

# **REEFER** **MADNESS**

**SEX, DRUGS, AND CHEAP LABOR  
IN THE  
AMERICAN BLACK MARKET**



**ERIC SCHLOSSER**



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# Table of Contents

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[Title Page](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[THE UNDERGROUND](#)

[REEFER MADNESS](#)

[IN THE STRAWBERRY FIELDS](#)

[AN EMPIRE OF THE OBSCENE](#)

[rise](#)

[fall](#)

[return](#)

[OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND](#)

[afterword: more madness](#)

[notes](#)

[bibliography](#)

[acknowledgments](#)

[index](#)

[about the author](#)

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For Cullen Murphy and William Whitworth

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*Sapere aude.*  
Dare to know.  
—HORACE

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# THE UNDERGROUND

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ADAM SMITH BELIEVED in a God that was kind and wise and all-powerful. The great theorist of the free market believed in Providence. “The happiness of mankind,” Smith wrote, “seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature.” The workings of the Lord could be found not in the pages of a holy book, nor in miracles, but in the daily, mundane buying-and-selling of the marketplace. Each purchase might be driven by an individual desire, but behind them all lay “the invisible hand” of the Divine. This invisible hand set prices and wages. It determined supply and demand. It represented the sum of all human wishes. Without relying on any conscious intervention by man, the free market improved agriculture and industry, created surplus wealth, and made sure that the things being produced were the things people wanted to buy. Human beings lacked the wisdom, Smith felt, to improve society deliberately or to achieve Progress through some elaborate plan. But if every man pursued his own self-interest and obeyed only his “passions,” the invisible hand would guarantee that everybody else benefited, too.

Published in 1776, *The Wealth of Nations* later had a profound effect upon the nation born that year. The idea that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” were unalienable rights, endowed by a Creator, fit perfectly with the economic theories of Adam Smith. “Life, liberty and estate” was the well-known phrase that Thomas Jefferson amended slightly for the Declaration of Independence. The United States was the first country to discard feudal and aristocratic traditions and replace them with republican devotion to marketplace ideals. More than two centuries later, America’s leading companies—General Motors, General Electric, ExxonMobil, Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Boeing, et al.—have annual revenues larger than those of many sovereign states. No currency is more powerful than the U.S. dollar, and the closing prices on Wall Street guide the financial markets of Tokyo, London, Paris, and Frankfurt. The unsurpassed wealth of the United States has enabled it to build a military without rival. And yet there is more to the U.S. economy, much more, than meets the eye. In addition to America’s famous corporations and brands, the invisible hand has also produced a largely invisible economy, secretive and well hidden, with its own labor demand, price structure, and set of commodities.

“Black,” “shadow,” “irregular,” “informal,” “illegal,” “subterranean,” “underground”—a variety of adjectives have been used to describe this other economy. Although defined in numerous ways, at its simplest the American underground is where economic activities remain off the books, where they are unrecorded, unreported, and in violation of the law. These activities range from the commonplace (an electrician demanding payment in cash and failing to declare the payment as income) to the criminal (a gang member selling methamphetamine). They include moonlighting, check kiting, and fencing stolen goods; street vending and tax evading; employing day laborers and child laborers; running sweatshops and chop shops; smuggling cigarettes, guns, and illegal immigrants; selling fake Rolexes and pirating CDs. Economists disagree about the actual size of the underground economy and how to measure it. Some studies look at the discrepancy between the amount of personal income declared on tax returns and the amount of money that is actually spent. Other studies examine changes in currency supply, the velocity of money, levels of electricity usage. Each of these methodologies has its merits. All have produced conclusions that are debatable. There is general agreement, however, on two points: America’s underground economy is vast—and most of its growth occurred in the past thirty years.

Any estimate of illegal economic activity is bound to lack precision, since it attempts to quantify things that people have carefully tried to hide. Nevertheless, the best estimates convey a sense of scale and proportion. In 1997 the Austrian economist Friedrich Schneider calculated the rise of America’s

“shadow economy” by tracing changes in the demand for currency. According to Schneider, in 1970 the size of the underground was between 2.6 and 4.6 percent of America’s gross domestic product (GDP). By 1994 it had reached 9.4 percent of the GDP—about \$650 billion. Using a different methodology in 1998, Charles Rossotti, the commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, told Congress that during the previous year Americans had failed to pay about \$200 billion of federal taxes that were owed, an amount larger than the government’s annual spending on Medicare. Assuming an average federal tax rate of 14 percent, that means Americans somehow neglected to report almost \$1 trillion in personal income. The IRS estimate did not include undeclared earnings from criminal activity.

Two other periods in modern American history were marked by thriving underground economies. From 1920 to 1933, the prohibition of alcohol led to widespread trafficking and the rise of organized crime. At the height of Prohibition, Americans spent about \$5 billion a year on alcohol (roughly \$54 billion in today’s dollars). This black market constituted about 5 percent of the U.S. gross national product at the time. When Prohibition ended, some bootleggers became well-respected businessmen. During the Second World War, the imposition of rationing and price controls created even larger black markets. A system designed to distribute scarce commodities fairly had some unanticipated effects: a burgeoning trade in ration books and a hidden cash economy. Perhaps 5 percent of the nation’s gasoline and 20 percent of its meat were soon bought and sold illegally. According to one estimate, by the end of the war Americans were failing to report as much as 15 percent of their personal income. The underground subsided amid the prosperity of the Eisenhower era. Wages increased, tax evasion decreased, and no illegal commodity generated the sort of profits once supplied by bootleg alcohol. And then at some point in the mid- to late 1960s the underground economy began to grow. Conservative economists point to high income tax rates and excessive government regulation as the fundamental causes. Liberals contend that declining wages, unemployment, union busting, and the business deregulation of the Reagan years were much more responsible for shifting economic activity underground. The explanations offered by the left and the right are not mutually exclusive. A stagnant economy prompted Americans of every background to work off the books. The hippie counterculture of the 1960s and the anti-tax movement of the late 1970s shared common ground in their dislike of government, encouraging defiance of the IRS. A new drug culture provided new opportunities for organized crime. The expansion of America’s underground economy over the last thirty years stemmed not only from economic hardship and a desire for illegal profits, but also from a growing sense of alienation, anger at authority, and disrespect for the law.

During roughly the same period similar phenomena occurred throughout the western industrialized world. The underground economy of the European Union may now be larger than that of the United States. Years of high unemployment, high tax rates, illegal immigration, and widespread disillusion with government have created enormous undergrounds. According to Friedrich Schneider’s estimates these shadow economies range in size from an estimated 12.5 percent of GDP in Great Britain to an estimated 27 percent of GDP in Italy. Countries that were once part of the Soviet Union have even larger black markets. In Estonia the underground is now responsible for an estimated 39 percent of GDP; in Russia, for an estimated 45 percent; in Ukraine, for an estimated 51 percent. The underground is sometimes the most vibrant sector of these transition economies, the place where free enterprise has finally bloomed. But in many ways the growth of black markets in the developed world represents a step backward. An expanding underground economy is often associated with increased corruption and a greater disparity in wealth. For years government officials and members of the Communist Party secretly profited from the Soviet Union’s “second economy,” offering services and commodities unavailable through the mainstream. The largest undergrounds are now found in the developing world where governments are corrupt and laws are routinely ignored. In Bolivia the underground economy



responsible for an estimated 65 percent of GDP. In Nigeria it accounts for perhaps 76 percent.

The U.S. dollar now serves as the unofficial currency of this new global underground. During the late 1960s and early 1970s American economists began to notice that the amount of currency in circulation had grown much larger than the amount ordinary citizens were likely to use in their everyday transactions. The discovery led to the first inklings that an underground economy was emerging in the United States. While business publications heralded the advent of a cashless, credit-based economy, the use of banknotes quietly soared. The \$100 bill soon became the underground favorite, not just in the United States, but overseas as well, thanks to its high face value and the relative stability of the dollar. During the late 1970s the outflow of currency from the United States averaged about \$2 billion a year. By the 1990s, about \$20 billion in U.S. currency was being shipped to foreign countries every year. Today approximately three-quarters of all \$100 bills circulate outside the United States.

The supremacy of the dollar in the global underground has proven a boon to the American economy. The outflow of U.S. currency now serves, in essence, as a gigantic interest-free loan. Every time the U.S. Treasury issues new banknotes, it purchases an equal value of interest-bearing securities. Those securities are liquidated only when the currency is taken out of circulation and put into a bank. In 2000 the U.S. Treasury earned an estimated \$32.7 billion in interest from its banknotes circulating overseas. The 1996 redesign of the \$100 bill was partly motivated by fears that Middle Eastern counterfeiters had created a convincingly real \$100 bill, a “supernote” that might threaten the role of U.S. currency in unofficial transactions. The latest threat to the \$100 bill comes not from organized crime figures, but from the central bank of the European Union. The new 500-euro note is perfect for black market activity. It has roughly five times the value of a \$100 bill, allowing drug dealers and smugglers to lighten their suitcases. Portugal has banned the 500-euro note for those reasons, and its acceptance in other foreign undergrounds is not yet certain.

The three essays in this book shed light on different aspects of the American underground—and on the ways it has changed society, for better or worse. “Reefer Madness” looks at the legal and economic consequences of marijuana use in the United States. Pot has become a hugely popular black market commodity, more widely used throughout the world than any other illegal drug. The enforcement of state and federal laws regarding marijuana guides its production, sets the punishment for its users, and suggests the arbitrary nature of many cultural taboos. Americans not only smoke more marijuana but also imprison more people for marijuana than any other western industrialized nation.

“In the Strawberry Fields” examines the plight of migrant workers in California agriculture, who are mainly illegal immigrants. The state’s recruitment of illegals from Mexico started a trend that has lately spread throughout the United States. Many employers now prefer to use black market labor. Although immigrant smuggling looms as a multi-billion-dollar business in its own right, the growing reliance on illegals has far-reaching implications beyond the underground, affecting wages, working conditions, and even the practice of democracy in the rest of society.

“An Empire of the Obscene” traces the history of the pornography industry through the career of an obscure businessman and his successors. It describes how a commodity once traded only on the black market recently entered the mainstream, turning behavior long thought deviant into popular entertainment. Profits from the sale of pornography that used to be earned by organized crime figures are now being made by some of America’s largest corporations. The current demand for marijuana and pornography is deeply revealing. Here are two commodities that Americans publicly abhor, privately adore, and buy in astonishing amounts.

Linking all three essays is a belief that the underground is inextricably linked to the mainstream. The lines separating them are fluid, not permanently fixed. One cannot be fully understood without

regard to the other. The vastness and complexity of the underground challenge the mathematical certainties of conventional economic thinking. Hard numbers suddenly appear illusory. Prices on Wall Street rise or fall based on minuscule changes in the rate of inflation, the unemployment rate, the latest predictions about the GNP. Billions of dollars may change hands because an economic measurement shifts by one-tenth of a percent. But what do those statistics really mean, if 20 percent, 10 percent, or even 5 percent of a nation's economy somehow cannot be accounted for? America's great economic successes of the past two decades—in software, telecommunications, aerospace, computing—are only part of the story. Marlboro, Camel, and Philip Morris are familiar names, and the tobacco industry is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, D.C. But Americans now spend more money on illegal drugs than on cigarettes.

The proper role of the state and the proper limits on the free market are central themes of this book. The political system of the United States and the economic system proposed by Adam Smith are ostensibly dedicated to freedom. Since 1776 Americans have been willing to fight and to die for freedom. You will search long and hard to find an American who thinks freedom is a bad thing. The question that has been much more difficult to answer is: Freedom for whom? Should the government be protecting the freedom of workers or employers? Of consumers, or manufacturers? Of the majority who live one way, or the minority who choose to live differently? In the abstract, freedom is always easy to celebrate. But adherence to that lofty ideal seems impossible to achieve. Despite the best of libertarian intentions, giving unchecked freedom to one group usually means denying it to another.

What happens in the underground economy is worth examining because of how fortunes are made there, how lives are often ruined there, how the vicissitudes of the law can deem one man a gangster a chief executive (or both). If you truly want to know a person, you need to look beyond the public face, the jobs on the résumé, the books on the shelves, the family pictures on the desk. You may learn more from what's hidden in a drawer. There is always more to us than what we will admit. If the market does indeed embody the sum of all human wishes, then the secret ones are just as important as the ones that are openly displayed. Like the yin and yang, the mainstream and the underground are ultimately two sides of the same thing. To know a country you must see it whole.

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[1]

**REEFER MADNESS**



SIN

DEGRADATION

VICE

INSANITY

A VICIOUS RACKET WITH IT'S ARMS AROUND YOUR CHILDREN!

DEBAUCHERY

THE TRUTH ABOUT . . .

MARIJUANA

THE SMOKE OF HELL!

“DEVIL'S HARVEST”

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IN THE STATE OF INDIANA, a person convicted of armed robbery will serve about six years in prison; someone convicted of rape will serve about eight; and a convicted murderer can expect to spend twenty-five years behind bars. These figures are actually higher than the national average: eleven years and four months in prison is the typical punishment for an American found guilty of murder. The prison terms given by Indiana judges tend to be long, but with good behavior, an inmate will serve no more than half the nominal sentence. Those facts are worth keeping in mind when considering the case of Mark Young. At the age of thirty-eight, Young was arrested at his Indianapolis home for brokering the sale of seven hundred pounds of marijuana grown on a farm in nearby Morgan County. Young was tried and convicted under federal law. He had never before been charged with drug trafficking. He had no history of violent crime. Young's role in the illegal transaction had been that of a middleman—he never distributed the drugs; he simply introduced two people hoping to sell a large amount of marijuana to three people wishing to buy it. The offense occurred a year and a half before his arrest. No confiscated marijuana, money, or physical evidence of any kind linked Young to the crime. He was convicted solely on the testimony of co-conspirators who were now cooperating with the government. On February 8, 1992, Mark Young was sentenced by Judge Sarah Evans Barker to life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

Marijuana is such a familiar part of youth culture in the United States, and the smell of pot smoke now so commonplace at high school and college parties, that many Americans assume a marijuana offense rarely leads to a prison term. In fact, there are more people in prison today for violating marijuana laws than at any other time in American history. About 20,000 inmates in the federal prison system have been incarcerated primarily for a marijuana offense. The number currently being held in state prisons and local jails is more difficult to estimate; a reasonable guess would be an additional 25,000 to 30,000. And Mark Young's sentence, though unusual, is by no means unique. Dozens of marijuana offenders may now be serving life sentences in federal penitentiaries, without hope of parole. If one includes middle-aged inmates with sentences of twenty or thirty or forty years, the number condemned to die in prison may reach into the hundreds. Other inmates—no one knows how many—are serving life sentences in state correctional facilities across the country for growing, selling, possessing, or even buying marijuana.

The phrase "war on drugs" evokes images of Colombian cartels and inner-city crack addicts. In many ways that is a misperception. Marijuana is and has long been the most widely used illegal drug in the United States. It is used more frequently than all other illegal drugs combined. Approximately one-third of the American population over the age of twelve have smoked marijuana at least once. About twenty million Americans smoke it every year. More than two million smoke it every day. Unlike heroin or cocaine, which must be imported, anywhere from a quarter to half of the marijuana used in the United States is grown here as well. Although popular stereotypes depict marijuana growers as aging hippies in Northern California or Hawaii, the majority of the marijuana now cultivated domestically is being grown in the nation's midsection—a swath running from the Appalachians west to the Great Plains. Throughout this Marijuana Belt drug fortunes are being made by farmers who often seem to have stepped from a page of the old *Saturday Evening Post*. The value of America's annual marijuana crop is staggering: plausible estimates start at \$4 billion and range up to \$25 billion. In 2001 the value of the nation's largest legal cash crop, corn, was roughly \$19 billion.

Marijuana has well-organized supporters who campaign for its legalization and promote its use through books, magazines, Web sites, and popular music. They believe marijuana is important not

only as a benign recreational drug but also as an herbal medicine and as a commodity with industrial applications. Marijuana's opponents are equally passionate and far better organized. They consider marijuana a dangerous drug—one that harms the user's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, that promotes irresponsible sexual behavior, that encourages disrespect for traditional values and threatens the nation's youth. At the heart of the ongoing, bitter debate is a hardy weed that can grow wild in all fifty states. The two sides agree that countless lives have been destroyed by marijuana, but disagree about what should be blamed: the plant itself, or the laws forbidding its use.

The war on drugs launched by President Ronald Reagan in 1982 began largely as a campaign against marijuana, organized by conservative parents' groups. After more than a decade in which penalties for marijuana offenses had been reduced at both the state and federal levels, the laws prohibiting marijuana were made much tougher in the 1980s. More resources were devoted to their enforcement, and punishments more severe than those administered during the "reefer madness" of the 1930s became routine. All the legal tools commonly associated with the fight against heroin and cocaine trafficking—civil forfeitures, enhanced police search powers, the broad application of conspiracy laws, a growing reliance on the testimony of informers, and mechanistic sentencing formulas, such as mandatory minimums and "three strikes, you're out"—have been employed against marijuana offenders. The story of how Mark Young got a life sentence reveals a great deal about the emergence of the American heartland as the region where most of the nation's marijuana is now grown; about the changing composition of the federal prison population; and about the effects of the war on drugs, more than twenty years after its declaration, throughout America's criminal justice system. Underlying Young's tale is a simple question: How does a society come to punish a man more harshly for selling marijuana than for killing someone with a gun?

## the plant in question

"MARIJUANA" IS THE MEXICAN colloquial name for a plant known to botanists as *Cannabis sativa*. In various forms, it has long been familiar throughout the world: in Africa as "dagga," in China as "ma," in northern Europe as "hemp," in India as "bhang," "ganja," and "charas." Although cannabis most likely originated in the steppes of central Asia, it now thrives in almost any climate, spreading like milkweed or thistle, crowding out neighboring grasses and reaching heights of three to twenty feet at maturity. Marijuana has been cultivated for at least 5,000 years; it is one of the oldest agricultural commodities not grown for food. The stalks of the plant contain fibers that have been woven for millennia to make rope, canvas, and paper. Cannabis is dioecious, spawning male and female plants in equal proportion. The flowering buds of the female—and to a lesser extent those of the male—secrete a sticky yellow resin rich with cannabinoids, the more than sixty compounds unique to marijuana. Several of them are psychoactive, most prominently delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Marijuana effects on the mind and body were first recorded by the Chinese emperor Shen-Nung in the twenty-eighth century B.C. The ancient Chinese used cannabis, mixed with wine, as an anesthetic during surgery and prescribed it to cure a variety of ailments. The ancient Egyptians also praised the medicinal properties of cannabis, and Roman women inhaled its smoke to relieve labor pains.

Dr. Lester Grinspoon, an emeritus professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, thinks marijuana will someday be hailed as a "miracle drug," one that is safe, inexpensive, and versatile. In his book, *Marihuana, the Forbidden Medicine*, Grinspoon provides evidence that smoking cannabis can relieve the nausea associated with chemotherapy, prevent blindness induced by glaucoma, serve as an appetite stimulant for AIDS patients, act as an anti-epileptic, ward off asthma attacks and migraines.

headaches, alleviate chronic pain, and reduce the muscle spasticity that accompanies multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and paraplegia. Other doctors think that Grinspoon is wildly optimistic, and that no “crude drug” like marijuana—composed of more than 400 chemicals—should be allowed in the modern pharmacopoeia. They argue that effective synthetic drugs, of precise dosage and purity, have been developed for every one of marijuana’s potential uses. Dronabinol, a synthetic form of delta-9-THC, has been available for years, though some clinical oncologists find it inferior to marijuana as an anti-emetic. Recent inquiries by the National Academy of Science and Great Britain’s House of Lords suggest that cannabis may indeed have legitimate medicinal uses. There have been remarkably few large-scale studies that might verify or disprove Grinspoon’s theories about marijuana’s efficacy. He says that the federal government has always been far more interested in establishing the harmful effects of cannabis than in discovering any of its benefits, while major drug companies have little incentive to fund the necessary research. As Grinspoon explains, “You cannot patent this plant.”

The long-term health effects of chronic cannabis use, and marijuana’s role as a “gateway” to the use of other illegal drugs, are issues surrounded by controversy. Marijuana does not create a physical dependence in its users, although it does create a psychological dependence in some. It appears to be less addictive, however, than heroin, cocaine, nicotine, alcohol, or caffeine. People who smoke marijuana are more likely to experiment later with other psychoactive drugs, but a direct cause-and-effect relationship has never been established. Marijuana’s potential role as a “stepping-stone” to other drugs is most likely determined by cultural, not pharmacological, factors. Delta-9-THC is highly lipid soluble and has a half-life of five days, which means it diffuses widely throughout the human body and remains there for quite some time. An occasional marijuana user can fail a urine test three days after smoking a single joint, while a heavy user may test positive after abstaining from marijuana for more than a month. Delta-9-THC’s persistence within various cells and vital organs (also a characteristic of Valium, Thorazine, and quinine) raises the possibility that it could exert subtly harmful effects; none has been proven. Studies of lifelong, heavy marijuana users in Jamaica, Greece, and Costa Rica have revealed little psychological or physiological damage. More research, however, needs to be done in the areas of cognition, reproduction, and immunology.

Some studies have suggested that short-term memory deficiencies among heavy smokers may endure long after the cessation of marijuana use. Other studies have demonstrated, in vitro and in laboratory animals, that marijuana may have a mild immunosuppressive effect, but no study has conclusively linked delta-9-THC to immune system changes in human beings. Well-publicized horror stories from the 1970s—that marijuana kills brain cells, damages chromosomes, and prompts men to grow large breasts—proved to be unfounded.

Smoking marijuana may damage the pulmonary system, in some of the ways that inhaling tobacco smoke does. In an ongoing study of people who have smoked three or four joints a day for more than ten years, Dr. Donald P. Tashkin, of the University of California at Los Angeles Medical Center, has found substantial evidence that habitual marijuana smoking may cause chronic bronchitis, changes in cells of the central airway which are potentially precancerous, and an impairment in scavenger cell function which could increase the risk of respiratory infection. A joint seems to deliver four to five times as much carcinogenic tar as a tobacco cigarette of the same size. Tashkin expects that some heavy marijuana users will eventually suffer cancers of the mouth, throat, and lungs. Oddly enough, the more potent strains of marijuana may prove less dangerous, since less of them need to be smoked.

There is much less controversy about the short-term effects and toxicity of marijuana. According to Dr. Leo Hollister, a former president of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, occasional use of marijuana by a healthy adult poses no greater risks than moderate alcohol consumption. For a variety of reasons, however, schizophrenics, pregnant women, and people with

heart conditions shouldn't smoke pot. Although the misuse of over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, acetaminophen, and antihistamines kills thousands of people every year, not a single death has ever been credibly attributed directly to smoking or consuming marijuana in the 5,000 years of the plant's recorded use. Marijuana is one of the few therapeutically active substances for which there is no well-defined fatal dose. It has been estimated that a person would have to smoke a hundred pounds of marijuana a minute for fifteen minutes in order to induce a lethal response.

## **criminalized, decriminalized, recriminalized**

THE FIRST AMERICAN LAW concerning marijuana, passed by the Virginia assembly in 1619, required every household to grow it. Hemp was deemed not only a valuable commodity, but also a strategic necessity. Its fibers were used to make sails and riggings, and its byproducts were turned into oakum for the caulking of wooden ships. Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and other colonies eventually allowed hemp to be used as legal tender to boost its production and relieve colonial shortages of currency. Although a number of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, later grew hemp on their estates, there is no evidence that they were aware of its psychoactive properties. The domestic production of hemp flourished, especially in Kentucky, until after the Civil War, when it was replaced by imports from Russia and by other domestic materials. In the latter half of the nineteenth century marijuana became a popular ingredient in patent medicines and was sold openly at pharmacies in one-ounce herbal packages and alcohol-based tinctures, as a cure for migraines, rheumatism, and insomnia. Dr. Brown's Sedative Tablets contained marijuana, as did Eli Lilly's One Day Cough Cure.

The political upheaval in Mexico that culminated in the Revolution of 1910 prompted a wave of Mexican immigration to the American Southwest. The prejudices and fears that greeted these peasant immigrants also extended to their traditional means of intoxication: smoking marijuana. Police officers in Texas claimed that marijuana incited violent crimes, aroused a "lust for blood," and gave its users "superhuman strength." Rumors spread that Mexicans were distributing this "killer weed" to unsuspecting American schoolchildren. Sailors and West Indian immigrants introduced marijuana to port cities along the Gulf of Mexico. In New Orleans newspaper articles associated the drug with African Americans, jazz musicians, prostitutes, and underworld whites. "The dominant race and most enlightened countries are alcoholic," one prominent critic of marijuana argued, expressing a widely held belief, "whilst the races and nations addicted to hemp . . . have deteriorated both mentally and physically." Marijuana was depicted as an alien intrusion into American life, capable of transforming healthy teenagers into sex-crazed maniacs. In 1914, El Paso, Texas, enacted probably the first local ordinance banning the sale or possession of marijuana; by 1931, twenty-nine states had outlawed marijuana, usually with little fanfare or debate.

Amid the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment fueled by the Great Depression, public officials from the Southwest and from Louisiana petitioned the U.S. Treasury Department to ban marijuana. Their efforts were aided by the Hearst newspaper chain's lurid reporting about the drug. "Murder Weed Found Up and Down Coast," one headline warned; "Deadly Marijuana Dope Plant Ready for Harvest That Means Enslavement of California Children." Harry J. Anslinger, the commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), at first doubted the severity of the problem and the need for federal legislation. But he soon responded to political pressure and assumed leadership of the drive for a nationwide marijuana prohibition. In public appearances and radio broadcasts Anslinger asserted that the use of this "evil weed" led to cold-blooded murders, sex crimes, and insanity. He wrote sensation



magazine articles with titles like “Marijuana: Assassin of Youth” In 1937 Congress passed the Marijuana Tax Act, effectively criminalizing the possession of marijuana throughout the United States. A week after it went into effect, a fifty-eight-year-old marijuana dealer named Samuel R. Caldwell became the first person convicted under the new statute. Although marijuana offenders had been treated leniently under state and local laws for years, Judge J. Foster Symes, of Denver, lectured Caldwell on the viciousness of marijuana and sentenced him to four hard years at Leavenworth Penitentiary.

Harry J. Anslinger is a central figure in the history of American drug policy. He headed the FBN from its inception through six presidential administrations spanning more than three decades. Anslinger had much in common with his rival, J. Edgar Hoover. Both were staunchly anti-Communist proponents of law and order who imbued nascent federal bureaus with their own idiosyncrasies. Anslinger did not believe in a public health approach to drug addiction. He dismissed treatment clinics as “morphine feeding stations” and “barrooms for addicts.” In his view, strict enforcement of the law was the only proper response to illegal drug use. He urged judges to “jail offenders, then throw away the key.” Anslinger’s outlook was consistent with that of most Americans, though his opinions proved more resistant to new scientific evidence. When the New York Academy of Medicine issued a report in 1944 concluding that marijuana use did not cause violent behavior, provoke insanity, lead to addiction, or promote opiate use, Anslinger angrily dismissed its authors as “dangerous” and “strange.”

America’s drug problem was often depicted by the FBN as the work of foreign powers. During the Second World War Anslinger accused the Japanese of using narcotics to sap America’s will to fight; a few years later he asserted that Communists were attempting the same ploy. The Boggs Act, passed by Congress at the height of the McCarthy era, specified the same penalties for marijuana and heroin offenses—two to five years in prison for first-time possession. As justification for the long sentences contained in that act and in the Narcotics Control Act, which followed in 1956, Anslinger stressed marijuana’s crucial role as a “stepping-stone” to narcotic addiction. Like Hoover, he maintained dossiers on well-known entertainers whose behavior seemed un-American. Anslinger hated jazz and kept a special FBN file, “Marijuana and Musicians.” It was filled with undercover reports on band members who played with Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Les Brown, Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey, and Duke Ellington, among others. For months Anslinger planned a nationwide roundup of popular musicians—a scheme foiled by the inability of FBN agents to infiltrate the jazz milieu. He did, however, manage to secure the arrest of a well-known marijuana user in Hollywood, the actor Robert Mitchum.

Although Anslinger’s opposition to drug use was both passionate and sincere, he allowed some notable exceptions. In the 1940s he collaborated with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the wartime precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), on various mind control experiments using narcotics. With help from the FBN, peyote and sodium amytal were combined to produce a “truth drug” for OSS interrogations of enemy prisoners. When that combination didn’t work, Anslinger suggested using cigarettes laced with marijuana derivatives. That didn’t work either, and the OSS search for a truth drug proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Anslinger later worked closely with the CIA on MK-ULTRA, a notorious mind control program in which hundreds of people were given lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) without their knowledge or consent. George White, one of Anslinger’s top agents, ran bordellos for the CIA during the late 1950s, observing the behavior of customers after their drinks were spiked with LSD. He not only dosed unsuspecting men and women with a variety of powerful psychoactives, but also took the drugs himself in order to gauge their effects. “I toiled wholeheartedly in the vineyards because it was fun, fun, fun,” White later recalled about his work for MK-ULTRA. “Where else could a red-blooded American boy lie, kill, cheat, steal

rape, and pillage with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest?" Activities that could bring ordinary Americans long prison sentences were deemed permissible and even patriotic for members of the FBN. In his memoir, *The Murderers*, Anslinger confessed to having arranged a regular supply of morphine for "one of the most influential members of Congress," who had become an addict. Anslinger's biographer, John C. McWilliams, believes that well-connected addict was Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.

By 1962, when Harry J. Anslinger retired, many states had passed "little Boggs acts" with penalties for marijuana possession or sale tougher than those demanded by federal law. In Louisiana, sentences for simple possession ranged from five to ninety-nine years; in Missouri, a second offense could result in a life sentence; and in Georgia, a second conviction for selling marijuana to minors could bring the death penalty.

As the political climate changed during the 1960s, so did attitudes toward drug abuse. A series of commissions appointed by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson repudiated some of the basic assumptions that had guided marijuana policy for over fifty years, denying a direct link between the drug and violent crime or heroin use. As marijuana use became widespread among white middle-class college students, there was a reappraisal of marijuana laws that for decades had imprisoned poor Mexicans and African Americans without much public dissent. Drug abuse policy shifted from a purely criminal justice approach to one also motivated by interests of public health, with more emphasis on treatment than on punishment. In 1970 the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act finally differentiated marijuana from other narcotics and reduced federal penalties for the possession of small amounts.

That same year, President Richard Nixon appointed a bipartisan commission to study the health effects, legal status, and social impact of marijuana. In 1972 the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse reached an unexpected conclusion: marijuana should be decriminalized under state and federal law. The commission unanimously agreed that possessing small amounts of marijuana in the home should no longer be a crime. Growing or selling marijuana for profit, using it in public, or driving under the influence would remain strictly forbidden. "Recognizing the extensive degree of misinformation about marijuana as a drug, we have tried to *demythologize* it," the commission explained. "Viewing the use of marijuana in its social context, we have tried to *desymbolize* it." Society should strongly discourage marijuana use while devoting more resources to preventing and treating heavy use. "Considering the range of social concerns in contemporary America," the commission argued, "marijuana does not, in our considered judgment, rank very high." President Nixon felt betrayed by the commission and rejected its findings; he privately blamed the agitation for marijuana law reform on "the Jews." Nevertheless, eleven states, containing one-third of the country's population, decriminalized marijuana in the 1970s, and most other states weakened their laws against it. The American Bar Association, the American Medical Association, and the National Council of Churches all supported the decriminalization of marijuana—as did President Jimmy Carter. It seemed long prison sentences for marijuana offenders had been consigned to the nation's past.

But they had not. One of the seminal events in the creation of the modern American antidrug movement was a backyard barbecue held in Atlanta, Georgia, during August, 1976. In the aftermath of their daughter's birthday party, Ron and Marsha Manatt crawled through the wet grass in their pajamas, at one in the morning, with flashlights, finding dozens of marijuana roaches, rolling-paper packets, and empty bottles of Mad Dog 20/20 discarded by their twelve- and thirteen-year-old guests. Alarmed by these discoveries, the Manatts gathered local parents in their living room and formed what was soon known as the Nosy Parents Association, a group dedicated to preventing teenage drug use. Marsha Manatt wrote to Dr. Robert DuPont, the head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); he helped arrange her introduction to Thomas Gleaton, a professor of health education at

Georgia State University. There soon arose the Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education and the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth, two organizations backed by top officials at NIDA and the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) which would exert a tremendous influence on the nation's drug policies. Thousands of other parents' groups soon formed nationwide, and Ross Perot helped launch the Texans' War on Drugs.

Marijuana use seemed epidemic; a survey in 1976 found that one out of twelve high school seniors smoked pot on a daily basis. The 1960s youth counterculture had celebrated marijuana's reputation as a drug for outcasts and freaks. "The slogans of the revolution are going to be pot, freedom, license," one Yippie leader confidently predicted. "THE BOLSHEVIKS OF THE REVOLUTION will be long-haired pot smokers." Conservative parents' groups took such words to heart and similarly invested marijuana with great meaning. Robert DuPont, who at NIDA had once supported decriminalization, later decried the "tumultuous change in values" among the young—their pursuit of pleasure, their lack of responsibility to society—and argued that "the leading edge of this cultural change was marijuana use."

During the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan endorsed the view that marijuana "is probably the most dangerous drug in America today." With strong support from the conservative parents' groups, his election brought the war on drugs to the White House. In 1982 President Reagan signed an executive order creating a new post in his administration—head of the White House Drug Abuse Policy Office, soon known as the "drug czar"—and appointed a chemist, Carlton Turner, to the job. Turner had for many years directed the Marijuana Research Project at the University of Mississippi, running the government's only marijuana farm. According to a profile in *Government Executive* magazine, Turner thought that marijuana use was inextricably linked to "the present young adult generation's involvement in anti-military, anti-nuclear power, anti-big business, anti-authority demonstrations." He also thought that smoking pot could turn young men into homosexuals. In 1977 the DEA had acknowledged that decriminalization was worth considering; three years later it called marijuana the most urgent drug problem facing the United States.

Richard Bonnie, a professor at the University of Virginia Law School who was the associate director of President Nixon's marijuana commission, believes that advocates of marijuana law reform were pushed out of the mainstream by the growing influence of the parents' groups. Political moderates soon abandoned the issue. Amid their silence, philosophies of "zero tolerance" and "user accountability" revived the notion that what drug offenders deserved most was punishment. Once again, drug abuse was depicted as a moral, not a medical, problem. The Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, and the Anti-Drug Abuse Amendment Act of 1988 raised federal penalties for marijuana possession, cultivation, and trafficking. Sentences were to be determined by the amount of pot involved; "conspiracies" and "attempts" were to be punished as severely as completed acts; and a hundred marijuana plants now carried the same sentence as a hundred grams of heroin.

## **the caprice of geography**

MARIJUANA IS CURRENTLY CLASSIFIED as a Schedule I controlled substance, implying that it has a high potential for abuse, no officially accepted medicinal uses, and no safe level of use under medical supervision. Heroin, LSD, and peyote are other Schedule I drugs; cocaine and phencyclidine (PCP) are listed in Schedule II, allowing doctors to prescribe them. Under federal law, it is illegal to possess any amount of pot anywhere in the United States. Penalties for a first marijuana offense range from

probation to the death penalty. Moreover, it is illegal to use the U.S. Postal Service or other interstate shippers for the advertisement, import, or export of such marijuana paraphernalia as roach clips, water pipes, and, in some instances, cigarette papers—a crime that can lead to imprisonment and fines of up to \$100,000.

Under civil forfeiture statutes, real estate, vehicles, cash, securities, jewelry, and any other property connected to a marijuana offense are subject to immediate seizure. The federal government need not prove the property was bought with the proceeds of illegal drug sales, only that it was involved in the commission of a crime—that marijuana was grown on certain land or transported in a particular vehicle. A yacht can be seized if a single joint is discovered on it. A house can be seized if a single marijuana plant is found growing there. Property may be seized and forfeited even after a defendant is found innocent of the offense, since the strict burden of proof that applies to people—“beyond a reasonable doubt”—does not apply in accusations against inanimate objects. Property can be forfeited without its owner ever being charged with a crime. On top of fines, incarceration, and forfeiture, a convicted marijuana offender may face the revocation or denial of more than 460 federal benefits, including student loans, small-business loans, professional licenses, and farm subsidies. Americans convicted of a marijuana felony, even if they are disabled, may no longer receive federal welfare payments or food stamps. Convicted murderers, rapists, and child molesters, however, remain eligible for such benefits.

State marijuana laws were also toughened during the 1980s and now vary enormously. Some states classify marijuana with drugs like mescaline and cocaine, while others give it a separate legal category. In New York State possessing slightly less than an ounce of marijuana brings a \$100 fine, if it's a first offense. In Louisiana possessing the same amount of pot could lead to a prison sentence of twenty years. In Montana selling a pound of marijuana, first offense, could lead to a life sentence, whereas in New Mexico selling 10,000 pounds of marijuana, first offense, could be punished with a prison term of no more than three years. In some states it is against the law to be in a room where marijuana is being smoked, even if you don't smoke any. In some states you may be subject to criminal charges if someone else smokes, distributes, or cultivates marijuana on your property. In Idaho selling water pipes could lead to a prison sentence of nine years. In Kentucky products made of hemp fibers, such as paper and clothing, are not only illegal but technically carry the same penalties associated with an equivalent weight of marijuana.

Crossing an invisible state line with marijuana in your car can result in vastly different punishments. If you are caught with three ounces of marijuana in Union City, Ohio, you will probably be fined \$100. But if you're caught in the town of the same name literally across the road in Indiana, you could face six months to three years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, a felony record, suspension of your driver's license, forfeiture of your car, and charges of marijuana possession, of possession with intent to distribute, and of “maintaining a common nuisance” (for the criminal use of an automobile). That one arrest in Indiana might cost you the \$10,000 fine and at least \$5,000 in legal fees, plus the value of your forfeited car. Wide discrepancies in punishment occur not just between states but also from county to county within a state. In La Salle County, Illinois, a first-time offender arrested with 300 pounds of marijuana might be sentenced to four months in boot camp. Sixty-five miles to the south, in McLean County, the same person convicted of the same crime would likely receive a prison sentence of four to eight years.

In at least twenty states, federally mandated “smoke a joint, lose your license” statutes now suspend a person's driving license after a conviction for any marijuana crime, regardless of where that person was arrested. A person who has never operated a vehicle under the influence of marijuana may still lose the right to drive. Indeed, being caught smoking a joint on the couch of your living room, with your car parked safely in the driveway, can lead to a harsher punishment than being arrested for

driving drunk.

About 724,000 people were arrested in the United States for violating marijuana laws during 2001—more than were arrested for heroin or cocaine. Almost 90 percent of the marijuana arrests were for simple possession, a crime that in most cases is a misdemeanor. Those arrested may spend a few days in jail. But possession of more than an ounce of marijuana—roughly equal to the amount of tobacco in a pack of cigarettes—is in many states a felony. Conviction may lead to a few months or a few years behind bars and the loss of a house or a job. People who use marijuana as medicine must either buy it from drug dealers or grow it themselves, often in violation of the law. James Cox, a cancer patient in St. Louis, was found guilty of growing marijuana and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. After the verdict, both he and his wife attempted suicide. Orland Foster, an AIDS patient in North Carolina, served fifteen months for growing marijuana; one of his cellmates served less time for killing a woman.

In perhaps the most extraordinary case of this kind, Jim Montgomery, a paraplegic immobilized from the waist down who smoked marijuana to relieve muscle spasms, was arrested in Sayre, Oklahoma, when sheriffs found two ounces of pot in the pouch on the back of his wheelchair. Montgomery was tried and convicted by a jury for possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, for possession of paraphernalia, for unlawful possession of a weapon during the commission of a crime (two handguns inherited from his father, a police officer), and for maintaining a place resorted to by users of controlled substances. His sentence was life in prison, plus sixteen years. Both the judge and the prosecutor were appalled by the sentence chosen by the jury; the judge subsequently reduced it to ten years. Montgomery spent ten months in a prison medical unit, where he developed a life-threatening infection, before being released on bond. After spending more than \$30,000 in legal fees and losing an appeal, he was returned to prison briefly, then freed on medical grounds. The government's effort to seize Montgomery's home, shared with his widowed mother, proved unsuccessful.

Oklahoma today has a well-deserved reputation for being the worst place in the United States to be caught with marijuana. On June 11, 1992, Larry Jackson, a small-time crook with a lengthy record of nonviolent offenses, was arrested at a friend's Tulsa apartment. On the floor near Jackson's right foot a police officer noticed a minuscule amount of marijuana—0.16 of a gram, which is 0.005644 of an ounce. Jackson was charged with felony possession of marijuana, convicted, and given a life sentence. In Oklahoma City, Leland James Dodd was given two life sentences, plus ten years, for buying fifty pounds of marijuana from undercover officers in a "reverse sting."

Oklahoma is not alone in handing out life sentences for buying marijuana from the government. In Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, William Stephen Bonner, a truck driver, was sent away for life without parole after state narcotics agents delivered forty pounds of marijuana to his bedroom. Raymond Pope, a resident of Georgia, was lured to Baldwin County, Alabama, with promises of cheap marijuana; he bought twenty-seven pounds from local sheriffs in a reverse sting, was convicted, and sentenced to life without parole. Pope's criminal record consisted of prior convictions for stealing televisions and bedspreads from Georgia motels. Douglas Lamar Gray purchased a pound of marijuana from a government informer at an Econo Lodge in Morgan County, Alabama. After paying \$900 for the pot, which seemed like a real bargain, Gray was arrested, charged with "trafficking in cannabis," tried, convicted, fined \$25,000, sentenced to life without parole, and sent to a maximum-security prison. Gray is a Vietnam veteran with an artificial leg. Under the stress of his imprisonment, Gray's wife attempted suicide with a pistol, survived the gunshot, then filed for divorce.

Although the penalties for buying, selling, or possessing marijuana are often harsh, the penalties for growing it can be even more severe. In Iowa, cultivating a few plants can lead to a five-year prison sentence; in Missouri, to a seven-year sentence; in Tennessee, to a fifteen-year sentence. In the state

of Virginia, where hemp cultivation was once mandatory by law, the recommended punishment for growing a single marijuana plant is now a prison term of five to thirty years.

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## **a farm in morgan county**

IN NOVEMBER OF 1988 Claude Atkinson and Ernest Montgomery met at a Denny's near the airport in Indianapolis to discuss setting up a large-scale marijuana-growing operation. Atkinson, a fifty-nine-year-old Indiana native, was by all accounts charismatic and highly skilled at cultivating marijuana. Ostensibly a used-farm-implements dealer, Atkinson had organized huge marijuana farms in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. His knowledge of growing techniques was much more impressive than his skill at eluding capture. In 1984 law enforcement authorities had linked him to a pot farm in Paragon, Indiana. The following year, he was caught growing marijuana with artificial light in an immense Indianapolis warehouse. And in 1987 a deer hunter stumbled upon thousands of his marijuana plants in an Indiana field. Claude Atkinson had cut a series of deals with the government, informing on others after each arrest and serving brief terms in prison, where he recruited employees for future ventures. Now fresh out of custody and broke, he was ready to get back into the growing business. Ernest Montgomery was an unemployed truck driver in his early forties who wanted to make big money. They agreed to form a partnership, with Montgomery supplying the capital and Atkinson the expertise. Soon after their meeting Claude Atkinson went to the Indiana statehouse and formed a dummy corporation, R.P.Z. Investments, using one of his many pseudonyms, Arno Zepp.

That fall Atkinson supervised the construction of a large "grow room" in the basement of a secluded cabin that Montgomery owned in Gosport. Montgomery enlisted his younger brother, Jerry, a gravedigger with a slight drinking problem, to help with the task. Together the three men drilled holes in the concrete floor for drainage, built a cooling system, assembled ballasts and reflectors, suspended grow lights with thousand-watt halide bulbs from the ceiling, and planted marijuana seeds in small pots. They installed a generator so that the operation would not be detected through an incongruously high electric bill. Montgomery invited David Lee Haynes, a young lumberyard rip saw operator from Louisville, Kentucky, and the son of an old friend, to come live at the cabin and tend the plants. After digging graves all day, Jerry Montgomery would visit the dark basement in the evenings, tending and pruning. By spring the group had 12,500 small marijuana seedlings growing in sixteen plywood flats. What they needed next was a farm.

In May of 1989, Martha Brummett, an elderly woman hard of hearing, agreed to lease her farmhouse halfway between Eminence and Cloverdale, in Morgan County, to R.P.Z. Investments. It came with about forty acres, a barn, and an option to buy. Martha Brummett was surprised that when "Charlie Peters" arrived to sign the lease, the woman with him remained in the car and never entered the house. Nevertheless, Brummett innocently signed over her farm for \$10,000 in cash, which she then took straight to her bank.

After Ernest Montgomery and his wife, Cindy, secured the house, David Haynes moved into it to "babysit" the operation, having obtained a sham rental agreement from R.P.Z. Investments as a legal buffer from what was about to happen on the land. The group plowed and tilled the field, fertilized it, and planted corn. Once the corn had reached a good height, they planted marijuana, hiding it amid the stalks. Over the summer they walked the fields, "sexing" the marijuana—eliminating all the males. The females, left unpollinated, would produce a much higher level of delta-9-THC in their buds, and would thus become a much more valuable crop: sensimilla. In late September, before the corn leaves turned golden brown, the group harvested the marijuana and then cured it in the barn for two weeks

and cut it into “books” about a foot wide and three feet long. The books were hauled into the farmhouse or driven to the cabin in Gosport for manicuring; the stems, orphan leaves, and fan leaves were separated from the precious buds. So far the operation had gone smoothly. Soon there would be about 900 pounds of high-quality marijuana to sell. Now the group needed buyers. Ernest Montgomery thought that Mark Young, a man whom he’d met a few times with Cindy, might know the right people to call.

Mark Young was thirty-six and had been smoking marijuana on a daily basis since his late teens. He’d grown up in Christian Park Heights, a middle-class neighborhood on the east side of Indianapolis. His father left the family when Mark was two. He and his sister, Andrea, were raised by their mother, Mary, who worked as a waitress or a hostess to pay the bills. Young was a willful, stubborn, charming boy always getting into trouble. He seemed to have, throughout his pranks and petty thefts, the sort of bad luck that is almost uncanny—often he would get caught while his friends got away. Young dropped out of high school after a year, became a father at the age of sixteen, married to give the child his name, divorced, worked as a carpet-layer, washed dishes, laid concrete, tended bar, sold used cars, and rebuilt Harley-Davidson motorcycles. He kept an album filled with pictures of his favorite Harleys. He knew all the local biker gangs, but remained apart; Young seemed to get into enough trouble on his own. He dated many women, lived a fast life, and slowly acquired a criminal record—nothing violent, just misdemeanors for driving without a license, for possession of marijuana, for taking a girlfriend’s stereo. He also earned two felony convictions: one at the age of twenty-one, for attempting to obtain diet pills with a fraudulent prescription, and the other, at the age of twenty-five, for possession of a few amphetamines and Quaaludes. Each felony brought a suspended sentence, probation, and a \$1 fine. When Ernest Montgomery called, Mark Young was rebuilding motorcycles, selling used cars wholesale, and looking for new income. He had held a financial interest in a number of massage parlors, which were now closed. His dream was to get some money, move to Florida, build custom Harleys, and work part-time as a fishing guide on Lake Okeechobee.

Claude Atkinson, Ernest Montgomery, and Mark Young met in the family room of Young’s home in early October. The price of the marijuana was set at \$1,200 a pound. If Young found buyers, he would receive a commission of \$100 for every pound sold. Not long after, Atkinson and Montgomery returned to Young’s house, where they were introduced to two men from Florida who were acting on behalf of someone seeking to buy all the marijuana the group could supply. Atkinson offered a hundred pounds a week; the marijuana was still being manicured and couldn’t be delivered all at once. Within days a man from New York City arrived at Young’s house with \$120,000 in a cardboard box. While the New York buyer inspected the marijuana at Montgomery’s Indianapolis house, Atkinson remained behind, counting the money. The deal was completed, and Young was handed \$10,000 in cash. The New York buyer eventually paid for 600 more pounds, in transactions that took place at Montgomery’s house. By Christmas all the high-quality marijuana was gone, the last 200 pounds either distributed to workers who’d helped with various tasks or sold to an acquaintance of Montgomery’s in Illinois.

The town of Eminence, Indiana, is about twenty-five miles west of Indianapolis. Near its only intersection is a Citizens Bank, a small church, a convenience store, and a post office built of concrete bricks and painted royal blue. The town boasts 180 inhabitants and looks as though it has not seen much new construction since the interval between the world wars. There are countless small towns like Eminence across the Midwest, slightly faded but still eulogized as the heartland of this country. To reach the farm used by R.P.Z. Investments, one must leave Eminence on a narrow country road and then turn onto a dirt road and drive for a long stretch, past fields of fifty to a hundred acres where corn, hay, soybeans, and wheat are grown, past modest farms with collapsing outbuildings, an

occasional trailer home, and rusted cars on cinder blocks. Farther west the land is flat, the acreage of each plot enormous, but here the countryside feels long settled, with hedges and trees marking boundary lines. After cleaning out the barn, Atkinson and Montgomery allowed the lease on Martha Brummett's property to expire. The one-story farmhouse has been painted beige by its latest occupants; the barn remains bright red. There is a porch on the front of the house, an enclosed patio on one side, and a swing set on the lawn. Looking at this humble American farm, one would hardly believe that more than a million dollars' worth of marijuana had been grown there in the space of about three months.

## **inside the industry**

STEVE WHITE LOOKS LIKE AN ORDINARY Indiana farmer, with slightly unkempt hair, a graying beard, teeth stained by nicotine, and strong hands. The day we met, he wore an old flannel shirt, gray pants, and battered work boots. His voice had a low rural twang. He seemed to belong in an old pickup, riding through a vast dusty field. At the time, White was the Indiana coordinator for the Drug Enforcement Administration's Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program. He'd spent the previous twenty years as a DEA agent in Indiana, working undercover. He knew the state backwards and forwards—had walked it, driven it, and flown low over it every summer, scrutinizing hills and farmland. He got along well with rural people. Nobody ever thought he was a cop. He grew up in New York City and went to elementary school there. His father worked on Wall Street. In addition to pursuing drug dealers, Special Agent White traveled to London every year to indulge a passion for collecting antique English toy soldiers. He would be an implausible character in any work of fiction. Savvy, articulate, self-deprecating, and blunt, White defied easy categorization and knew more about growing marijuana than most of the people he arrested.

Claude Atkinson was an extremely talented grower with a "good product," White told me—"a superb salesman." The operation near Eminence was of average size for that time. It is difficult, even from the air, to find marijuana hidden in corn. "Remember *North by North-west*?" White asked. "Cary Grant in the cornfield? We don't have cornfields like that anymore, with wide rows. They broadcast the stuff, and it's just thicker than hell." Sometimes patches of marijuana will be distributed here and there amid hundreds of acres. Discovering one may not lead to the others. Growers tend to be much more concerned about hiding their marijuana from thieves than from the government. A rural American underworld has emerged around marijuana, secretive and unknown to outsiders. Booby traps are being laid in cornfields. There is now a group of people in the Midwest, known as "patch pirates," who earn a living solely by stealing marijuana from growers, whom they follow. White acknowledged that the booby traps are aimed at patch pirates, not his own men. Nevertheless, fish hooks strung at eye level on fishing line are nondiscriminatory.

Outdoor marijuana farms have become smaller to avoid detection, though White's agents had recently found "60,000 beautiful plants" on a farm in Tippecanoe County. The case proved a disappointment; the DEA found the suspected grower, but prosecutors declined to press charges. "What I want is bodies," White explained. "I don't give a damn about the dope, that's just something we're going to burn up." His job involved a daily cat-and-mouse pursuit of marijuana growers, with both sides changing tactics, adopting new technologies, and often, after an arrest, amicably discussing tricks of the trade. White harbored no animosity toward his prey. "These are not heroin or cocaine dealers," he said. "They're not violent. I find a lot of them personally engaging." They were violating the law, however, and White loved tracking them down.



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