators to prohibit marijuana in the first place. This is not to suggest, however, that the institution of marijuana prohibition was necessarily motivated by any real concern about citizens' mental health, though such rationalizations have been proffered. Rather, marijuana prohibition has served primarily as a means of control exercised by a hegemonic structure unduly threatened by the 'spectre' of alien influences, of Otherness, in a white European dominated society. And Otherness was perhaps no more clearly signified than by the notion of the 'natural' mind in an altered state of consciousness, the result of inhaling a substance indelibly linked to the likes of Old World peasants, itinerant Mexican farm workers, black jazz musicians.

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[201] Hebdige 3.

[202] Ginsberg 184.

Canned Goods

While the sort of good kick at reality produced by 'the consciousness-expanding effects of the herb' might require actual ingestion of the drug, it would appear - as Mr. Clinton could attest - that any sort of association with marijuana essentially constitutes a defiance of a cultural hegemony, for marijuana is inextricably linked with counterculture, Otherness, the margins and fringes of society. Today, for example, this is often reflected in the association between marijuana and hip-hop music; as one journalist put it, "A pall of smoke hangs over the hip-hop nation at the moment - but these days it's burning cannabis that's in the air, masking the smell of spent gunpowder that people have come to expect".[203] Yet despite the fact that marijuana is often popularly associated now with hip-hoppers, and (more commonly) hippies, Deadheads, and '60s dropouts, Bill Clinton's experimentation with marijuana hardly sets him apart from the general American - or Canadian - populace, for despite marijuana's continuing illicit status, millions of Canadians and Americans have themselves inhaled.

And, opposition to the prohibition of marijuana continues to grow.[204] Though calls for the decriminalization and/or legalization of marijuana have been heard since at least the 1960s, in the 1990s the debates over marijuana's legal status have been increasingly waged in mainstream forums. An increasing number of constituencies have also jumped into the fray. And despite (perhaps to a large degree *because of*) its illicit status, marijuana has attained a

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[203] Joseph Gallivan, "Living on the Blunt Edge", *The Independent*, 23 Sept. 1993, 18.

[204] For example, "A national survey found that 69 per cent of Canadians believed that our current cannabis laws are overly harsh (Health Canada, 1995)". ARF, 5.

certain hip cachet in the 1990s. Perhaps most significantly, marijuana has also re-emerged in the public consciousness, the plant's symmetrical, serrated leaf as familiar a cultural icon, perhaps, as the 'golden arches' or a peace symbol. The pot leaf can be seen everywhere, emblazoned upon hats and t-shirts and various items of clothing. Increasingly open and invariably embracing, even celebratory, references to it can be heard in contemporary popular music, hip-hop in particular. Hemp clothing and accessories are increasingly stocked by trendy clothing stores and a growing number of specialty shops. And perhaps most telling, voters in two American states (California and Arizona) recently voted in favor of legalizing marijuana for medical use. The rumblings of decriminalization and legalization supporters grow ever louder, emanating from more and more perspectives, representing increasingly disparate agendas and causes.

The 'pro-pot movement', such as it is, is concerned primarily with reforming government drug policies and rescheduling marijuana's legal drug status. Today, this is pursued largely on two fronts: the eco-hemp and the marijuana-for-medicine movements. 'Hemp awareness' activists seek to promote the ecological benefits of the marijuana plant as a source of fuel, fibre, and food; and similarly, medical marijuana proponents seek legal reforms such that marijuana's medicinal properties might be more extensively researched and utilized in the treatment of cancer chemotherapy patients and people with AIDS, multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, and other illnesses. The pro-pot movement has undergone a certain legitimization of its enterprise by association with elements of the medical and environmentalist establishments. The marijuana cause has traditionally earned whatever sense of popular legitimacy it has had, at least in Canada in the U.S., primarily by virtue of the

sheer numbers of those who have at some time or another inhaled. And as increasing numbers of people of a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds inhale in the literal sense, so too does the metaphorical act of inhaling, the engagement with marijuana culture, and with drug issues, and the embrace of marijuana's potential benefits, become increasingly resonant within contemporary society. But while increasing numbers of people have chosen to inhale, the degree to which the public and governments are prepared to accept or tolerate marijuana use is anybody's guess. Conflicting signals abound.

Despite the fact that millions of North Americans have used marijuana, there can be no doubt that the stigma reflected in much of its historical significations remains attached to the act of inhaling, as is reflected in Bill Clinton's now infamous qualification of his 'admission'. Though the popular Reagan-era slogan/admonition to 'just say no' has likewise been widely ridiculed, it would appear that it nonetheless has similarly informed the dominant mythologies and hegemonic discourses on illicit drug use. For, despite our apparent disdain for such discursive strategies of denial with respect to drugs, there remains a certain inclination in popular discourse towards, if not silence, certainly a reluctance to 'come clean', to face the ways in which we as individuals are implicated in the ways in which the consumption of illicit substances are reflected through discourse and representation. The public's apparent apathy concerning Clinton's actual experimentation with marijuana might well indicate a possible transformation in how marijuana use signifies today within popular culture. Foucault's observations on the implications of silence in discourse are telling:

> Silence itself - the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name; the discretion that is required between different speakers - is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that

> functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.[205]

Was Clinton merely hedging his bets, somehow sensing that things could go either way? Was he opening the door to reform, or closing it to meaningful discussion? Conventional views about marijuana, and indeed drugs in general, have been increasingly challenged in mainstream debate; considerable changes to public policy concerning marijuana in particular now seem entirely possible, even probable, in the not-too-distant future. Based on the strange twists and turns of various discourses on marijuana and North American governments' drug policies of the past, however, whether this means liberalization or increased restrictions remains to be seen.

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[205] Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis", 309-310.

Boy, she's really frantic, the wildest chick in town
She blows her gage, flies in a rage
Sweet Marijuana Brown
In her victory garden the seeds grow all around
She plants, you dig, she's flipped her wig
Sweet Marijuana Brown
She don't know where she's going, she don't care where she's been
But every time you take her out, she's bound to take you in.
Boy, that gal means trouble, you ought to put her down
Get hep, take care, look out, beware of Sweet Marijuana Brown.

('Sweet Marijuana Brown', 1945)

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